The Man Without Labour

On the Phantasm of Artistic Labour

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Abstract

The Man Without Labour:
On The Phantasm of Artistic Labour

The aim of this thesis is to reconsider the concept of labour in contemporary art. It advances a newly developed theory of the phantasm, where a double force of negation and affirmation mediates production, as an appropriate model for analysis of art in the age of immaterial labour. Specifically this thesis investigates the relationship between artists and their labour, and how artistic labour is phantasmal in that it allows artists to operate in, and make visible, a space between (or in the shadow of) the aspects of being-at work and being available-for work. What the phantasm defines is the crucial movement that mediates artistic labour in sense, linking the artist's interior sense or imaginary to its external production in aesthetics. Chapter 1 situates this inquiry in the current era of immaterial labour characterised by an influential body of theory that has arisen around artistic practices since the 1970s (specifically Jacques Rancière and Giorgio Agamben), which focuses on a shift in production from material goods to human relations and social life. The increasing slippage between the material product of art and the artist's imaginary is then investigated in chapter 2 beginning with Marx's proposition that what makes labour exclusively human is that before it produces anything in reality it is first raised in the imagination. Building on Agamben's reflections on art and work (*The Man Without Content*) and the phantasm (*Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*), this thesis then identifies the phantasm as the

dominant movement in relating the imaginary of artistic labour to its event of production. Rather than offer a new elaboration on the trajectory and history of art practices following the shift from the factory production line to the network (which emphasises communication, interaction, and creativity), the theory of the phantasm contributes an understanding of how art 'thinks' labour and how artists mediate themselves in labour. Contextualised with reference to performance art, conceptual and post-conceptual art practices, and particularly the artists Tehching Hsieh, Santiago Sierra and Bruce Nauman, chapters 3 and 4 then show how artistic practices operate to open up a space of critique of labour that combines and distributes different senses or suggest another sensory reality of labour. Chapter 3 develops this argument through Rancière's theory of the distribution of sense in aesthetic practices (*Politics of Aesthetics*, *Dissensus* and *The Aesthetic Unconscious*), and situates artistic labour as a conflict between sensible presentations and our making sense of them. Chapter 4 concludes by bringing the movement of labour in the imaginary (Agamben) together with its distribution in aesthetic practices (Rancière) to formulate a single model of artistic (phantasmatic) production. In order to face the central position of labour in art practices, what this model contributes is a way to understand and visualise artistic practices not by the products of art, but through the artist's labour as a phantasmatic moment of production, free from the obligation of producing or signifying anything other than itself.

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Introduction

Is artistic labour a phantasm?

> [T]he world is labour.
>
> (Hardt & Negri, 2003: 11)

This investigation is concerned with the relationship between artists and their labour. By this I mean artistic labour recognised in practice as something other than technique, tacit skill, reproduction, performative transmission, and certainly more than the reification of labour-power congealed in an aesthetic object. I am talking about artistic labour in the context of immaterial or biopolitical production. Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, coinciding with the rise of tertiary industries, informatisation and computerisation, the artist's *modus operandi* has increasingly come under scrutiny as a blueprint for the affective industries in general (Boltanski & Chiapello: 445), and relationships as a social process in particular (Bourriaud, 2007: 32-3). The rhetoric of this debate, now increasingly familiar to discourses of art and work, focuses on the shift from a Fordist production line with processes based on necessity, production quotas and the division of labour, to the post-Fordist network: whereby instead of a hierarchy of labour we have a collective flow that emphasises interaction, responsibility and creativity, and increasingly puts pressure on an individual's subjectivity and flexibility. This shift is

asserted by the understanding that along with quantitative changes in employment through the migration from industry to service jobs, the paradigm shift in industrialised countries toward post-Fordist production positions artistic practices at the threshold of an increasingly porous relationship between labour and life. In particular artistic practice, its form, basis, value, and organisation, has come to occupy the frontline of a general shift from the alienated factory line worker to the flexible cultural producer.

The relationship between art and labour has recently been the focus of numerous symposiums, conferences, exhibitions and publications. Examples concurrent with this present thesis include summits in the form of public arenas for a critical debate on art and labour in the creative industries, such as the 'Art & Labour Summit' held at Cell Project Space in London (2010) and 'Mashing Up: Art + Labour' held at Glasgow's Centre for Contemporary Art (2010). The aim of these summits being to invite a public conversation on the conditions and experiences of art and labour in the creative industries, raising issues of artistic value in neo-liberal culture, creative entrepreneurship, making a living in general, and structures for organising artist groups or unions (such as the Scottish Artists Union). Maria Lind and Simon Critchley also organised a series of talks at the Goethe Institut in New York between 2009 and 2010, titled 'What is the Good of Work?', which specifically debated the idea of artist-as-template for the flexible cultural producer. Lind and Critchley, by pairing artists with other cultural producers (including Marysia Lewandowska, Peter Fleming, Marion von Osten, Tom McCarthy, Carles Guerra, Michael Hardt, Liam Gillick and Gianni Vattimo) more pointedly question the value of artistic labour itself. Over the duration of four symposiums what they particularly invite is a response to the question of how and why, since the late 1960s, did the perception of future production change from a vision of a leisure society to one of life dedicated to the exhaustion of increasingly purposeless work. Getting beyond the traditional rhetoric of labour and subsistence, the question

'what is the good of work?' gets to the heart of the implications of the shift from a Fordist model of production to a post-Fordist one: the question as to why work is valorised (at all) in contemporary society.

On the back of those discussions at the Goethe Institut Liam Gillick describes the relation between art and labour as a 'history of doing nothing and a long tale of useful action' (Gillick, 2010). Published in the journal *e-flux*, titled 'The Good of Work' (2010), Gillick's article reiterates the question as to whether art is really a promise of leisure or of work, a process of withdrawing or limiting production, or perhaps testimony to a generalised terrain of collective communication. Art, he postulates, simultaneously points at the figure of the flexible knowledge-worker *and* 'operates alongside him or her as an experiential phantom' (Gillick, 2010). Sven Lütticken, in *Text Zur Kunst*'s recent issue 'Life at Work' (2010), similarly proposes that the present change of production does not mean the artist is required to change jobs, but change how artists 'intervene in the changes in work that subject and subjectify us' (Lütticken: 132). This call for artistic intervention in work has been taken seriously, for example, by the exhibition *Be a Happy Worker: Work-to-Rule!* (2008). Curated by Ivana Bago and Antonia Majaca, and held at Galerija Miroslav Kraljevic in Zagreb, this exhibition was the first visible part of a long term research project on different perspectives and concepts of work and labour.[1] What the exhibition put across was a considered 'slowing down' of labour, as alluded to in the 'white strike' method of the show's title. The art cooperative Société Réaliste, for instance, develop several research and economical structures in fields such as territorial ergonomy, experimental economy, political design and counter-strategy, here expressed with their project *EU Green Card Lottery* which

[1] *Be a Happy Worker: Work-to-Rule!* included in the exhibition a range of projects, interventions, and research by Zbynk Baladrán, Mircea Cantor, Maja Cipek, Miklós Erhardt in collaberation with the group Reinigungsgesellschaft, Igor Grubić, Sanja Iveković, Helmut & Johanna Kandl, Pavel Mrkus, Deimantas Narkevicius, Marion von Osten, Marija Mojca Pungercar, Mladen Stilinovic, and the art cooperative Société Réaliste created by Ferenc Gróf and Jean-Baptiste Naudy.

mimics websites that exploit aspiring migrant workers hoping to apply for the American Green Card Lottery system. Or the project *Your Way to the Top*, in which Helmut and Johanna Kandl intervened on a collection of glass negatives from the Lower Austrian Landesmuseum originally used as teaching aids for depicting various work situations and means of production. Their aesthetic re-distribution of these images, placed beside slogans of modern business strategies, sets up a complex shifting of signifiers between past and present, romanticism and cynicism, aesthetic systems and social questions. The slogan 'work-to-rule' also echoes something of Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's proposition that the temporal spaces of production be subjected to a slowing down or deferral of time (Boltanski & Chiapello: 469), or what Antonio Negri proposes with the 'refusal to work' (Negri, 2005: 75).

What this breadth of debate emphasises is the potentiality of artistic labour to not only describe, influence, and operate within the present paradigm of production, but also to contest and critique its tendencies. What further characterises all these debates is an increasing slippage between valorisation of the real and the virtual, the material product of art and the artist's imaginary, and between time at-work and time away-from-work. Here a distinction needs to be made between post-Fordist production and immaterial labour, or more specifically between the classic definitions of immaterial labour associated with post-Fordism and the autonomy of immaterial labour from capital. The classic definition is useful for an analysis of traditional distinctions between *work* and *workforce*, and for tracing a movement of production that goes beyond the site of the factory and invests itself in flows and networks where people are 'active subjects' (Lazzarato, 1996). Industries such as advertising, fashion, and cultural activities in general typify this type of production, as do self-employed workers and home-workers, because they emphasise the trend of blurred divisions between leisure time and work time. But what is raised, to some extent, by the exhibition *Be a Happy Worker: Work-*

to-Rule! and the symposiums on 'What is the Good of Work?' is the beginning of a move beyond this definition. What is at stake in immaterial labour is not only the problem of life becoming inseparable from work, but how the labour power of immaterial production can itself be organised independently of or autonomous from capitalist control (Lazzarato, 1996). In recent years Jacques Rancière has championed a similar position by proposing that the aesthetic regime of art demands that art be art only so long as it is something else than art, that art approach aestheticisation as an 'autonomous form of life' (Rancière, 2002: 137). This present thesis therefore situates itself in relation to the productive synergies of immaterial labour by investigating precisely how artistic labour can potentially define, organise and distribute a space of labour based on 'a radical autonomy' (Lazzarato, 1996), 'refusal' (Negri), or what Rancière calls 'dissensus' (Rancière, 2009a: 48-9).

What is at stake in my approaching the subject of artistic labour is a problem that Critchley identifies in a recent symposium on 'The Infinite Demand of Art' (2010) as one of 'approaching how and in what art thinks in its own medium' (Critchley, 2010). This investigation aims to raise issue with the specificity of art's mode of articulation and how it 'thinks' labour. Rather than offer a 'new' elaboration on the trajectory and history of art practices following the paradigm shift to post-Fordism – although a certain clarification of the tendencies of this shift will be explored in Chapter 1 – I intend to expose the process of strife and tension present in the *mediation* of labour in aesthetics itself: including how it comes into presence by moving beyond immaterialisation into a vacuous space of creation.

This investigation begins with artistic practice. Therefore, in order to clarify the terms of this thesis and what I aim to expose in articulating artistic labour, I will begin with an example. For me, this investigation started with a deliberation on the 59 minutes

and 30 seconds of Bruce Nauman's film *Setting a Good Corner (Allegory and Metaphor)* (1999). In this film we watch Nauman labouring on his ranch in New Mexico. He begins by digging a post-hole in a field, then sets a wooded post into it, backfills the hole, and finally joins this post to two others with cross-braces and tensions the whole thing with wire. In the end he has produced the corner section of a field boundary from which a gate will hang. But this aesthetic display of labour poses a problem. If we question the film's mimetic discourse we identify a blurring of boundaries. Insofar as Nauman acknowledges his process of labour in *Setting a Good Corner* as a process of mimesis (insofar as in the prologue to the film Nauman states that his agricultural skills are learnt from a man called Gene Thornton), he actively seeks to engage a discourse of separation that goes back to Plato. In both *Republic* and *Sophist* what makes the artist so noxious to Plato is that he occupies the role of imitator: a person who does more than one thing in the community and, therefore, disrupts the apportionment of the time and space of labour. Nauman acknowledges his own duplicity because, on one hand, he highlights the necessity of the labour he performs insofar as the field corner does need building on his ranch, and on the other hand, by filming his performance the labour attains an aesthetic dimension. He labours not only as an agricultural labourer employing his means (labour) toward a certain end (setting a post in the ground), but disrupts the normal sensibility of labour's time and space because he also employs agricultural labour as artistic labour.[2] As soon as Nauman acknowledges his duplicitous role, however, he appears to negate the Platonic accusation of mimicry by an assumption of fallacy. What he produces with his labour is not a reproduction or the perfect copy of Gene's labour. Everything he has been taught

[2] Nauman's engagement with labour, its visibility, and the durational event in *Setting a Good Corner (Allegory and Metaphor)* (1999) is prefigured by his earlier work *Fishing for Asian Carp* (1968). The 1968 film was shot with fellow artist Bill Allan while Nauman lived in San Francisco and features the simple premise of Nauman filming Bill while he fishes for Carp. In a commentary of this film, given in an interview with the artist Joe Raffaele and published in an article titled 'The Way-out West: Interviews with four San-Francisco artists', Nauman simply states: 'Bill Allen got his boots and we went to the creek. We ran the film until Allen caught the fish' (Kraynak: 105).

by Gene does not come back in the re-enactment of the event and, as such, the copy is not perfect but rather labour is divided, Nauman's from Gene's, by fallacy.

The fallacy of labour as mimesis arises not from Nauman's mistakes but from his separation of the representative order that dislocates the normal signification of labour: namely the dislocation of the link between the signifier and the signified, which tells us that his labour signifies a specific mode of production. In short, Nauman's method of setting the corner of a field is really secondary to the visibility he gives to labour. The difficulty lies not in defining an artist's activity by 'what it is' or 'what happened', but in defining the potentiality of 'what could happen'. The potentiality of artistic labour is to be found beyond the descriptors of locality, method, and time of labour, as causalities of history and knowledges. As Michel Foucault states in the introduction to *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), we are moving into a regime of history that approaches its documents (broadly speaking anything that describes the history or surface of things, events, beings) differently. 'The document,' he tells us, 'is no longer for history an inert material through which it tries to reconstitute what men have done or said', but rather importance is placed on 'trying to define within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations' (Foucault, 2010:7). Potentiality means also the potential to not-be, to not-be inert or defined simply by the specificity of its predicates, but to be defined also by its dissociation from all predicates.

What my investigation provokes, more specifically, is the possibility of the question: is artistic labour a phantasm? I do not mean that artistic labour is associated merely with the faculty of the illusory, or that artists engage with what is an illusion when they labour, but rather that the phantasm proposes a model of labour that frees itself of any and all predicates in order to open up the signification of labour to a space of creative negation. Artistic labour, I propose, is not exactly separate, but continually

leaks into the general commonality of labour – and indeed visa-versa – by a movement of interrelation. In the sections that follow I will focus on these interrelations as they arise in the context of a selective but influential body of theory that has arisen around artistic practices since the 1970s, and which is notably orientated by the practice of performance art, conceptual art, and post-conceptual art practices. An analysis of artistic labour will be presented here in terms of a critical reading of contemporary theory concerning how artists' practices operate as distinct processes of labour – to which ends, when I talk of artworks, art work, and artistic practices it should be understood that I am referring to the labour involved in the artistic endeavour in question and not simply the objectified and reified output of the art commodity or a 'represented' labour. Primarily the theory of this terrain is established by a contemporaneous group of philosophers that includes Jacques Rancière, Giorgio Agamben, Mauricio Lazzarato, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, a body of thought that notably progresses in the wake of Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze, and further back to Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Karl Marx.

The abode of my discussion arises, then, around a field primarily concerned with a theoretical level of reflection on artistic labour more than one directly linked to a critical analysis of case studies of specific artists. Furthermore, what Rancière's and Agamben's approach to language, text, and practice install in this thesis is a sense of getting beyond a transmission of historical lessons in order to engage affirmatively with a production of a particular voice, and, moreover, to do so while remaining reflexively aware of the conditions of one's operation and able to critically analyse the conceptual constructions of the field in which one moves. For Rancière the difference of performative outputs, the 'giving' of the voice to something or someone, identifies its modality of authority through the manner of its speaking. In this way disagreement and contradiction operate as a conflict over the very way in which the sensible is distributed

and the way in which 'doing', 'making' and 'thinking' obtain their voice. To approach the question of how art articulates labour, what we may call the voice of artistic labour, means to raise issue with the specificity of the artist's mode of giving voice to labour while maintaining the contradictory conditions, and indeed conflict, inherent in postmodern production between work and life, work and non-work.

Chapter 1 takes up the initial task of addressing this problem by constituting the term 'artistic labour' insofar as it forms a paradox in political economic thought between notions of exceptionality and generality. Set against the dominant paradigm of immaterial production, the role of the artist as a producer is organised around a discourse of work based on two key distinctions: first, as a process of re-distributing the time and space of labour, especially with regard to the role of aesthetics in the immaterial paradigm of production; secondly, as a process that operates as a creative negation, building on the nihilism of Nietzsche and Robert Musil, and extending through to notions of non-work and a refusal to work in Negri. Insofar as the world of labour today is a world defined by immateriality and biopolitics, what Hardt & Negri call 'biopolitical labour' (Hardt & Negri, 2006: 109), the context of artistic labour I define in political economy is situated within a terrain of increasingly blurred boundaries between the economic, the political, the social, and the cultural. Although systems of value or questions of valorisation are explicit in this terrain, this present enquiry specifically addresses artistic labour to the autonomous space of immaterial labour that Lazzarato and Hardt & Negri identify with the internalisation of biopower through reconnecting the value of labour with Marx's concept of living labour: namely the living quality of labour that always exceeds consumption (by capital), and both defines the 'general possibility' of human production while itself being the 'absolute poverty' of value (Marx, 1973: 295-6). Out of this body of thought I identify artistic labour with two key tendencies: *dissensus* and the *shadow*. Dissensus is what Rancière

defines as a conflict between sensible presentations and our making sense of them (Rancière, 2010aa: 139). Based on a process of dissociation, dissensus then is what dis-identifies labour as this or that labour, this or that perception of labour, but opens labour to a space of free association. The shadow is what Agamben calls the space of negation as 'availability-toward-nothingness' (Agamben, 1999a: 67). Here labour is associated with a vacuous identity that is dissociated from all its precepts, which Agamben's investigation of the scission between action and production highlights as the presence of a gap between being-at labour and being-available for labour. The use of the shadow, textually displayed as (—), will therefore become a key descriptor in this investigation to present 'the alienated essence of the work of art' (Agamben, 1999a: 67).

What Agamben proposes then is a treatment of the political-philosophical tradition not as an investigation of the classical distinction between terms, but rather as a questioning that takes place from a view-point of their interwoven existence. Similarly developed from Foucault's archaeology of knowledge, what Rancière also helps to identify as our goal is that which can be sought after only through a process of connecting or forming combinations of possible systems across a field of thought, instead of simply digging at surfaces to get at substratum. The search for a designation of labour in artistic practices here becomes a search for possibilities in a connectedness of thought and also of practice, rather than one of concrete truths. It is out of this framework that I draw the structure of artistic labour.

This leads me to the second key term of this thesis, the phantasm. Elaborated at length in Chapter 2, the phantasm is what I use as a technical term to relate labour to the internal faculty of perception, which discloses the imaginary structure by which artists activate labour in what they do. This theory begins with Marx's proposition that what marks labour as essentially human is that it is first and foremost presupposed in the

imaginary. Following this line of thought, the relation between labour and the imaginary is what leads me to the theory of the phantasm as I take it up in Agamben's *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (1993). Agamben's theory forms the key point of critique in this chapter. In particular, through his deliberations on the phantasm's proper and improper signification, I aim to demonstrate its vital relevance to understanding the authority of the imaginary in constructing senses of labour. It is not the task of this present thesis to provide a comprehensive history of the phantasm as terminology – a task that Agamben has already gone some way toward completing with *Stanzas* – nor do I intend to compose a historical study of artistic labouring practices as a review of art's own political economy of labour power, although this task may also have merit. Rather, the purpose of this investigation is to present the groundwork for theorising artistic labour as a phantasmal process. What the phantasm allows for and opens up is an interconnected space around which theories of immateriality, biopolitics and the aesthetic unconscious find purchase. The essential quality of the phantasm is not that it posits a revised theory of artistic practices, but that it posits a process of movement operable between the internal subjective perception of labour by the artist, and its external distribution as a sensible regime of immaterial artistic practice.

It would be prudent to emphasise from the start that the phantasm is not a metaphor for labour, as the transference of something into that which is not ordinarily appropriate. Nor is the phantasm an extension into allegorising an utterance that speaks of labour otherwise than it seems to speak. To propose either path would be to fall into the trap that Marx insinuates Pierre-Joseph Proudhon had fallen into when he admonished him for seeking to 'eliminate all the drawbacks' that assail the concept of labour by eliminating 'all the ill-sounding terms, [changing] the language; and to this end ... apply[ing] to the Academy for a new edition of its dictionary' (Marx, 1996: 537). The proposition for a phantasm of labour is rather the identification of an

interwoven space on which the reality of the artistic endeavour engages with its imaginary precepts. First and foremost the concept of artistic labour, as phantasmal, challenges for a reconsideration of the extant notions and language of labour, but intentionally does so by encompassing all the 'ill-sounding' terms associated with it in order to define the spatial and temporal totalities of its potential rule.

The second stage of this investigation (Chapters 3 and 4) is organised around an interpretation of the phantasm of artistic labour through a triangulation of positions. First, I position the theory of the phantasm according to a select example of artists that primarily include Bruce Nauman, Tehching Hsieh, and Santiago Sierra, but also touch on the work of Piero Manzoni, Thomas Hirschhorn, Marina Abramović, Darren Almond, among others. What I specifically aim to highlight in the primarily post-conceptual practices of these artists is how the artist combines and distributes different 'senses' or suggests another sensory reality of labour. Second, to translate the artist's labour from the aesthetic event into a particular voice or mode of articulation requires a certain conceptual framework of philosophy. Here the philosophy of Rancière, concerning dissensus in the distribution of the sensible, and Agamben, regarding the alienated presence of work, form the framework for each analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. The third position or point of orientation is supplied by the model of the phantasm itself. In particular the peculiar movement of the phantasm will operate as a medium of interrelation allowing the conflicts between regimes of sense to conflate in artistic practices: whereby the mediation of artistic labour can then be illuminated by the philosophical discourses of Rancière and Agamben orientated by concepts of dis-identification, suspension and negation.

Let me elaborate first on why I have chosen to focus on these artists in particular. Because this enquiry focuses on the relation between artists and their labour

specifically, I have proposed the example of three artists (Sierra, Nauman and Hsieh) who produce events not tied to being activated by the viewer, or that bind the artist's labour to its literal participation in the work. Instead, whether labouring in front of a camera (Nauman), remunerating others for their labour (Sierra), or operating in a time-space that makes no delimitation between work and life (Hsieh), they engage a conscious and intended exchange with immaterial labour beyond the classic definition of post-Fordism. What they allow us to see, I propose, is the mediation of labour itself. I therefore reference these artists in order to direct our attention away from art's output and toward the more complicated imbrications of labour and aesthetics. It is crucial here that the antagonism of labour and aesthetics be allowed to remain strife, for example between work and life, being at work and being away from work. These artists achieve this by engaging in a practice that can be described, as Claire Bishop has said of Sierra but which I would say also of Nauman and Hsieh, as 'relational antagonism': as opposed to the 'microtopian communities' of Bourriaud's relational aesthetics (Bishop, 2004: 79). In particular, I propose that each of these artist's performances allude to the main tropes of the phantasm that I will address throughout this thesis: (a) the substantiation of polemic tension, (b) the disjunctive temporalities of artists' organisation and distribution of occupations, labour time and labour space, (c) the dissociation with precepts of reality and fiction, the virtual (imaginary) and the real.

Nauman, as I have briefly already said, brings to light an indistinction between history and fiction. *Setting a Good Corner*, for example, identifies an ambiguity at the heart of defining artistic labour as exception or non-exception to other practices (for instance, as to whether Nauman expresses agricultural or artistic labour). As Nauman said of this work in an interview, what is precisely ambiguous is 'the part that makes it art and not a "how to do it" tape' (Nauman, 2001). Sierra is interesting because the social methods of exchange that he utilises 'set up "relationships" that emphasize the

role of dialogue and negotiation ... but do so without collapsing these relationships into the work's content' (Bishop: 70).[3] His work acknowledges the impossibility of creating a microtopian space between the artist and the spectator and, instead, sustains a tension among participants, viewers and the very context of labour that bind them together. What we see in Sierra's work is an indexical trace of the economic and social reality in which artists labour in the regime of biopolitics and immaterialisation. Moreover, he does not present a reconciliation of the divisions between his occupation and that of those he employs, nor an entirely separate sphere of co-habitation. Instead he exposes labour as medium, and each individual's inescapable being-in the medium of labour. Alternatively, the *One Year Performances* (1978-1986) of the Taiwanese-American artist Hsieh sets up an encounter between the artist and his own elemental features of self: his body in time and place, motion and idleness, production and inactivity. What he specifically brings into question is the artist's capacity to produce at the threshold of art and life. Through these performances the artist's position in time and of being sentient to the passage of artistic time in artistic production is made explicit. The temporality of labour is not only exposed by the untimely figure of Hsieh (which I refer to in Chapter 4, following Adrian Heathfield, as the *durational aesthetics* of artistic labour), but also the important role of self-certifying one's own place of untimeliness in the aesthetic declaration of labour.

Within the terrain of this investigation the problem, initially, is also one of subject: and here I am aware that I am advancing in an area that is fraught with

[3] In contrast to the work of those artists for whom Nicolas Bourriaud coined the phrase 'relational aesthetics' (namely, Liam Gillick, Philippe Parreno, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Angela Bulloch, Maurizio Cattelan, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Jorge Pardo, Carsten Höller), Sierra takes up something of the argument that Steven Wright levels against artists' manufacturing 'frivolous interactions' (Wright: 535). These are interactions that never actually alter the established class-based power relations, but offer a tacit co-authorship to the spectator that was never asked for, not reimbursed, and capricious. Sierra, on the contrary, acknowledges this fallacy and makes exploitation entirely key to his *operandi*. In doing so he does not dismiss the question of his own 'interaction' in the exchange between himself and the workers he employs, but precisely acknowledges the division of power relations in effect in all socio-economic interactions.

difficulty. Speaking as I will of the artist subject in terms of the artist's constitution and the conditions of their existence as labourer, I do not, however, aim to localise phantasmal theory with reference only to the artists I mention explicitly. Even though through the course of this thesis I will make use of specific and precise examples of certain artists in order to expand upon my case – primarily Nauman, Hsieh, and Sierra – such examples are intended rather to ground the problematic abstract space and time of immaterial labour, and to help crystallise ideas in a framework of thought that otherwise threatens to become an impenetrable fog of ambiguity. The aim is not to make of any of these artists a case study in point and I do not propose to advance into hitherto un-researched areas of their practice or archives. Rather, I am speaking here of artistic labour as not necessarily concretely defined by the person of the artist, per se, but as artistic labour within a genus of labouring individuals (notably of post-conceptual practices) that designate a particular *modus operandi*, a particular form of thought, and an imaginary mode of working.

In summary, the aim is not to approach any artist or thinker via a scholarly activity that tries to attain knowledge as a progression towards its own perfection, or to a completing of some objectified history with regard to them, but rather to ground a new condition of possibility (Foucault, 2005: xxiii-xxiv). In the terms of the thesis, this is precisely the possibility of the phantasm: an engagement with a distribution of thought that is open to allow for changes to occur in the current taxonomy of aesthetics. In this light my reasons for foregrounding Hsieh, Sierra and Nauman are because these artists make overt the primary themes that are so important to understanding the tropes of a phantasmatic discourse (polemic tension, disjunctive time, and the dissociation of precepts). The exposure of these tropes, however, due to the imaginary structure and context of this enquiry will be difficult to visualise. Therefore, while I do not propose that the theory of the phantasm is applicable only to particular artists, or indeed limited

to post-conceptual art practices, I do propose that the artists I mention here make explicit what is perhaps less visible in other artists' labour.

Chapter 3 takes up the investigation, then, by specifically aiming to understand the artistic distribution of labour in terms of the aesthetic regime of the sensible. Framed by Rancière's understanding of the distribution of the sensible, the investigation I raise tries to define how artistic labour 'speaks' and to whom it is addressed. Beginning from an identification of the roles of the 'visitor' and 'poor' in Rancière's *The Nights of Labour: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (1989), I aim to identify the position of the artist and the spectator around a double movement of visiting and escaping times and spaces of labour organised by a representative order of social relations. Through an analysis of Nauman's *Setting a Good Corner* and Sierra's use of paid workers, this chapter therefore pursues a regime that orientates how artistic labour mediates processes of transference from the fixed identities of occupations to a free-play of positions and identities within the aesthetic theatre of labour. I do not only propose a temporary transference for the time and space of the performance, but rather a dissensual transference that ruptures the normal descriptors of labour through an aesthetic space and into a general domain of knowledge. The artistic space and time of labour is here comprehended according to two modes of mute speech, the hieroglyph (which makes the trace of labour speak by unpacking its sedimented history) and soliloquy (the non-thought of labour, which divides itself from all predicates and signifies nothing but its presence). By going beyond what can be seen and what can be said by the representative regime, mute hieroglyphs and the silence of soliloquy respectively elaborate the conscious procedures inscribed on the body of unconscious production, and inversely, the unconscious production present in the procedures of conscious labour. Through these mute speeches, I propose, artistic labour is removed from the artist as his or her labour and made visible to the aesthetic community.

Discussed as theatricality, or more properly as 'hyper-theatre' (Rancière, 2009a: 22), the artistic spectacle becomes a critique and experience of criticism in order to become more than a spectacle of labour, but labour as an event without event (or what I call the ~~event~~).

In Chapter 4 I put forward a model of artistic labour organising an interrelation between the artist's internal sensibility and the force of aesthetic transmission. This is what I call *the phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production*. Here I formulate the process by which the imaginary space of labour subsists in aesthetic discourse by introducing a gag or moment of suspension into the distribution of labour. Primarily I pursue this analysis through Agamben's idea of the shadow in order to explore how the pre-figuration of labour in the artistic imaginary reaffirms its phantasmatic tendency as an aesthetic dimension. To interrogate this space and its disjunctive format of transmission I propose a conjunction of three traits that I take from Agamben: the critique of *pure gesture*, labour as the shadow (—) of *availability-toward-nothingness*, and the *articulation* of memory and death. Specifically I posit that the pure gesture of labour, situated between action (*praxis*) and production, is only exposed when labour attains aesthetic visibility. As such I suggest that the role of the artist is to open artistic labour to a critique of its pure mediality: dissociated from the production of ends and, therefore, suspended from signification.

In short, artistic labour gives a space and time to labour suspended from *praxis* and meaning, whereby labour exists simply *such as it is*.[4] Hsieh's *One Year Performances* and the specific aesthetics of duration that he orientates, help to disclose

[4] The term 'such as it is' is taken from Agamben, in particular from *The Coming Community*. Here Agamben describes the term 'such as it is' as a relation to being that encompasses all of the singularity's properties without the obligation of entering into a discourse of choice between what is individual or universal (Agamben, 1993b: 2). I further outline my use of the concept in Chapter 4 of this present thesis, whereby being such as it is means something is not indifferent to its concept, but relates to it such as it is this or that thing. In this regard artistic labour is not indifferent to labour generally, but relates to labour with all of its generic properties and those specific to it being artistic.

this argument as an engagement with the artistic state of disappearance in the mediality of labour. Furthermore, what I propose his performances expose, or really force into aesthetic visibility, is not only a general enquiry into how artists produce, perceive, move, and apprehend themselves in art or in life, but how artists construct, reform, transmit and conceal themselves by mediating the gap between art and life. What the attainment of this position allows me to disclose, then, is not labour as being-in or being available-for signification, but labour orientated toward attaining a 'third' place whereby the normal predicates of action and production are suspended in the force of their mediality. This is what I define as artistic ~~labour~~. ~~Labour~~ (the shadow of being-at-labour) denotes the aesthetic dimension of labour that exposes labour to its own mediality. But in exposing its mediality artistic labour in fact exposes the truth that it signifies nothing. Precisely the nothingness of its expression is what then opens labour to the vacuousness of the phantasm. And it is this vacuousness that allows labour to subsist freely in sense as pure potentiality.

To conclude, I propose that the conjuncture of Rancière's dissensual distribution of the sensible and Agamben's shadow of labour as a zone of suspension structure a body of thought that intertwines to formulate the artist as the biopolitical man of ~~labour~~. The division between work and production, labour and artistic labour, are not overcome by the shadow but made extreme through reciprocal suspensions. It is this formula that, like the pure mediality of the gesture, indicates a space from which we may know artistic labour according to a status of non-being: of thinking labour as ~~labour~~. The shadow tells us to think of the thing in question as what it is not, which reigns as a value over what it is. In order to constitute what it means to have labour as a privation, this investigation moves to propose the phantasm of artistic labour as a strategic mode of activity where labour is first measured against its own negation. I do not aim to just interpret the mode of the phantasm's fracturing of presence, but really seek to identify

precisely how the artist engages with the phantasm as the having of that fracture (between signifier and signified). Furthermore, I propose that the artist's having of the fracture as negation and dissociation defines the artist's originary experience of labour. Through the analysis of the phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production and its application in exposing the articulation of artistic labour, I therefore intend to show how the mediality of the phantasm exposes artistic labour to its own mediation through aesthetics.

1

The (bio)political economy of art

> ... the new immaterial and cooperative creativity of the multitude move in shadows, and nothing manages to illuminate our destiny ahead.
>
> (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 386)

Perhaps nowhere else does the paradox of artistic labour show itself so fully as in the problem constituting its value in relation to political economy. Both the theory and practice of political economy has always encountered difficulties in formulating and maintaining artistic labour within the general precepts of its laws. Specifically a point of strife occurs between political economy's ability to do two things: position artistic labour within a general theory of human labour and, conversely, define the points of distinction that establish artistic labour as an exception. A recent treatise on artistic production by Nicholas Bourriaud sets the common terms of this strife when he posits that: 'a work of art has a quality that sets it apart from other things produced by human activities' (Bourriaud, 2002: 41). Yet the crucial term of artistic labour's distinction, the 'quality' that 'sets it apart' is what remains resistant to definition in political economy. The preliminary aim of this present investigation, then, will be to illuminate the ambiguity of this quality and approach an understanding of what is at stake in setting apart artistic labour and political economy in general.

This investigation could start by digging through the historical sediment that has built up around the concept of human labour. From Plato through to Adam Smith, Marx, Hannah Arendt, Antonio Negri, et al., there exists a plethora of blurred boundaries that have arisen between the terminological divisions of human labour. While identifying and categorising these trends has merit, to do so would be to engage with a task of extensive cleaning up, and that is not the goal of this present thesis. Alternatively we could proceed with a simple universal category of labour in the abstract and then attempt to pick the artist out from this homogenised whole. But this too offers only the problematic of establishing our terrain of artistic labour based on concrete exceptions, which leads to a contextual partitioning between the artist and society. Nevertheless, extant divisions between labour terminologies must be taken account of if we are to understand artistic labour as a topology of labour. Rather than simply resolve to seek a definition of labour in a brand new discourse, I shall begin by defining the theoretical terrain on which the extant dictionary of artistic labour operates. For now, the analysis of this territory will not aim to change it, but seek a way to allow its points of strife to remain strife and, furthermore, define that strife as itself a tendency. The task of re-imagining these divisions and conflicts, and positing them as an interrelation of oppositions within a discourse of artistic labour falls to the later chapters of this thesis.

In order for the present study to speak of artistic labour in particular therefore necessitates that I first begin with an investigation into the ambiguity that surrounds artistic labour's status of differentiation, separation and exception. Before this can take place, however, a broader distinction needs to be made between the terms labour, work and action. Arendt, in *The Human Condition* (1958), usefully illustrates the central importance of defining distinctions between human doing by showing how the separation of *labour*, *work*, and *activity* exist as differing states of the human condition that fundamentally designate the life of man. For her these divisions arise as follows:

labour is that which is linked to the biological existence of man and designates life itself, *work* defines those activities that are essentially unnatural and 'artificial' in human existence but produce our 'world' of things, and *action* designates the direct activity that passes unmediated by things or matter between men in their plurality. The human condition, as a whole, is what Arendt's term *vita activa* then tries to implicate as the resolution of the intimate connections that take place between these three distinctions (Arendt: 7-8).

The problem with artistic activity arises, however, because it often remains outside of any clearly resolved space and time of labour, work, or action, but is left to occupy its own 'special place' in the intimacy of these connections. One resolution to this problematic, which I will critique in the first section of this chapter, is to seek the elusive 'quality' of artistic value according to its permanence in the world based on the tangibility of its 'thing' (Arendt: 167). Here the understanding of artistic practices by political economy (notably exemplified by Adam Smith, John Ruskin and William Morris) demonstrates the limitation of its ability to substantiate human doing beyond valorising causal connections between means and ends. Furthermore, I propose that to narrowly define artistic doing and its life in labour by restricting our analysis to the special character of the art object fails, ultimately, to comprehend the value of what Arendt would call the 'intimate connections' that weave the human condition together.

A clear division therefore arises between a political economy that considers artistic labour in exception to other human practices, and a mode of thought that seeks to disclose a fundamental commonality. Among the former are essentially what we might call proponents of a traditional political economy, including Smith, Ruskin and Morris. Those in the latter group (such as Lazzarato, Hardt & Negri, Rancière and Agamben) instead conceive of labour coming from a tradition of postmodernism,

immaterialisation, and biopolitics that frames our contemporary Western climate of production (largely identified with the move to tertiary industries post-1970). To distinguish what I mean when I say artistic labour, work, or action then, I refer to Marx's understanding of *living labour* – a concept that is sustained by the postmodern tradition of political economy while Marx's concepts of use-value and exchange-value have, under the paradigm of immaterial production, lost their authority. What I am referring to is not the doing of a production aimed at an objectified 'thing': although I acknowledge that the role of the artist is essentially linked to a human existence that produces an experience of our 'world'. Similarly, the intention is not to refer to a process of unmediated plural activity by referring to artistic doing in general. On the contrary, the singular activity of an artist's process is taken here to constitute a specific form of mediation. Nevertheless I recognise that a social passage between human plurality and artistic individuality exists as an encounter between inclusion and exclusion, universality and singularity, and remains prevalent to art's role in the distribution of the sensible.[5] Instead the term that I utilise is labour (as opposed to work or action) because, for me, labour alone takes account of the essential biological existence of human life. To these ends my use of the term labour intends to take account of both a biopolitical blurring of traditional distinctions between the economic, the political, the social, and the cultural – which I orientate according to Lazzarato, Hardt & Negri in relation to the term 'immaterial labour' in section 1.3 and 1.4 – and also the comparably broad scope that an aesthetic model of production must contend with in order to communicate and distribute artistic doing and its life in labour.

[5] The distribution of the sensible (*Le Partage du sensible*) is understood here within the terminology that Rancière uses to describe 'the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it' (Rancière, 2006: 12). The glossary of technical terms contained in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2000) adds to this that the term 'refers to the implicit law governing the sensible order that parcels out places and forms of participation in a common world by first establishing the modes of perception within which these are inscribed.' Furthermore, the word 'distribution' should be understood as referring 'both to forms of inclusion and to forms of exclusion', and the 'sensible' to the wide scope of 'what is ... capable of being apprehended by the senses.' (Rancière, 2006: 85)

For reasons already mentioned, and for those that I am still to unpack over the course of this chapter, it should be understood that by referring to artistic labour rather than speak of artworks, art work, and artistic practices in general, the points of distinction that Arendt raises between definitions of labour, work and activity are maintained. Furthermore, a point of antagonism (or what I will come to refer to as a polemic interrelation) is maintained between labour and non-work. This is a discourse that manifests itself through aligning the concept of labour with the concept of negation. In particular the emancipatorary quality of non-work, or Negri's proposition for a refusal of labour, moves this enquiry toward defining artistic labour as creative freedom framed by the flight toward immateriality: which locates labour outside of traditional divisions and aligns it instead with a postmodern melee of re-production, communication and informatisation.

Where this investigation finally leads to is an understanding of artistic labour that finds its substantive ground in the conjunction of two philosophers: Jacques Rancière and Giorgio Agamben. What Rancière introduces is a model of aesthetic thought that re-thinks how we perceive what artist's do and how artistic practices make us see 'doing' within what he calls the distribution of the sensible. In particular his understanding of the aesthetic regime not only formulates artistic labour as a re-distribution of the time and space of labour, but proposes that the present aesthetic revolution breaks away from the regime of representation: beginning not from a standpoint of extant divisions between occupations, but from a standpoint of identifying only with the specificity of the aesthetic regime itself. To these modes of seeing, doing and distributing states of sense, the critical appeal of Agamben aims to disclose the gap or scission that expresses the alienated presence of art today. What he offers is an interlinked oeuvre of thought that formulates artistic practices according to notions of negation, privation, the state of exception, and crucially, the theory of the phantasm. Labour's potentiality, then, lies in

a space between being and non-being, signification and the unarticulated voice. What Agamben makes us see is signification as it takes place between what is transmitted by language and the act of transmission itself.

My proposition, then, is that Agamben's methodology can be employed in disclosing the shadow between artistic *praxis* (the act 'to do') and the distribution of labour as meaning (the production into presence of 'doing'). Agamben's identification of scissions in the aesthetic space of art opens up artistic production to its own alienation and, in effect, allows us to see the aesthetic space of labour as a space of negation. But I propose we also think of this space as itself what Rancière would call dissensual. Art is not here a destination that is designated by a de-aestheticisation into a commodity, or a re-aestheticisation into life, but dissensual because it proposes a lack of destination. The problem that faces us in identifying the role of artistic labour is not based on defining it in relation to a general regime of human production, even as an exception to such a regime, but the problem of understanding labour as a process of dis-identification. The paradox of artistic labour is not that it offers itself as an outside to work, but that it is dissociated from any predicate of inside and outside, universal and singular, value and privation. As the opening quote of this chapter from Hardt & Negri posit: 'the new immaterial and cooperative creativity of the multitude move in shadows' (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 386). It is the task of this chapter then to establish the tendency of these shadows and, from there, illuminate our way ahead.

1.1 *The political economy of artistic labour (Smith, Ruskin & Morris)*

Political economy's understanding of artistic practices, on the whole, demonstrates a self-admitted limitation of thought that fails to move substantively beyond the original problem of a scission between labour and work: a scission at the point of connection

between the means and ends of what artist's 'do'. Nevertheless, since there has been a field of thought called political economy there has been a specific place in it for a political economy of art. Insofar as this body of thought functions as a substantive set of criteria by which the artist's 'doing' is valorised and judged, we must be aware that its momentum has gathered around talking in terms of exceptionality and commonality, which moves in cyclical motions.

Adam Smith, in the opening comments of his essay 'Of the Nature of that Imitation Which Takes Place in What Are Called The Imitative Arts' (1795), identifies a set of criteria by which the valorisation (and also the possible diminishing of value) of the art object is made based on a measure of the greater or lesser importance, or greater or lesser commonality, of that object in comparison to its original (whereby imitation acts in servitude to the original). The relationship between representation and the mimetic act or imitation that he posits here remains fundamentally unchanged from Antiquity. In particular Smith espouses a representational critique that derives from the distinction of representation that Plato had given to the arts in the section of his *Republic* titled 'Poetry & Unreality', insofar as the gap between originality and imitation, as divisive as that between signifier and signified, is a measure of distance from the truth. However, while Plato positions the artist's representation at a great distance from the truth, designating it as a third order class of objects,[6] Smith turns this distance into proximity and elevates the arts to the primacy of most original: because for him, while manufacture produces objects of the same kind as the original template they copy, the imitative arts produce objects of one kind that represents objects of a very

[6] Plato distinguishes the hierarchical order of representation into three stages in *Republic* as follows: The progenitor is God, he who is 'the maker of this and every other reality', the craftsman is second in the order of truth as he who copies the original object as the act of the 'Manufacturer', the artist (the specific example used by Plato being the painter, but he expands this category in the dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon to include playwrights and 'all other representers'), however, is termed a 'Representer,' who merely represents the creations of others and therefore exists 'two generations away from the throne of Truth.' (*Republic*: 597a-e)

different kind (and are therefore original in themselves) (Smith: 185). Although Plato and Smith seem to define two polemic positions, in reality they define standpoints of a mode of thought that has simply circled around the same point of contention. The relation in each case is built on a distinction between nature, human labour, and artistic practices, which establishes a hierarchical status for each based on qualifying representation against a point of origin.

By the middle of the nineteenth century John Ruskin has further progressed Smith's transcendence of art to a place of primacy by assigning the art object, and by consequence the artist, to a profound place of the sacred in society. Ruskin's elevation of art to the position of sacred object is outlined most clearly in two lectures delivered in Manchester in July of 1857, under the title of *The Political Economy of Art.* In particular these lectures define what he comes to think of as the 'artistic resource', which he divides by its subjective and objective order: whereby the subjective ownership of artistic labour by the artist is subjugated to the propriety of the state in order to administer what Ruskin calls the sacred artistic resource. Posed as a question of how to get 'your man of genius' or obtain what he called the 'Leonardesque or golden faculty,' the artist is here defined by his or her attainment of labour as an 'artistical gift' (Ruskin: 31-32).

Half a century later, William Morris would develop Ruskin's idea of the artistic faculty into a philanthropic one. Rather than valorising artistic production based on the proximity to truth or originality of its objects, Morris identifies art's sacred position based on its proximity to the truth, or joy, of labour. In order to promote the welfare of joy in labour he therefore elevates the practice of art above other human occupations. The joy of labour, identified by Morris *par excellence* in creative disciplines, thus becomes the epicentre for an argument that defines art as much more than Plato's mere

reflection of labour and human occupation (Morris: 4-5), but where art and the artist instead designate the reflection of joy. This shift, which forms the basis of Morris' essay on 'Art, Labour, & Socialism,' published by the Socialist Party of Great Britain in a pamphlet in 1907, seeks to bring labour out of the place of toil that Ruskin gave it (Anthony: 148), and elevate labour to a utopian ideal of happiness that foregrounds a general socialist dogma of labour elevated from its capitalist disutility. Artistic labour, as such, becomes the figurehead example of how a general attainment of labour as a joyful utility can be attained by all of society. Even pronounced critics of the socialist dogmas of work appear to maintain a sense of Morris' idealism. Ludwig Von Mises, for example, who wrote *Human Action: a Treatise on Economics* (1949), finds it necessary even within his praxeological approach to valorising labour to consider the subject of the artist by way of a scission: specifically he theorises that the artist is a figure of 'genius' who 'lives [*only*] in creating and inventing' (Von Mises: 139).

Beneath the guise of distinguishing the artist by way of Mises' 'genius', Ruskin's 'golden faculty,' Morris's philanthropic faculty, and Smith's placement of art at the pinnacle of originality, an underlying separation between the means of artistic labour and its end is prefigured. Political economy of art of this type operates from a point of scission that separates the artist's labour from his or her biological existence. Exemplified particularly in Morris, the artist therefore designates a figure whom, in order to obtain a philanthropic faculty, is bequeathed with a capacity for engaging with labour in a way that separates labour from its toil or fatigue, and separates it even from the principles of (capitalist) production. In order to focus on artistic ends rather than artistic means, artistic activity is therefore designated by its power to preserve labour reified in 'original' products, in social benefit, or simply as an ambiguous proximity to a divine practice called 'gift' or 'genius'. But artistic labour remains shrouded here in the ambiguity of what these terms actually designate. They point toward a position of

exceptionality without defining what it is that is exceptional, except through recourse to setting up artistic practices as Other. It is this ambiguity over the exception that needs to be disclosed.

1.2 *Artistic labour & Marx*

One of the clearest propositions for outlining artistic labour's division from labour in general is evidenced in a short note written by Marx under the title 'Debaten ueber Pressfreiheit', or 'The Writer's Profession'. What Marx specifically focuses on is the apparent gap between how an artist appropriates their own labour as an individual means, and how the appropriation of artistic labour is taken up as an end for society. The distinction Marx makes, really more of a demand (and even a condemnation of creative labourers who ignore it), is that '[t]he writer must, naturally, make a living in order to exist and write, but he must not exist and write in order to make a living' (Marx & Engels, 1947: 63).[7] What distinguishes his proposal from the terrain of political economy already mentioned is that he identifies, where the others have failed to do so, a point of artistic exceptionality framed within his own political economic terms, even if disjointed from their normative placement. In particular what is disjointed is the relationship between labour-power and subsistence: 'he must not exist and write in order to make a living'. What he goes on to say is that the artist, as a producer, 'sacrifices his existence' as a means 'to *theirs*' – whereby he designates *theirs* to mean society (Marx & Engels, 1947: 63). As such he proposes that the living creative labour of the artist is always already a social means.

[7] Although they refers the subject of the text to the 'writer', Marx's comments should be understood within a wider context of creative practitioners as outlined in the wider collection of texts on art and literature: which collectively speak of creative disciplines inclusive of writers, painters, architects, musicians and actors (Marx & Engels, 1947). Consequently, these are the same disciplines that Adam Smith referred to in his political economy as unproductive workers.

The normal relationship between means (*praxis*) and ends (production) is undone here. Whereas a general labourer would apply their own labour-power to fulfil their needs (subsistence), Marx proposes the artist's labour must be directed toward social ends rather than individual ends. Although all labour is inherently social, because it enters into exchange with other human labour at some point, here that social element of labour is made explicit. In particular, he identifies artistic labour as a moment of sacrificing (sacrificing the artist's means). What Marx pursues is a concept of self-negation that carries its credence from the German tradition of philosophical criticism that continues from Hegel (particularly with regard to his notion of a self-annihilating-nothing in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807) and forms part of the pre- and post-Nietzschean tradition of nihilism.

In order to explain how labour can be both a source of value (for society) and, simultaneously, a sacrifice or negation of value (for the artist) we need to understand the fundamental principle of *living labour* that underpins Marx's theory. Living labour, as specifically outlined in *Capital* (1867) and *Grundrisse* (published posthumously in 1941), fundamentally define the human ability to engage as active subjects with the world, and importantly, as a faculty for creating social life. There are two sides to this theory. First, living labour is the expression of our creative capacities. It is the living quality of labour in each of us that always exceeds our productive labour (our productive output in terms of capital) and, as such, expresses the capacity for labour to remain greater than its expenditure. This is what he calls labour's *general possibility* for production: insofar as living labour defines the general possibility for humans to produce (Marx, 1973: 295-6). However, because living labour is not a quantity of wealth itself, not value in itself, but the general possibility of all value creation, Marx also defines living labour as the *absolute poverty* of value. Therefore, living labour is a constituent of two mutually contradictory states of labour: on one hand, living labour

makes evident the fact that labour is objectless and 'is a reality only in the immediate vitality of the worker' (Marx, 1973: 362), and, on the other hand, that living labour is that by which all objective production comes into being and so constitutes the general possibility of all objectified wealth.

Properly speaking, we can say that the living quality of labour in each individual does not operate as either a means, in that it is not the act of labour power, or an end, as the objectified goal of production (a peculiarity that I will take up again later in relation to Agamben's notion of *means without end*). The role of artistic labour that Marx outlines in 'The Writer's Profession' only makes sense then within the paradox of living labour. But the paradox is not limited in application to the artist. In terms of contemporary biopolitics and economics, living labour is crucially important because it constantly reinforces the enigma of how labour possesses the ability to remain in excess of what capital claims from it in the form of value creation. What led to Marx's proposition that capital will always be limited in what it can capture from the totality of life, is here what also allows Hardt & Negri to point toward a space on the terrain of immaterial labour production today where 'the political recomposition of antagonism' again becomes possible (Hardt & Negri, 2003: 22).

The living 'fire' of labour that Marx defined is crucial to a continuing discourse of artistic labour for a number of key reasons. Primarily because it establishes a paradoxical relation to labour based on sustaining the duality of absolute poverty and general possibility: between value and poverty, social labour and privative labour, and between capital and its apparent outside. Living labour establishes the crucial power and capacity of the living individual (Marx, 1996: 181, 193), but does so only by simultaneously relating individual labour to its social potentiality. It is this critical distinction, or really a lack thereof, that the present paradigm of immaterial production

utilises to organise our postmodern concepts of time and temporality of labour, between the time at work (act) and the time of non-productive labour (potency). From the wealth of Marx's political economy it is not the concepts of use-value and exchange-value, or concrete and abstract labour that has managed to transcend the time of his writing, but the concept of living labour that remains potent today.[8] The potency of this term is exemplified most notably in the socio-political work of Lazzarato and the biopolitics of Hardt & Negri, to which I shall now turn.

1.3 *The biopolitical paradigm of production*

In order to understand the current climate under which artists labour, requires situating the political economy of art within the present paradigm of biopolitical production. First I will elaborate on the crucial turn that biopolitics has made in human production, and then I will elaborate on the specific processes and apparatus of this paradigm and how they are applicable to our framing of artistic labour. To understand the biopolitical paradigm we need to understand the implications of moving from a *disciplinary society* to a *society of control* (to which the thought of Foucault was crucial in preparing the terrain).[9] This change in social and industrial production is important because it marks

[8] Here, the problematic attached to use-value is that it is originally posited as an expression of labour activated in the exercise of labour as force, i.e. what is expressed (and sold) in the definite time period of work. The problem that arises is that this exercise is inherently temporally limited. Living labour, in comparison, is not temporally limited but always exists in the living subject, and, as such, is not bound by a differentiation of time but is an expression of labour in excess of time-delimitation, a notion that is concurrent with contemporary post-industrial and post-Fordist labour practices: whereby the increasing lack of delimitation between the time and place of work means that there is potentially no longer time that is away from work.

[9] Foucault's inquiry into what he calls biopolitics is credited to begin with the final chapter of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1978). What Foucault traces, starting in the seventeenth century, is how mans' natural life becomes increasingly included in the mechanisms of power and the calculation of power over life. Focused on the species body, which Foucault describes as 'the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes' (Foucault, 1998: 139), the mechanisms of regulatory controls that were concerned with life are what he calls 'a biopolitics of the population' (Foucault, 1998: 139). 'For millennia,' he proposes, 'man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence;' whereas 'modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question.' (Foucault, 1998: 143) Biopolitics, then, refers to a power that aims to take charge of life rather than administer life through

the point of transference from the first phase of capitalism to the second, but also marks the transference from a political economy of labour to a biopolitical one. As I said earlier, there is a clear division that arises between a political economy that, on one hand, considers artistic labour in exception to other human practices, and on the other, a mode of thought that seeks to disclose a fundamental commonality. This division arises with the turn of biopolitics.

The impact of this shift, like any paradigm shift, is that it works as a hegemonic 'vortex' to affect our wider apprehension of the world and how we produce as labourers (Hardt & Negri, 2006: 107).[10] The present discourse on artistic labour is similarly drawn into this paradigmatic migration, and, as such, is responsive to the processes of biopolitical production. To understand this shift and its tendencies I will draw on the work of Hardt & Negri who, continuing from Foucault, have been crucial in making apparent the shift from a society based on discipline to a society based on control.[11] Disciplinary society is defined by them in *Empire* (2000) as 'society in which social command is constructed through a diffuse network of *dispositifs* or apparatuses that produce and regulate customs, habits, and productive practices' (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 23). On this point of *dispositifs* Agamben elaborates further in his essay 'What is an Apparatus?' (2009). The term *dispositif*, translated to 'apparatus' in English, is a technical term used in Foucault's thought from the mid 1970s onward to designate a

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the sovereign command of the ability to command death. This is primarily achieved through 'distributing the living in the domain of value and utility', which included in its calculations 'the realisation of his [man's] potential' (Foucault, 1998: 144-5).

[10] Hardt & Negri's chapter on 'Postmodernisation, or the Informatisation of Production' (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 280-303) succinctly outlines the process of transference through the succession of economic paradigms since the Middle Ages. The current paradigm, viewed as a quantitative change in employment, is hereby manifest as: 'the process of postmodernisation or informatisation ... demonstrated through the migration from industry to service jobs (the tertiary), a shift that has taken place in the dominant capitalist countries, and particularly in the United States, since early 1970s' (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 285).

[11] Hardt & Negri draw on a terminology of biopolitics primarily from Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, but also in relation to 'The politics of health in the eighteenth century,' in *Power/Knowledge* (1980), and jointly 'La naissance de la médecine sociale' and 'Naissance de la biopolitique' both in *Dits et écrits* (1994).

network of power relations between various elements (Agamben, 2009a: 1).[12] The rule of disciplinary society can therefore be expressed and seen to occur through analysis of its apparatus or mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that enforce institutional discipline. Under this regime the social terrain is structured according to a disciplinary power that designates the very 'parameters and limits of thought and practice': a terrain that Hardt & Negri identify with the 'entire first phase of capitalist accumulation' (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 23).[13]

Society of control differs from disciplinary society because it designates a move into the postmodern, where society democratises the mechanisms of control by making them 'ever more immanent to the social field' (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 23). Rather than rely on institutional apparatuses, the mechanisms of control characteristic of postmodern society are 'distributed through the brains and bodies of the citizens' themselves. What this shift equates to is a transfer from an exteriority of power distributions – i.e. the institution of discipline – to an interiority of control. The apparatuses of control still exist, but whereas these were previously located practically and largely physically in the work ethic of early capitalism (namely identified with the factory), the postmodern society of control has moved its apparatus beyond the walls of the institutions. Lazzarato refers to this as a cycle of production that 'operates ... outside in the society at large' (Lazzarato, 1996), while Hardt & Negri pronounce that the structure of capitalist command has today become an 'every place'. Just as there 'is no longer an outside to capital,' they state, 'nor is there an outside to the logics of biopower' (Hardt & Negri, 2006: 101-2).

[12] Giorgio Agamben summarises three main points to Foucault's idea of *dispositif* as follows: (a) 'It is a heterogeneous set that includes virtually anything, linguistic and non-linguistic, under the same heading: discourses, institutions, buildings, laws, police measures, philosophical propositions, and so on. The apparatus itself is the network that is established between these elements.' (b) 'The apparatus always has a concrete strategic function and is always located in a power relation.' (c) 'As such, it appears at the intersection of power relations and relations of knowledge.' (Agamben, 2009a: 2-3)

[13] The political economic thinking on artistic labour that stems from the first phase of capitalism is largely accountable to the theory of disciplinary society: most notably in the 1857 lectures on *The Political Economy of Art* given by Ruskin directed toward a state administration of artists.

The apparatus of control can be redefined, as Agamben proposes, to mean 'literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living beings' (Agamben, 2009a: 14). In particular to labour theory, however, the apparatus of biopolitics that concerns us is that of biopower. Biopower not only refers to a mechanism of power aimed at the 'production and reproduction of life itself,' but 'a form of power that regulates social life from its interior' (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 23-24).[14] In these terms the apparatus of biopower is what accounts for a system of control that not only shifts its scope of confining productive labour to the factory, but expands the scope of its control into the social field (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 331). What this means is that the scope of our enquiry into artistic labour, with regard to biopower, now includes the production of subjectivity more than it does the production and exchange of objects. In short, postmodern production has put Marx's concept of living labour into practice as a real force in its mechanisms of valorisation. The general possibility of labour, that which is always in excess of labour-power, now constitutes a passageway that leads from the virtual – by which Hardt & Negri mean the general human powers to act – to the real (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 335). Living labour has therefore become the 'vehicle of possibility' *par excellence* for a mode of production that seeks to valorise the virtual, subjective space of labour.

[14] Bio-power, according to Foucault, is 'without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes' (Foucault, 1998: 141). Bio-power is indispensable in the development of capitalism, therefore, insofar as it inserted human bodies, as the 'species body', through a controlled mediation into the mechanism and apparatus of production; moving the population as such into economic processes. But, as Foucault goes on to highlight, this process also required that the insertion into production be accompanied by the need to reinforce that the presence of these bodies be available and docile for production. Capital 'had to have methods of power capable of optimising forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern' (Foucault, 1998: 141). The goal of Capital to control of means of production is continued through to the apparatus of control that immaterial production, as a move from mechanisms of discipline to a society of control, continues to expand.

1.4 *The apparatus of biopower & immaterial labour (Lazzarato)*

The term used to describe labour according to biopower is immaterial labour or biopolitical labour. Hardt & Negri define this as: 'labour that creates not only material goods but also relationships and ultimately social life itself' (Hardt & Negri, 2006: 109). However immaterial labour notably arises as a concept from Lazzarato's synthesis in *Immaterial Labour* (1996) between empirical research into the new forms of work and modes of labour organisation that have arisen since the 1970s. The concept progresses from a domain of work that has arisen around tertiary industries, computerisation and informatisation – for which Lazzarato uses the term 'mass intellectuality' – and corresponds to concurrent theoretical reflection at that time on biopolitics.[15]

The immateriality of labour practices coincides then with a shift toward manual labour involving, to a greater extent, procedures that are intellectual or require a certain knowledge orientation in the subject of the worker. This does not mean that immaterial labour poses a dichotomy to manual labour in the same way as one may think of the traditional dichotomy between manual and intellectual labour. Rather, what Lazzarato proposes is that immaterial labour theory takes these divisions on board and then transforms them. What he says is that:

> [The] split between conception and execution, between labour and creativity, between author and audience, is simultaneously transcended within the 'labour process' and re-imposed as political command within the 'process of valorisation.'
>
> (Lazzarato, 1996)

[15] Lazzarato places his idea of 'mass intellectuality' as a '"great transformation" that began at the start of the 1970s', whereby '[m]anual labour is increasingly coming to involve procedures that could be defined as "intellectual," and the new communications technologies increasingly require subjectivities that are rich in knowledge' (Lazzarato, 1996). Rather than simply meaning that intellectual labour has become subjected to the norms of capitalist production, what Lazzarato states has happened is that 'a new "mass intellectuality" has come into being, created out of a combination of the demands of capitalist production and the forms of "self-valorisation" that the struggle against work has produced' (Lazzarato, 1996).

Hardt & Negri trace a similar trajectory in the development of immaterial labour in both *Empire* (specifically section 3.4 'Postmodernisation, or the Informatisation of Production') and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004) (specifically in 'Excursus 1' on 'Method: In Marx's Footsteps'). Within Lazzarato's analysis, however, the process of valorisation he is specifically concerned with is foremost a process of self-valorisation. Instead of seeing labour practices as divisive, splitting conception and execution, means and ends, he sees immateriality as a force that 'transcends' labour divisions from 'within the labour process' (Lazzarato, 1996). Key to this internalisation of control is the re-imposition of the process of command (over reproduction and reception) into the individuals' process of labour.

To understand how he perceives this we must understand that the concept of immaterial labour is divisible by two different aspects: the 'informational content' and the 'cultural content' (Lazzarato, 1996). The informational content of the commodity is a direct reference to the changes that immaterial labour affects on the process of labour itself, as evidenced in the changing skill relations brought about by cybernetics and computerisation. Cultural content, on the other hand, refers to those activities and commodities which are produced but are not normally recognised as work, but involve activities which nevertheless define cultural standards. The hypothesis Lazzarato proposes in *Immaterial Labour* is that 'the process of the production of communication tends to become immediately the process of valorisation' (Lazzarato, 1996). What he suggests is a model of thinking on immaterial labour that moves beyond what he calls the classical definition of the immaterial, such has arisen in the post-industrial workforce. To elaborate, the classic definition of immaterial labour is here typified by production types such as advertising, fashion, and cultural activities in general. Such production processes are useful to analyse because they allow us to question traditional distinctions between *work* and *workforce* in terms of the shift from a Fordist production

line into a network. The distinction being that a network comprises an 'immediately collective' flow of labour that takes place between a variety of different types and skills of work. Instead of being constrained by the notion of the factory, Lazzarato proposes this model operates in 'the basin of immaterial labour', whereby the cycle of production only becomes operative when required, and when it is not it dissolves back into the flows and networks of its 'active subjects' (Lazzarato, 1996). Self-employed workers and home-workers typify this trend of production and, furthermore, typify a modality of work that increasingly finds the boundary between leisure-time and work-time blurred. As Lazzarato and others have said of the classic definition of the immaterial, 'life becomes inseparable from work.' (Lazzarato, 1996)

On the whole we may understand the immaterial process, in its classic definition, as a mutation of Marx's idea of living labour because it effectively aims at placing life and the production of subjectivity at the controls of capitalism. Against this idea, Lazzarato's central hypothesis is that the social labour power of immaterial production is in fact independent and able to organise itself without capitalist control, or rather, beyond capitalist control: stating that '[i]ndustry does not form or create this new labour power, but simply takes it on board and adapts it' (Lazzarato, 1996). Furthermore, by pursuing an analysis of immaterial labour and its organisation, he believes that we are moving 'beyond the presuppositions of business theory' and in a direction that 'can lead us to define, at a territorial level, a space for a radical autonomy of the productive synergies of immaterial labour.' (Lazzarato, 1996) The new immaterial labour power that he proposes is not operative as merely a new processes of accumulation and reproduction functional in a 'new historical phase of capitalism,' but that 'labour power is the product of a "silent revolution" taking place within the ... realities of work and within the reconfiguration of its meanings' (Lazzarato, 1996). The specificity of how Lazzarato sees this new territory coming into presence is founded, then, on a process of

social communication becoming central to forms of production, reproduction and consumption. Effectively this entails a shift from a mode of consumption that traditionally would be defined by the consumer destroying the consumable object, to a consumption of information that consumes by communicating and re-communicating social products.

The fundamental problem that Lazzarato tries to overcome is how the social (defined in terms of language and communication) becomes economic. In order to think the production of subjectivity outside of being tied to traditional mechanisms for control, social communication needs to be considered in terms of itself producing production. Where he leads the way with *Immaterial Labour* is by proposing that the most suitable model for applying a theory of immaterial labour process to society is through applying it to an aesthetic model. In a footnote to the text explaining how both the creative and the social aspects of the problem of production lead him to consider the aesthetic, Lazzarato cites that his concept of labour is derived from either of two starting points: first, artistic activity, specifically in the wake of the Situationists, secondly, following Italian workerist theories (Lazzarato, 1996). While the arrival at his aesthetic model could be made by following either path, it is noteworthy that both rely on Marx's concept of living labour.

To frame the formation of social production and the production of subjectivities Lazzarato uses the aesthetic model to define both the force of immateriality and its tendency. Because, post-industrialisation, production technologies and the workforce are becoming increasingly invested with the reproduction of communication, the tendency of immateriality is fundamentally directed toward an interchange that includes the reproduction of images, sound, knowledges, thought, and language. The aesthetic model's traditional organisation around the production and reproduction of language as

well as ideological, literary or artistic modes of production thereby supersedes the material model in framing these instances. Furthermore, the aesthetic organises production around three key points of intersection that the material model would otherwise obscure: author, reproduction, and reception. In order to prove his hypothesis Lazzarato reformulates these instances in the following way: (a) the author looses his 'individual dimension' in order to be 'transformed into an industrially organized production process', (b) reproduction becomes mass reproduction, (c) the audience is recognised as the consumer/communicator: operating according to the double function of both the addressee of the author's commodity (the ideological product) and simultaneously as a productive site with the role of integrating the ideological product into social communication (literally activating the product by placing it in the context of life) (Lazzarato, 1996).

In order to understand how Lazzarato is able to propose that what is now productive are the whole of the social relations between author-work-audience, a number of points need to be made about the aesthetic model and how it forms an active productive cycle. Firstly, the author's loss of an individual dimension does not necessarily mean a loss of individual productive power in the same way that the traditional production line turned labourers into piece workers and alienated them from their labour. Instead, the author may remain a singularity while simultaneously being part of the commonality for the productive model: in this regard Hardt & Negri's term the *multitude* is useful (which I will return to in section 1.6). Secondly, in considering the production and reproduction element of this system (what becomes mass reproduction insofar as it is defined and organised within the economic imperatives of profitability) Lazzarato is concerned with the 'ideological' aspect of the product. What ideological designates is how products (in the immaterial paradigm) are capable of producing new intersections between human power, knowledge and action: what he also

calls 'new stratifications of reality' rather than mere reflections thereof (Lazzarato, 1996). He also describes ideological products in terms of being 'always addressed to someone' and always ideally signifying something: the problem then comes down to the meaning of signification. By positing that social relation is itself productive, meanings are brought into play because the entire process of labour, and not just the relationship between production and consumption, is involved in a constant reproduction and communication of meaning. 'These ideological products are completely internal to the processes of the formation of social communication; that is, they are at once the results and the prerequisites of these processes.' (Lazzarato, 1996) But if the human environment is to be construed from its ideological products, what still needs to be understood is the manner in which the ideological meaning is addressed to the audience. Lazzarato proposes it is 'always address[ed] to someone', but the problematic of written language over spoken language has always been that it does not necessarily distinguish between addressees. This is a point of conjecture that I intend to clarify later, specifically with a view to how artistic labour operates as a particular discourse in addressing its audience (notably understood through Rancière's aesthetic model of production). Thirdly, the idea of the consumer/communicator insists that we must comprehend not only how the audience constitutes a productive capacity, but also how it functions as a creative act in itself as part of the social product. The process of immaterial creation, structured by these three points (the author, the ideological product and the consumer/communicator) defines an open process of labour characterised by inter-communication.

What has been brought into question here is the politics of aesthetic production and distribution within 'open' systems. Immaterial labour organised in open systems allows for resonance and interference between the material and the immaterial, the virtual and the real, the corporeal and the incorporeal, to come into question through

interactions that are no longer enclosed by limits or administered by apparatuses of control from the outside, but forces of interaction 'radically exposed to it from all sides' (Terranova, 2006: 34). What is to be taken forward from Lazzarato's immaterial valorisation of intercommunication, relationships, subjectivity, and virtuality, then, is a question as to how this system of inter-valorisation takes place between an artist and their audience (through the author, reproduction, and reception system)? But it is also the aim of this thesis to get beyond an indexing of the characteristics of the creative disciplines on the wider structural transformation of human production, and beyond the illumination more of symptoms than diagnoses. As such I aim to focus on the general possibility of artistic labour based on potentiality or 'virtuality' (Lazzarato's 'mass intellectuality'), which throws up the development of the contradictory relationship posed by 'the figure of the artist as valorised mental labourer' (Brouillette: 147-8). What is a more crucial question for the subject of this thesis, then, is how the artist autonomously identifies with, mediates, and distributes the ideological product (the virtuality) of artistic labour as the opening of an intersection between human power, knowledge and action.

1.5 *Immaterial labour as re-production (Bourriaud's postproduction)*

To elaborate briefly on how the mobile space of production and the commonality of production might occur in artistic practices, I will turn for a moment to Bourriaud. In particular, in *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How art Reprograms the World* (2002), Bourriaud models the present hybridisation of space in terms of its relational aesthetic arrangement. For Bourriaud the contemporary artist today is constituted not by the valorisation of objects but by the artist's generation of relationships: echoing the trend we have already seen in immaterial production. In focusing on an analysis of the

relationships between people as a social process, and not just the inter-human exchange of the aesthetic object, he establishes the notion of the postproduction artist (Bourriaud, 2007: 32-33). Postproduction offers not simply a breaking of the distinction between living creation, on one hand, and a history of forms on the other, but rather identifies an un-delimited space of practice between them. In this space of production the promise of immaterialism comes into effect as the work of the artist and the work of others, namely the spectator, operate collectively as part of a cultural ecosystem based on 'overproduction' (Bourriaud, 2007: 45): meaning that the saturation of objects and the inflation of images need not be seen as a problem that requires a dematerialisation of the work of art, but rather promotes strategies of mixing, combining and inventing new proliferations of production.

A wider concern is also prevalent here regarding a transformation or disappearing of the boundary between human life and human production as it is made visible by artists. To these ends Bourriaud proposes an understandable desire for the artist to re-materialise the current dislocation of spaces and times. The problematic he is faced with, however, is how to achieve this without falling into the trap of the reified object. To avoid this problematic he instead prioritises the value of living experience (Bourriaud, 2007: 32). Nevertheless, the task at hand fights a battle against the abstraction of reality inherent in the economic system of an immaterial paradigm. As a result, the process to which his theory directs the artist is to utilise overproduction as a tool to produce. Or, more specifically, he proposes that the artist aim to re-produce from the standpoint of a post-productive enterprise whereby singular instances are intended to stand as narratives: or what Bourriaud refers to as an artistic work of creating a narrative *mise-en-scène* from the dislocation of societal production. The concept of the artistic act becomes, therefore, not a process of labour as something that belongs exclusively to the artist, but as a transfer of labour information and communication that takes place

between the artist and the audience/society. What can be said, then, is that the postproduction concept is really one of cohabitation beyond the space of exhibition that is directed at placing artistic tools and *operandi* at the disposal of the visitor.

This analysis offers some interesting insights for transposing into the artistic regime Lazzarato's proposition that a truly social cycle of production requires that communication is created and takes place at every level of production and reception. However, in my opinion, Bourriaud leans in his analysis too far toward valorising the material construct of the space, time, and relationships that artistic activity produce. Artistic labour is here seen and judged primarily by the 'beholders of art,' contained within a specific context of co-habitation that echoes and gives primacy to Bourriaud's earlier thinking on relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2007: 94).[16] Moreover, by focusing on a critique that places society's *re*productive forces central to aesthetic practices, the artist's engagement with the *re-* of the *re*-materialising process is given dominance over the general possibility of living labour. Insofar as living labour is that which is always already in possession of each individual, and biopolitical labour aims to put the virtual power of human action into real production, in essence we can say the tendency of this regime is located in making the *pre-* of production work. It is this fundamental element of postmodern production that, for me, Bourriaud's reproductive force of postproductive labour does not sufficiently account for. In order to establish the crux of immaterial artistic labour, it is therefore toward *pre*-production as production in potentiality that I move.

[16] As I briefly mentioned in the Introduction to this present thesis, the criticism that Steven Wright levels against relational aesthetics – in his essay 'The delicate essence of artistic collaboration' (2004) – is that artists merely 'end up reproducing within the symbolic economy of art the sort of class-based relations of expropriation that Marx saw at work in the general economy' (Wright: 535). These 'frivolous interactions' never actually alter the established class-based power relations but sustain the division between 'those who hold the symbolic capital' (the artists) and 'those whose labour (such as it is) are used to foster the accumulation of more capital.'

1.6 *The artistic model of immaterial labour (Boltanski & Chiapello)*

Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999) continues in the wake of Lazzarato to directly open up a comparison and analysis of capitalist modes of production through both a social and artistic critique. On one hand, their social critique inspired by socialism and later by Marx, focuses on a critique of production based on two primary concerns: production as a source of inequalities and poverty, and production as a source of oppression and egoism. These sources of critique are evidently prevalent in much of the critical political economy that I have elaborated so far in this investigation. The artistic critique that forms the second half of their investigation of capitalism, on the other hand, distinguishes a point of original perspective that demands close attention.

In order to construct a critical sociology Boltanski & Chiapello develop a dual analysis between, on one hand, historical changes in capitalism and, on the other, the dynamic relationship that itself exists between capitalism and critique. In order to approach a critique that tackles the various different grounds of capitalist exploitation, whereby particular historical conjectures often form a particular ground for different 'actors,' they make a distinction between *social* and *artistic* models of critique. The *social* designates a historical critique of the working-class movement with an impetus placed on exploitation and focusing on two of the four modes of capitalism's essential nature, which they argue have not radically changed in the last two centuries. The first essential nature that a social critique engages is 'capitalism as a source of poverty among workers and of inequalities on an unprecedented scale.' The second addresses 'capitalism as a source of oppression and egoism which, by exclusively encouraging private interests, proves destructive of social bonds and collective solidarity, especially of minimal solidarity between rich and poor' (Boltanski & Chiapello: 37). Social

critique, in this regard, rejects the kind of individualism associated with egoism and specifically the 'egoism ... of artists' (Boltanski & Chiapello: 38).

The *artistic* operates as a critique of intellectual and aesthetic models of production targeting the dehumanising elements of the capitalist sphere. Capitalism is therefore critiqued according to its nature as 'a source of disenchantment and inauthenticity of objects, persons, emotions and, more generally, the kind of existence associated with it', and 'capitalism as a source of oppression, inasmuch as it is opposed to the freedom, autonomy and creativity of the human beings who are subject' (Boltanski & Chiapello: 37). The artistic critique here probes two alternative forms and mechanisms of constraint in capitalist production that interest this investigation. On one hand, it questions both authenticity and inauthenticity: inclusive not only of objects but also disenchantment with authenticity in relation to persons and existence in general. On the other hand, it deals with the oppression of autonomy and creativity in subjugation to dominant market forces, demands, and desires. Insofar as this critique deals with a sense of loss with regard to meaning ('meaning' insofar as we are talking about an ideological product in relation to Lazzarato), it is opposed to Adam Smith's argument that art's objects are valorised based on a level of loss measured only between an object in comparison to its original site of imitation. The loss of meaning that Boltanski & Chiapello recognise stems instead from a process of 'standardisation and generalised commodification' (Boltanski & Chiapello: 38). In its widest context standardisation affects, regiments, and dominates human beings within a prescriptive modality of work. What they are therefore interested in is how the artistic model (whose roots Boltanski & Chiapello define in a bohemian lifestyle and the figure of the dandy, which finds its best example in Charles Baudelaire) is counterposed to this tendency at the very level of artistic freedom and 'their refusal of any form of subjection in time and space and, in its extreme forms, of any kind of work' (Boltanski & Chiapello: 37-38).

Boltanski & Chiapello's deliberations are specifically situated by the current and increasing lack of distinction between the time and space of work that is a result of capitalism adopting the *modus operandi* of the artistic model. The artistic notion of freedom and autonomous authenticity is hereby appropriated in the codification process of capitalist production and essentially used to make possible the commodification of everything that was previously outside of commodification, including human subjectivity (Boltanski & Chiapello: 445). The failure and subsequent contradictory doubling of authenticity that is here posed, on a basis of the adoption and subjugation of the artistic regime into a capitalist mode of production, is, as they state, based on the fact that '[t]his contradictory double incorporation tends to acknowledge the demand for authenticity as valid and to create a world where this question is no longer to be posed' (Boltanski & Chiapello: 451). The impotence that they foresee and posit in the artistic critique is thus based on the undermining of its ground by capitalist production, which leaves it with the option of either backtracking to a critique based on the nineteenth century – basically a 'denunciation of bourgeois morality' – or demonstrating 'a "lucidity" presented as the only posture still worth adopting in the face of the impending apocalypse' (Boltanski & Chiapello: 467).

In response to the increasing commonality of the artistic *modus operandi* Boltanski & Chiapello propose a possible alternative position of action: that instead of resorting to either of the first two unsatisfactory positions (denouncing anew the 'bourgeois mentality' of capitalism, or lucidly accepting 'impending apocalypse') the artistic critique can instead adopt a response to questions of action or passivity as a mode of deferral (Boltanski & Chiapello: 467). Essentially what they are proposing, and the point at which I wish to take up their argument, is a proposition that Musil following Nietzsche had already suggested in *The Man Without Qualities* (originally published in German in 1930) in terms of an 'active passivism' (Musil, 1995: 63). The distinction

between active and passive, or the process of deferral, is hereby prefigured by Musil's process of creating a protagonist that is not only 'without' qualities (Musil, 1966: 71) but defers them, or what Frederick G. Peters reads into Musil's text as not saying 'no' to reality, but rather the saying 'not yet' (Peters: 210).[17]

Boltanski & Chiapello's response to the problematic loss of the artistic ground of labour to capital by positing a deferral, of giving neither an active nor passive response, is literally a proclamation of Musil's 'not yet' in answer to a question that normally demands either an affirmative or negative response. To some extent the modality of this response is prefigured by the tradition of nihilism, for example in Max Stirner's 'creative nothing' of the role of the artist (Stirner: 41),[18] but much more so in Nietzsche's nihilism and the term 'free spirit' (*Human, All Too Human (I)*, 1878).[19] However, by adopting this stance as a 'new' critique, Boltanski & Chiapello intend to offer a new challenge to the notion that labour mobility is 'a prerequisite and

[17] The deferral of reality in Musil must here be understood insomuch as it goes hand in hand with the utopianism of his proposal for living life experimentally, which Hans Reiss summarises in the form of an artistic endeavour that aims to provide 'models for future action' (Reiss: 45), and Stefan Jonsson as a state of 'continual denial or negation of the reality constructed by past events' (Jonsson: 150). I will return to this distinction of the term 'not yet' as a deferral of reality in section 4.7 of this thesis.

[18] A brief detour to elaborate how the premise of negation, relating to the labour deferral of Boltanski & Chiapello is formulated in nihilism is useful at this point. The concept of artistic labour that Stirner introduces in his chapter on 'Art and Religion' in *The Ego and His Own* (1844) makes extended use of the otherness and the alienated state of artistic creation. However, the nihilism of which Stirner speaks is also, here, what Critchley identifies as its own liberation (Critchley, 2004: 5). Stirner's 'I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but I am the creative nothing,' (Stirner: 41) also has echoes of the dual properties of Marx's living labour: being both the nihilistic absolute poverty of the nothing, and simultaneously the general possibility of creation itself, phrased by Stirner as 'the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything' (Stirner: 41). Furthermore, Critchley's *Very Little ... Almost Nothing* (1997) frames the duality of this nature through a reading of Maurice Blanchot's utilisation of a double plus and minus sign (±±) as an elaboration of his use of 'the neuter,' or what Critchley also refers to in terms of a 'labour of negation' (Critchley, 2004: 71); and also in terms of Hegel's 'life of the Spirit,' meaning 'life that endures [destruction] and maintains itself in it' (Hegel, 1977: 19).

[19] Nietzsche somewhat clarifies Stirner's idea of the phenomenon of the artist in *The Will To Power* (1901), where he suggests that the importance of the artist is that he designates 'the most transparent' figure, in whom we can 'see through ... to the basic instincts of power, nature, etc.!' (Nietzsche, 1968: 419) The difference of opinion between Stirner and Nietzsche, as to how the artistic figure illuminates or makes evident the 'instincts of power', is here subtle. The expression used by Nietzsche in *Human, All Too Human (I)* is the 'free spirit' (Nietzsche, 1995: 9-10). The 'free spirit' is the idea of being able to evade the fetters that restrict one from offering oneself completely over to living experimentally; a notion that recurs later in the twentieth century in a number of guises, notably including Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* and, more recently, in the thought of Agamben's *The Man Without Content* (1970). Nietzsche's definition of art as 'the only superior counterforce to all will to denial of life' (Nietzsche, 1968: 452), therefore opens to us what he saw as its ability to make the power relations and fetters of life transparent.

incontestable value' in current production trends (Boltanski & Chiapello: 468). The challenge they mount would be a contestation fought first and foremost against the use of time.

What Boltanski & Chiapello propose, however, is not a refusal to work, as we will later see exemplified in the thinking of Negri, but neither is it a move the other way to the hyper-mobilisation of labour. Instead, the 'deferring engagement,' or a 'slowing down the pace of connections' that they propose is rather one of a compromise between refusal and hyper-mobilisation (Boltanski & Chiapello: 468-9).[20] It offers a mode of thinking about production as a construction of 'temporal spaces' that are considered as freedom-giving space larger than the specific project of any individually employed labour. In the terms of labour employment in which they frame the argument, by extending the net of normal production to include a time that goes past the end of any specific project, the individual is given a quantity of time to move to, or choose, their next employment without the constraint posed by their own need for subsistence. Therefore, by employing a temporal space that goes beyond the completion of production the pace at which individuals form labour connections is slowed down and production, to some extent, deferred. The fallacy of Boltanski & Chiapello's thinking, nevertheless, is that they consider mobility and potential production within these temporal spaces materialistically and, dominantly although not always, in exclusion of an ideological mobility of the individual. Temporality is indeed key to understanding labour, but what I propose is that these temporal spaces of labour do not need to be based on a limitation of thinking about mobility physically, but a mobility that gives a space of freedom to defer the virtual or subjective connections of production.

[20] Here, the exhibition *Be a Happy Worker: Work-to-Rule!* (2008), curated by Ivana Bago and Antonia Majaca at Galerija Miroslav Kraljevic in Zagreb, which I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, can be understood in the context of Boltanski & Chiapello's 'slowing down'. With its motto calling for (artistic) action in line with the idea of a 'white strike', what the exhibition proposes in general, and each of the artists and collectives involved in the project manifest in particular ways, is a space and time of labour in which 'employees' do no more than the minimum required by the rules of a 'workplace'.

By expanding Boltanski & Chiapello's analysis, taking into account the work done by Lazzarato and by consequence Marx's notion of living labour, what is opened up is a labour model that allows for a new mobility of labour to be expressed beyond the ability to move with work. The notion of mobility, I propose, is not simply defined by a materially increased temporal space of work, which exists to provide the individual with subsistence even for the period of transition between employment, but as a free mobility of time *with* labour as a space of deferral and slowness, or a spacing, if you like, that is neither defined by an active or passive move with or against labour and production. The space that remains to be sited in this model, however, is the position of an aesthetic *modus operandi* defined by the specific structure of artistic labour. The proposition that I therefore put forward is that any theorising of artistic labour needs to take into account the temporal space of labour as internal and virtual. Furthermore, that within the present immaterial paradigm of production the authority of this (internal) space and its effect on how we perceive of the production, reception, and communication of labour is increasingly vital.[21]

1.7 *Affective labour, the commonality of labour, and non-work (Hardt & Negri)*

Hardt & Negri take a slightly different approach to Lazzarato's understanding of immaterial labour. In particular they distinguish it by three types. First, they identify the informatisation of industrial production through the incorporation of communications technology, whereby the production process is necessarily changed and to which extent manufacturing has become a service. Secondly, in the impact that informatisation has on the specific type of work typical of the postmodern sector, such as analytical and

[21] In Chapter 2 I will propose a model for investigating this free temporal space of labour orientated by Marx's notion of the imaginary pre-figuration of labour and, fundamentally, Agamben's theory of the phantasm.

symbolic activity. Within this second 'type' immaterial labour is fundamentally still divisible into skilled and low-skilled labour: between intelligent and creative information manipulation at one end of the scale and the processing of routine symbol manipulation (i.e. data entry) at the other. Thirdly, immaterial labour and production is identified by the manipulation of what may be called *affect*. This type of labour is based on the direct (here taken to include virtual or actual) human interaction through contact.

What is particularly interesting in these distinctions, from the viewpoint of the present investigation, is how the value of artistic labour changes according to a valorisation of affect, which shares some similarities with Lazzarato's idea of cultural content. The value of affective labour goes beyond immaterial labour's technological developments of computerisation and informatisation (as a classic definition of the immaterial), and instead gives authority to the development of subjective qualities. For instance, while technological developments have produced shifts in multimedia art practices and introduced new mechanisms of communication and reception, the rise of affective labour industries gives new impotence to artistic practices that are specifically borne of social processes or generate relationships between people. Whether these practices exist either in reality or virtuality, what becomes crucial is their ability to produce human relations through interaction. The cultural content of Lazzarato's model similarly deals with valorising those modes of production not normally recognised, but he does so by foregrounding the distinctive character of this or that mode of production according to its production of cultural standards. For Hardt & Negri, however, the cooperative and social power of affective immaterial labour is what they foreground as the site of a new potential antagonism against the constraint of external impositions or organisations of value. The internalisation of biopower therefore affords labour the possibility of self-valorising, because what is now internal to labour is thus 'external to capital' (Hardt & Negri, 2006: 147). As they have said on the subject: '[b]rains and

bodies still need others to produce value, but the others they need are not necessarily provided by capital and its capacities to orchestrate production' (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 294).

In conceptualising how immaterial labour orchestrates production outside of capital, Hardt & Negri's *Empire* and *Multitude* expands on the transition between a socio-economic model and an artistic model as a critique of production (as so far established by Lazzarato and Boltanski & Chiapello). Predominantly they achieve this through identifying the current paradigm of immaterial labour as an assertion of power aimed at developing commonality in production, founded on Marx's notion of living labour. Furthermore, insofar as these two thinkers represent what has been critically acclaimed as a new Marxist critique for the postmodern age, they clearly identify the extent to which any theorising of production today is inherently based on notions of the common.

Production, within the notion of the multitude, is here elaborated as a reciprocal cycle of common consumption and communication that echoes and extends Marx's proposition that 'production thus not only creates an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object' (Marx, 1973: 92). It is to this un-delimited boundary between work and life that Hardt & Negri direct their analysis of immaterial labour, leading toward a re-assessment of Marx's methodologies in political economy. In particular they highlight that one of the key factors that must change from Marx's methodology is our perception of the temporal nature of labour. They assert that distinctions between being-at-work and being-away-from-work are not only increasingly invalid, but insufficient as a modality for theorising on labour's hegemony of specific or concrete times and spaces of labour. Expressed as a passage toward a horizontality of social control – flattening the previous vertical instances of control, i.e. from Fordism to post-

Fordism – what they posit unhinges subjectivity from identity so that it may be produced in a mobile and hybridised space (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 331).

A dilemma arises in their concept of the multitude, however, because insofar as the multitude operates in and between the productions of communication, information, knowledges and affective relationships, its essential commonality encounters a situation of risk that Marx forewarned us of. What Marx was cautious of was how the process of transforming an individual labourer into a collective labourer meant two things must happen: the labourer must become 'rich in social productive power' and, at the same time, 'be made poor in individual productive powers' (Marx & Engels, 1947: 24). Nevertheless, Hardt & Negri insist that the multitude proposes an instance of co-existence whereby the singularity of the artist, for instance, can still exist in the multitude of society without succumbing to processes of massification, or what Bourriaud's vision of artistic production proposed by identifying the artist's occupancy of an exhibition space as one of cohabitation with the spectator. Yet, as the expansion of immaterial and communicational instances of labour processes constantly expand what is shared as common, I must highlight that progressively we see a systematic insinuation that coexisting with Hardt & Negri's 'becoming common' in biopolitical-life is a process toward being common in production: despite reassurances that the becoming common of qualitative divisions does not pose a contradiction between the individual and commonality.

The question that remains to be asked of Hardt & Negri's process of commonality, with regard to the artist's becoming common with a paradigm of production similarly based on the aesthetic model of author, reproduction and reception, is then to what extent does this tendency propose a possibility for individual artistic production post-becoming common? Furthermore, in what way can this be theorised as

a general production of the artist as a biopolitical subject? In answering these questions Hardt & Negri direct us toward a distinction of how one should accept or refuse to work. This argument poses two notions: first, the immeasurability of excess, and second, as the fundamental creative act understood as a transitory movement from, and between, the virtual through to the possible and into the real. Both of these points find their original basis in Marx's living labour. In order to produce the hybridised life-giving form of creative production, living labour lays the foundation for a process of production that creates the very passageways that enable a transition from virtuality to reality by crossing through, or what Hardt & Negri describe as a breaking open, of the fetters of economic, social and political regulations (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 357).

This brings us to the subject of non-work.[22] Non-work is not defined as 'no longer work,' but rather 'work which is liberated from work' (Negri, 1984: 160). In particular, Negri's essay 'Worker's Party Against Work' foregrounds an ideal refusal of abstract labour as a rule of unmediated production and posits 'a general tendency toward the workers' refusal of work' (Negri, 2005: 75).[23] The new refusal of work that Negri proposes is hereby situated precisely in immaterial labour discourses. Although he does refer in this essay to refusal in terms of the worker's refusal to work being *materially* significant, we should understand that by this he means materiality insofar as at the lowest levels of refusal a material impact is visible in absenteeism, sabotage, or direct

[22] Negri's concept of non-work is developed out of his reading of Marx's *Grundrisse* – which he identifies as a text that actually takes Marxist thinking beyond *Capital* – which centrally informs his ideas in *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* (1979) and the series of radical essays he produced while in Italy in the 1970s: collected in *Books for Burning: Between Civil war and Democracy in 1970s Italy* (1997).

[23] Just as nihilism for Stirner posed the dual possibility of liberation, as does the Musilian term 'without', so to does Negri's refusal to work offer a modality of labour liberated from its own abstraction. Negri's consistent return in his writing to common passages from *Grundrisse*, for example Marx's phrase concerning 'the slave's awareness that he cannot be the property of another' (Marx, 1973: 462-463), recurrent both in Negri's *Marx Beyond Marx* and the essay 'Worker's Party Against Work', demonstrates his favour for a non-existence of our bond to alienated surplus labour and, instead, posits a move to appropriate our own surplus-labour in order to redistribute production and materiality through the refusal to work (Negri, 2005: 76).

appropriation of labour.[24] Also, we must remember that what is immaterial in immaterial labour is its product, while the body of labour (the biological existence of man) remains material.

The material significance of a refusal to work, we can say, therefore occurs in the body in terms of the mode of perception and appropriation of labour as it is taken up for the worker as an individual. This is what Negri was leading toward with his comment that: '[w]orker's imagine their life not as work but the absence of it' (Negri, 2005: 75). He further expands on this by saying that labour imagined in this way defines 'activity [as] free and creative exercise'. In particular Negri sees life without work becoming viable through the present movement to tertiary industries and immateriality. With immateriality what becomes possible is a refusal to accept labour as abstract and unmediated. Labour, as such, would no longer be defined by the same rules that previously imposed disciplinary control on it under the factory regime. Instead, refusal directs us toward an enjoyment of labour based on our perceiving labour no longer as discipline but as 'satisfaction'.

The absenteeism of work would occur, according to Negri's model, not in being bodily away from work *per se*, but in no longer perceiving it to be work. Instead he proposes we perceive work as a free activity. Rather than collapse capital's utilisation of surplus-value, what Negri calls for is a 'surplus of refusal to directly valorise capital' (Negri, 2005: 75).[25] This proposition shares some ground with Lazzarato's idea of labour as a process of self-valorisation, which Hardt & Negri's later thinking in *Empire*

[24] In artistic discourses we can also think of refusal taking place in terms of Gustav Metzger's *Art Strike*: called for in 1974 and active from 1977-80.

[25] In *Capital* Marx proposes that the working day is divided into two parts, necessary labour and surplus labour. 'The prolongation of the working day beyond the point at which the labourer would have produced just an equivalent for the value of his labour power, and the appropriation of that surplus labour by capital,' Marx tells us, is the point at which the 'production of absolute surplus value' takes place (Marx, 1996: 510-511). Necessary labour is the quantity of labour necessary to recuperate what is paid for it, while surplus labour is labour in excess of this, which produces capital. Capital, therefore, is not only 'the command over labour', but 'the command over unpaid labour' (Marx, 1996: 534). It is therefore to the question of who commands surplus-labour that Negri's work contends.

and *Multitude* also takes up, although neither of these texts specifically formulate a proposition of refusal. Nevertheless, between these sources we can begin to build up a picture of how a refusal to work (and here I mean 'work' according to it designating those human activities that produce the world of things) becomes possible when the individual comprehends what they do 'as an implicitly subjective characteristic' (Negri, 2005: 75). What this means is that in demystifying the constraints of work's suppression under the idea of abstract labour, the individual is able to comprehend and become conscious – what we may also think of in terms of Heidegger's bringing-into-undisconcealment – of the real suppression of labour ('labour' meaning the living force essential to life). Only by comprehending the operation of labour outside of a fettered relation to the creation of capital and the production of the world of things, and therefore freeing it as a 'creative exercise', is labour able to be enjoyed. In short, the proposition for a refusal to *work* is a proposition aimed at the enjoyment of one's own *labour* as creative. In refusing to work, then, one can begin to 'live out [one's] own experience of the destruction of work' (Negri, 2005: 92).

The general tendency of refusal has specific credibility today because, as Negri suggests, the 'continuity between spontaneous and political forms of behaviour is no longer merely a logical exigency of the theory, but an experience of the practice of the movement' (Negri, 2005: 92). This 'practice of the movement' must be set in two contexts: first, as a practice that is underlined by the current movement of immaterial labour, second, in that Negri proposes a shift in the practical behaviour of those who labour. The first context of the immaterial paradigm is something we have already considered. The behavioural context, however, is what we have only previously touched upon through the virtual and the process of interiorising labour. What I am particularly interested in, then, is the behavioural element of labour that Negri aims to direct toward

a position of refusal, notably through the act of appropriating its own power, or, as he says, 'on its way to emancipating itself through the refusal of work' (Negri, 2005: 76).

What Negri's emancipatorary project highlights is twofold: firstly, the immaterial importance of communication, including what Lazzarato called 'meaning' or the signification of the ideological product, and secondly, the entrenchment of immaterial (biopolitical) labour in the internal space of the individual. The individual is thus the only one capable of their own refusal because what is to be appropriated is one's own labour-surplus. However, we also see that the emancipation of refusal, of work that is not work but the creative freedom of labour, means that we must also engage with a new formulation of relationships to labour framed by the flight toward immateriality. Insofar as the dominant process of immateriality is identified with communication, being founded in the translation of signs, the necessity of using an aesthetic model for articulating labour becomes clear. On the basic technological level the role of sign manipulation is already evident, a fact which Hardt & Negri point out in *Empire* by showing how in the tertiary industries a division of labour still occurs according to the required level of processing associated with various tasks of symbol manipulation – exemplified at one end of the scale by data entry and word processing, and at the other end creative information manipulation (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 290). A more general view of the symbolic manipulation of labour beyond its technological (routine) implementation, however, requires an understanding of production as a process of translating and manipulating not only signs but also subjectivity and creativity.

At this point in our investigation we can state that, where previously the artistic exception of labour could be theorised as an outside to normative labour – because it was located by a system that valorised originality – this distinction, along with its system of value, no longer wields any authority. Instead, artistic labour now begins to

obtain a new position within a truly general discourse on labour theory. This discourse takes its ground not from an external point of verification, namely the State or Capital, but from the interiority of each subject's productivity (although the extent to which each person operates as a subjective mechanism of capital is still debatable). Traced through Marx's living labour, the adoption of the artistic *modus operandi* in immaterial labour discourses as a model upon which the relationship between author, reproduction and reception are based, gains credence, then, dependent on the nature of its being-taken-up as a model of refusal. Furthermore, refusal defies how we choose neither to activate nor negate labour, but simultaneously activate and negate it. Or to put it another way according to situations borrowed from Marx and Hegel, to think of labour as simultaneously *realised* and *suppressed.* When I talk of value or valorising artistic labour, then, it is important that this not only be understood as merely the application of something toward the end of generating value, earnings or yield. Rather, this present enquiry seeks the autonomous space of immaterial labour that becomes possible, as Lazzarato and Hardt & Negri have posited, when the value of labour is reconnected with living labour: provided by the self rather than capital, and manifest through the internalisation of biopower. Therefore, what is at stake in defining artistic labour in terms of immaterial labour, for this thesis, is foremost a question of discourse: of how artistic labour articulates a space and time of biopolitical labour. Two contemporary theorists that are crucially important in establishing the trajectory of such a project from this point forward are Jacques Rancière and Giorgio Agamben.

1.8 *Rancière; on art, labour, and the aesthetic regime*

If this enquiry is to discover the artistic subjectivity that animates labour, then it must discover the signification of the artist's labouring hieroglyph. To this extent Rancière's

essay 'On Art and Work' in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004) comes closest to a precise engagement with the problematic of situating a contemporary artistic practice first and foremost as a process of labour. Established in what he calls the factory of the sensible, what he lays out is the context of an aesthetic terrain whereupon the disputes and battles that have been brought to issue so far regarding the relationship between aesthetics and politics continue as a specific question of discourse. Indeed what Rancière describes as the crisis of art in our time is a crisis over its 'fatal capture by discourse': a discourse bound up with the spectacle of the image, the 'promises of emancipation', and 'the illusions and disillusions of history' (Rancière, 2006: 9).

Broadly speaking we may define Rancière's long-term project as aimed at re-establishing a debate over the very terms by which aesthetics is given its intelligibility. To these ends, what he has introduced into aesthetic thought is a re-thinking of how we perceive the distribution of the sensible as occurring. Beyond accepting the simple valorisation of aesthetics, his distribution aims to take into account aesthetics' connected points of transference and transformation as a pattern of distribution between delimited spaces and times of work. This model of distribution focuses on two key elements that are important to this current enquiry: an expanded concept of the possibilities of artistic production as practice, and what criteria of assessment we apply to a critique of those practices.

The background of thought that sets the context for both points in Rancière's analysis derives from his early investigation *The Nights of Labour: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*. While the focus of this work is historical, primarily interested in a small group of workers active in Paris around 1830, what Rancière identifies in the desire of these workers to rally against the process by which their servitude was maintained, would later force him to reconsider how the distribution

of occupations, time, and labour occurs. Specifically, what he encounters in these investigations is not a story of workers whose time away from work was dedicated, as he supposed, to subsistence. Instead he encounters men and women engaged with the leisure of aesthetics and philosophy. It is this unexpected encounter with a time of leisure stolen away from the time of work that leads him to reformulate the traditional Platonic distribution of occupations. In particular he interjects the Platonic order of social relations with processes of disruption and re-configuration. This eventually culminates in his conjoined theories of the distribution of the sensible and the force of dissensus.

The dilemma raised by the workers of Paris in the nineteenth century is that as the time dedicated to labour would not allow for anything other than mere subsistence: time, literally, became the measure to which 'one's life was lost' (Rancière, 1989: vii). The absurdity of this predicament is what Rancière subsequently traces from Plato and manifests in *Politics of Aesthetics* as the conflict between private and public space and time, but also as a division between those who do and those who do not have time to occupy a visible place in the community because 'work will not wait' (Rancière, 2006: 12). In order to organise a new approach to thinking about the distribution of occupations in aesthetic practices, he therefore proposes a re-thinking of how the arts demarcate human sense in production. In particular he identifies three dominant regimes under which the arts are identifiable: these are the ethical regime of the image, the poetic regime, and the regime of aesthetics. The ethical regime considers art from the point of view of its image object. Notably this regime considers the image according to a twofold question: first, regarding the nature of its origin, and second, regarding what use and effect is derived from its end purpose. The premise of this regime is developed from Plato's deliberation in *Republic* on the artistic regime of representation, whereby the question of origin is grounded in a critique of the object's truth content. What this

regime foregrounds is how we know the affect of the object and judge the quality of truth manifest in the process of image distribution. However, for the same reasons I have previously dismissed the political economy of Adam Smith, my concern in this investigation is not to focus on valorising the truth content of artistic labour, but the artist's distribution of labour and sense, whether true or false, real or imaginary.

The two remaining regimes, the aesthetic and the poetic (also referred to as the representative regime), are essentially posited as contradicting each other. The contradiction arises because the aesthetic regime fundamentally designates a perspective that derives from only what is specific to the product of art, rather than starting from the identification by poetics of the substance of art – based on the notion of representation or *mimēsis*, which organises ways of doing, making, seeing, and judging according to a regime of visibility (Rancière, 2006: 22). All modes of being that are specific to the realm of art here fall under aesthetics and therefore stand in isolation from other practices, not as a form of division but, instead, as a complete extrication: defining the aesthetic as an absolute singularity. If the representative regime of poetics thus defines a distribution of the sensible according to the barriers that stand between representations, the aesthetic regime destroys the very criterion of the barriers which would allow for the singularity to be isolated in the first place. Aesthetics, quite simply, identifies only within the specificity of its own regime, free from the confinement of any exterior ruling of hierarchical placement (Rancière, 2006: 23). It is therefore the aesthetic regime that holds the interest of this present investigation on artistic labour. It is also by conducting an analysis of artistic practices under the aesthetic regime that Rancière is finally able to state that artistic labour is not, after all, an exception to other practices, but designates only a specific mode by which human activities are reconfigured and distributed (Rancière, 2006: 45).

Crucially, what the aesthetic regime questions is the polemic space of artistic distribution. In particular, the polemic space in question is what the figure of the artist opens up in the space and time of work by giving a visible public stage to what otherwise is a 'private principle of work' (Rancière, 2006: 43). As such, our concept of artistic labour is expanded to include a role of displacement. It displaces distinctions of private and public, but also the virtual and the real, and through this potentiality for displacement the representational delimitations of labour can be transcended. Furthermore, the aesthetic regime has temporal repercussions that promise an emancipatorary status of labour. Constituted by its ability to illuminate the delimitation of activities by temporal domains of occupations, the aesthetic regime valorises artistic labour by its ability to give a time and space to what is improper. But this does not, as Rancière reiterates, posit a new valorisation of occupations and activities based on a proposition of new ways of thinking about art. Rather, the central task that he gives to aesthetics is bound up with the process of re-configuring and re-distributing ways of thinking, not simply discarding extant models.

Within a wider context of social occupations, what he proposes exists is a folding of the space and time of occupations. It is this process of the 'fold' that not only 'renders the arts visible,' but also gives power to the arts as a mode of rendering the labour of others visible (Rancière, 2006: 22).[26] Furthermore, the link of the fold presents a general ordering of labour's specificity, which allows the arts to participate as a visible regime within a general production of occupations in a way that earlier analyses of political economy failed to do so. This is where Rancière's idea of a visible distribution of the sensible is capable of revealing, or what Heidegger would call disconcealing, the social delimitations that partition one's share of the common space of

[26] Here, the fold should be understood in the context of Deleuze's use of the term in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988) as a layering of relationships, twisted to fold one upon another, whose function it is to interpret how we amass and organise actions. Artistic labour would not be invented by the 'fold' but, rather, viewed according to how doing and making is distributed by the fold.

the community based on one's activity and 'on the time and space in which this activity is performed' (Rancière, 2006: 12-13).

A crucial criterion of assessment that Rancière applies to the aesthetic regime occurs first in a short paragraph contained amidst a discussion on the birth of the mechanical arts and the development of art's 'new history,' where Rancière briefly posits the idea of a 'phantasmagoric dimension of the true' (Rancière, 2006: 34). Proposed as part of the structure of his aesthetic regime, the phantasmatic dimension appears to locate itself in proximity to art's faculty for removing signifiers from their obvious order, 'torn out of their trivial appearances' and 'made into phantasmagoric objects in order to be interpreted as the expression of society's contradictions'. The value of this notion, I propose, lies in its apparent ability to illustrate the contradictions and paradoxes associated with the apparatus of biopower (based on the paradox of living labour as simultaneously the general possibility and absolute absence of value). The question still to be asked, however, is how an artist's labour would figure within this phantasmagoric dimension, and to what extent we may say that the artist's signification of labour dislocates a normal order? Insofar as the phantasmatic figure proposes an expression of labour based on dislocating or disturbing its normal social order, it finds a correspondence notably with the fetish object of Marx, but also with the critiques of labour that Lazzarato, Boltanski & Chiapello, and Negri propose. Taken further, the 'phantasmagoria of the true' opens up a method for critiquing the aesthetic regime of artistic production as a process of a phantasmagoric undertaking.

Unfortunately the short essay contained in *The Politics of Aesthetics* does not provide enough commentary to elaborate the points and propositions that Rancière makes beyond a summary outline of phantasmagoric objects. In order to extend his proposition into a discussion on the phantasmagoric activity of artistic production itself,

we therefore need to refer to three more recent texts: *The Aesthetic Unconscious* (2009), *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009), and *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010). In particular, *The Aesthetic Unconscious* goes on to define the phantasmagoria of the true as a process of thought and a mode of speech that specifically corresponds to the aesthetic regime. Rancière achieves this by showing how Freudian psychoanalysis presupposes the current trends of what he calls the 'aesthetic revolution': a break between aesthetics and representation that defines 'the end of an ordered set of relations between what can be seen and what can be said, knowledge and action, activity and passivity' (Rancière, 2009b: 21). This is not a matter of applying Freud's theory of the unconscious to a theory of aesthetics, or to an analysis of art through psychoanalysis, but rather an investigation into how artists specifically operate in Freud's theories as '*testimony* to the existence of a particular relation between thought and non-thought' (Rancière, 2009b: 3). Art becomes important in this debate as a 'privileged ground' where the unconscious mode of thought is already identifiable and already at work (Rancière, 2009b: 4). In this regard, what I am interested in is how the aesthetic unconscious can also be said to testify to labour's transformation to an interior space. To understand the aesthetic placement of labour, its position between thought and non-thought, is therefore the reversible task of transmitting the truth of labour's phantasmagoric hieroglyphs: whose emblems are of a history that bare witness to history and that operate according to an archaeology of signs.

In *The Emancipated Spectator* the title essay formulates the process of this archaeology of signs through a reflection on the spectator/actor relationship. As we have already seen in Lazzarato's formulation of the author/consumer relationship, the transference and communication between one and the other is so important in applying an aesthetic model to an immaterial mode of production. The question raised is as to how and in what way the sign is translated in a theatre of aesthetics. An interesting

synthesis occurs here between spectatorship and the idea of ignorance and intellectual emancipation, which Rancière had previously developed in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1991). The emancipatorary role of the spectator is woven through his debate on performance, theatre, and intellectual emancipation by placing the spectator in the place of a paradox at the heart of art and politics.[27] The important social capacity of labour – what Hardt & Negri would call its commonality and what Lazzarato's hypothesis defines as immediately social – hereby finds a ground in the aesthetic opposition between audience and author, viewing and acting. The sensible grounds of actor and spectator here occupy a shared space insofar as we can acknowledge that the activity of translating signs is present on both sides of the stage. Rancière goes on to elaborate this point by establishing the context by which human action is tied together through a common sensory 'fabric' that arises from a shared distribution of the sensible. The production of a common 'community of sensation' (Rancière, 2009a: 55-56), describable in terms of a common fabric of labour, here equates the individuality of art with the commonality and multiplicity of life through the reciprocal translation and verification of labour's immateriality: namely labour's meaning as it moves from the virtual to the real.

Lastly, this criterion of assessment is based on the dissensual quality of aesthetics. *Dissensus* offers the term dissensus as a comprehensive framework under which the aesthetic regime achieves something like a position of refusal or deferral that takes

[27] The idea of intellectual emancipation occurs in this discourse as a method of reformulating the logic of theatre based on the pedagogical relationship between the 'schoolmaster' and the 'ignoramus'. What Rancière demonstrates is how the gap of knowledge that stands between these two positions is actually demarcated by one's 'knowledge of ignorance': which means 'knowledge of the exact distance separating knowledge from ignorance' (Rancière, 2009a: 9). Intellectual emancipation is based on knowing the equality of intelligence because all humans learn the same way; through the comparison and reading of signs. The position of knowingness is one that places the 'labour of translating' signs at the heart of an intellectual emancipation. The opposition between the ignoramus and the schoolmaster, audience and author, viewing and acting, is also an acknowledgement that activity is present on both sides of this equation; that viewing and acting, the actor and spectator, each in turn occupy these grounds. The goal of emancipating the spectator is not in transforming ignoramuses into scholars, as Rancière puts it, nor even spectators into actors, but in understanding the specificity of the knowledge and the activity already at work in the spectator and the ignoramus alike.

account of Rancière's wider understanding of political (and we should also say biopolitical) emancipation. Dissensus forms the kernel of the relationship between art and politics by re-distributing the sensible according to 'forms of creation that are irreducible to the spatio-temporal horizons of a given factual community' (Rancière, 2010a: 2). Insofar as 'artworks can produce effects of dissensus precisely because they neither give lessons nor have any destination' (Rancière, 2010a: 140), what is posited by the term dissensus is that art is not a destination that is designated by a de-aestheticisation (for example of the labour it involves) into a commodity, or a re-aestheticisation into life, or life and art into one another, but properly speaking the lack of destination that we find in the role of the artist is that of a movement between states of sense. The 'dissensual re-configuration of the common experience of the sensible' is what Rancière therefore calls the 'efficacy of dissensus', which designates 'a conflict between sense and sense' (Rancière, 2010a: 139-140). Effectively 'a conflict over homonyms', between sense and sense, as between labour and labour, the discourse we come face to face with, then, is one that is defined only on account of who is 'speaking' (Rancière, 2010a: 218).

Rancière's methodology of dissensus, as with how he approaches the distribution of the sensible, is aimed at giving a space and time to those particular manners of speaking that otherwise are excluded. In order to understand this project we need to understand Rancière's own method of speaking. To this end, Gabriel Rockhill in the introduction to *The Politics of Aesthetics* points out how Rancière 'does not belong to any particular academic community [history, philosophy or politics] but rather inhabits unknown intervals' (Rancière, 2006: 1). The unknowability of these intervals portray itself most strikingly with Rancière's attempt at designating a voice, especially in *The Nights of Labour*, to the actions of those normally excluded from knowledge's hierarchical formation. Yet it is Rancière's interest in the distribution of knowledge

itself – as in the modality of intellectual emancipation as outlined in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* – that designates his awareness of the forces at work in differentiating the specific operations by which a voice is given to something or someone. The identification of a mode of authority in which the voice speaks manifests itself, on one hand, in the tone that relates to a historicity of knowledge as one does to a lecture, and, on the other hand, from a mode that acknowledges its own ignorance by giving a voice to history without making of it a lesson, but allowing a space for its own disturbances to exist. Disagreement and contradiction therefore operate for Rancière as a conflict over the very way in which the sensible is distributed and the way in which doing, making and thinking obtain their voice. In this manner, disagreement effectively highlights its own delimitation and inhibitors. Thought in terms of horizontality rather than a verticality of distributions, what Rancière ultimately posits, to which I profess a similar strategy, is a connection or a combination of possible systems across a field of thought, whereby a search for a designation of truth becomes instead a search for possibilities.

1.9 *Agamben; on negativity and the shadow in artistic labour*

Agamben's *The Man Without Content* (1999) is important to the present enquiry for a number of reasons. First, it directs us to define art's structure by a historical and theoretical movement between art as a process of *poiesis* and *praxis*. Agamben's overview of the division of human productive activity, stemming from the Greek tradition, tells us that while *poiesis* (to produce or bring into being) and *praxis* (the 'to do' of human activity) form the major division of human production in this period, the term *work* is also used as a third descriptor of labour. Contrary to *poiesis* and *praxis*, the idea of work enters into Greek discourse in order to describe labour related to the basic needs of human subsistence. Work, as a necessity of life therefore stands apart from

poiesis and *praxis*. But it is only able to do so in Greek society because they divided those physical tasks devoted to the base subsistence of life from *their* life, namely by having work performed by slaves.[28] What we essentially end up with by reading Agamben, then, are three terms of human production: *poiesis*, *praxis* and work, which respectively define man's ability 'to produce', 'to do', and 'doing'. However, because these three distinctions have become obscured, *poiesis* and *praxis* often converge under the term *praxis* to define modern human activity according to the production of effects in the process of production. Work, on the contrary, is elevated in value from the lowest rank of production in Greek thought, through John Locke, Adam Smith and eventually Marx, to the status of expressing man's very humanity in political economy (Agamben, 1999a: 70). It is this strife between the expression of art in the political economy of *praxis* and the production of art as the ability to bring truth (origin) into being that occupies Agamben's discourse.

The Man Without Content clearly demarcates a territory of investigation that ties together many of the discourses that have so far been discussed around the problematic position of art in political economy. However, he takes this discussion further by providing an analysis of the form and composition of aesthetic practices based on a relation between active and passive labour, or labour in act and labour in potency. This is the second key point of the text. The terms he uses, being-at-work and being-available-for work here form a distinction that, like Rancière, he derives from Platonic and Aristotelian thought to designate a split between art's energetic status (the 'being-at-work of the work') and dynamic status (as being available-for, or 'mere potentiality') of production (Agamben, 1999a: 66). By investigating artistic labour through an investigation of the scission posed by these two polemic positions, he therefore goes on

[28] The distinction that Agamben makes in *The Man Without Content* between work and labour refers to Arendt's analysis of the term *vita activa* in *The Human Condition*. Through Arendt he is able to place the Greek terms *poiesis* and *praxis* in context with the modern Western tradition.

to propose that art might occupy a third space of labour between the energetic and dynamic statuses. It is this reference to a third space of production, neither energetic nor dynamic but what he calls 'availability-toward-nothingness' (Agamben, 1999a: 67), which forms the crux of what I will take forward from his argument. It is also this methodology of resolving strife by way of understanding di-polarities that leads me to the third reason for using this text. Distinctly, Agamben's *The Man Without Content* forms an essential point of articulation in a line of genesis that develops the project of negation that stems from Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*. What Agamben crucially brings to Musil's unfinished project, though, is the investiture of artist.

Essential to the character of Agamben's thought is the production and celebration of strife as an inherent faculty of apparently bi-polar concepts. Working methodologically within the formation of scissions, he is able to define the space, or gaps, of theoretical conflicts. Agamben's practice extensively becomes, then, a practice of thinking that reflects on Heidegger's notion of concealment and disconcealment, or a bringing into the open of the work of art as a process of disconcealment. This process of disconcealment, however, engages with the notion beyond the aesthetic premise of Heidegger's essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (1950), and elaborates, moreover, on the basic propositions of being. Heidegger's *Dasein*, as a being-in-the-world, specifically forms the focus of Agamben's *The Open: Man and Animal* (2004), and also forms the crux of his deliberations on the role of the shifter and the operation of negativity in *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity* (1991). In *The Man Without Content*, however, *Dasein* appears more subtly implied in his considerations, for example in the chapter 'Privation is Like A Face,' which puts a *face* to the identity of artistic strife as it is operable between the energetic and dynamic status of the work of

art.[29] The argument of the face here alludes to the territory of nihilism and non-work insofar as it denotes a strategy for occupying labour from its own position of concealment and exposition. The struggle for labour's truth thereby arises between processes of production that aim to hide its state of being (for example the role of commodities as social hieroglyphs) and the various emancipatorary projects (such as Negri's refusal to work) that seek to expose it.

Agamben's position occupies our attention around exposing the aesthetic trajectory of the open work, as a being-in-progress of work that is, nevertheless, never at work.[30] The aesthetic space that he makes us see takes place between what is transmitted by the artist and the act of transmission, or, what I have previously defined as the passage in immaterial labour between the virtual and the real. Between these two sites we come into contact with an inherent split between labour's signifier and the signified, but also a split between the artist and their own expression. What Agamben identifies as the gap or space of suspension in language therefore exposes a territory of production where the artist engages with their own nihilistic tendency. In the

[29] My use of term 'face' here corresponds to Agamben's use of the word derived from his essay 'The Face' in *Means Without End*. Here he describes the face as 'at once the irreparable being-exposed of humans and the very opening in which they hide and stay hidden' (Agamben, 2000: 90). The face therefore becomes 'the location of a struggle for truth' (Agamben, 2000: 91), whereby the individual's own revelation through being-exposed in language finds expression in the face. This does not denote a revelation of truth about a particular state of being, as such, but reveals only the communicability that presents each person as 'open' in the community (Agamben, 2000: 92).

[30] Umberto Eco's *Open Work* (1962) posits the openness of art work as the radical shift that identifies modern forms of art. Different to traditional or 'classical' art forms (which he defines as unambiguous in that they channel certain responses by the audience in a particular desired direction), the 'open work' of modern art means that the relationship between the artist and the public is founded on a much greater degree of collaboration (on this point Bourriaud's notion of postproduction also shares similarities with Eco). Eco's degree of openness coincides with Agamben's notion of being-in-progress insofar as it corresponds to a degree of information that is left open in the work, or what designates an ambiguity that allows for interpretation. Eco also proposes the term 'work in movement' to designate a 'more restricted classification of works' inside his definition of open work, which specifically designates works that 'characteristically consist of unplanned or physically incomplete structural units' (Eco: 12). Furthermore, Eco proposes that open works of art are the only work that is appropriate to our current time of production: '[i]n every century,' he says, 'the way that artistic forms are structured reflects the way in which science or contemporary culture views reality.' Openness, therefore, corresponds to a dynamic awareness that moves from a focus on the *tactile* to the *visual*, or what he proposes by suggesting that 'the subjective element comes to prevail': as we can say it does in immaterial production (Eco: 13). Furthermore, although it is not specifically cited by Agamben, I propose that one can also read Agamben's thinking here in conjunction with Heidegger's thinking in *Mindfullness* (1997) on 'The Free-play of Time-space' as a deliberation on the process of how Beings discard time and space (Heidegger, 2006: 84).

signifier/signified relationship this gap is formulated by the presence of the barrier (/), which is precisely what needs to be assailed if the historical and future status of the artist as a productive being is to be resolved in a present time.

Among the theoretical tools that Agamben utilises to disclose the presence of the barrier in signification is a proposition that work, as potentiality, can be considered and textually displayed as being in shadow: as ~~work~~. For the present discussion, however, I will replace the term work with the more relevant term labour to avoid confusion. The importance of this distinction is that labour, thought of as ~~labour~~, designates the gap that links being-at-labour to the being-in-progress of what we have already defined as the nature of 'open work'. Agamben goes so far as to say that understanding this gap constitutes 'the most urgent critical appeal that the artistic consciousness of our time has expressed toward the alienated essence of the work of art' (Agamben, 1999a: 67). The alienated essence he refers to also heralds the line of spectres that have amassed to date around the political economy of artistic labour: stretching from Smith and Marx right through to Hardt & Negri. The shadow of ~~labour~~ therefore interlinks a variety of concepts that criss-cross the political economy of art in general and Agamben's thought in particular.

The shadow, as a space of disconnection, has several key components. The shadow can be seen to realise an alternative proposition of Marx's injunction against the appropriation of artistic means toward the end of personal subsistence,[31] for instance, in Agamben's idea of 'means without end': as a means that is made visible through suspending the gesture of action in its own mediality (Agamben, 2007a: 155-156). Similarly his theory of potentiality (developed from Aristotle) pursues an encounter with potentiality as both being and not-being, as the mediation of privation with similar

[31] I am specifically referring here to Marx's comments in 'The Writers Profession', on which I will elaborate further at the beginning of Chapter 2.

tendencies to the notion of non-work (Agamben, 1999b: 177-184).[32] In particular, the presence of the shadow in Agamben's discourse draws on processes of negation that starts with an investigation in *The Man Without Content* on the artist's transformation according to the principles of Hegel's 'self-annihilating nothing'. Placed outside of a discussion on art's self-transcendence, the self-annihilating nothing highlights the role of artistic subjectivity in producing its own inherent split, based on one's experience in artistic labour. Here Agamben's terminology of experience notably derives from Walter Benjamin, but is pursued (as it also is in 'Infancy and History: An essay on the destruction of experience') by posing the question of what it means to say that 'there is language' or, specifically, 'I speak' (Agamben, 2007a: 6).[33] Agamben goes on to make of Hegel's self-annihilating principle the paradoxical and radical split of his 'man without content', insofar as he describes the artist as perpetually 'emerging out of the nothingness of expression' (Agamben, 1999: 55). The artist is therefore groundless, whose expression points only to an artistic ground that is without ground, from where the artist is always already beside themselves.

Agamben's deliberations on this lacuna in aesthetics and artistic subjectivity become operative within a wider social apparatus when taken as part of the wider field of his thinking on the state, law, and biopolitics in general. In particular Agamben's terminology of 'bare life' in the *Homo Sacer* trilogy, including *Homo Sacer: Sovereign*

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[32] An interesting possibility also arises here concerning the use of the shadow to disclose something about non-work. Can non-work, for instance, be shadowed in the same way as work? Where the shadow is useful for theorising work is in opening up an understanding of how labour practices (specifically art) can alienate the presence of work from its energetic and dynamic aspects. Similarly, the shadow of non-work could therefore prove useful in highlighting a point of suspension operable in those human practices that employ labour not in work, but as what Negri refers to as 'free and creative exercise' (Negri, 2005: 75): namely non-work. A theory of non-~~work~~ might then present a model of thought more appropriate to a critique of human displays of labour such as sport (perhaps applicable, for example, to Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno's 2006 film *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*), but potentially also for addressing modes of labour resistance (to capital) that achieve an aesthetic dimension. However, such a study falls outside the current objectives of this present investigation.

[33] The model Agamben sets out for the demise of experience is notably drawn from the writings of Benjamin, especially his essay 'The Storyteller,' but also as a continuation of the speculative concept of experience that Benjamin developed from Kant throughout his life: to which Howard Caygill's *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (1998) expressly refers.

Power and Bare Life (1998), *State of Exception* (2005), and *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (2002), explicitly articulate the biopolitical paradigm according to an idea of *life* that is politically determined. *Homo Sacer* proposes its key concept in terms of the ban and the production of bare life under sovereign power, designating a threshold of articulation between nature and culture that is also marked by an indistinction between man and animal, *zoē* and *bios* (which is taken up further in *The Open*). The concept of *State of Exception* articulates the peculiarity of this indistinction by locating the terminology of exception as a space that is not a space outside the norms of law, but a suspension of the law. The 'state of exception' therefore marks an indistinction between inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, and for these reasons is useful in terms of comprehending a space of aesthetic production where norms of labour are suspended (corresponding to the idea of deferral as raised earlier through Negri's refusal to work). As such the idea of art's 'exception', which Rancière argues against, again comes into contention as a descriptor of artistic practices. The ground of contention between Rancière's proposition that 'artistic practices are not "exceptions" to other practices' (Rancière, 2006: 45) and Agamben's state of exception (including the shadow of labour) is here fought over how artistic labour reconfigures production. On one hand, Rancière proposes artistic practices reconfigure and re-distribute other practices, while on the other hand, through Agamben it is possible to posit a notion of what I refer to as ~~labour~~: meaning artistic practices are organised by processes of alienated production that identify a space of productive exception (neither being-at work nor available-for work). In truth, I see the juxtaposition of these positions as the essential tension of artistic labour: bordering on a threshold between exception and non-exception. I will return to address this strife more specifically in Chapter 4 (particularly section 4.4) when I define the role of the state of exception in formulating what I call the phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production.

What Agamben demarcates is a territory of artistic practice that foregrounds a specific model of aesthetics based on a terminology of negation. Furthermore, Agamben, just as Rancière does, arranges his argument around a methodology of approaching the word, language, text, and artistic practice that gets beyond a transmission of historical lessons and engages affirmatively with a desire to produce its own voice. As he states about his approach to the political-philosophical tradition, it is not an investigation of the classical distinctions between terms (such as public/private) that interest his studies, but rather a questioning of terms from a viewpoint of their interwoven existence (Agamben, 2004a: 612). Consequently, in order to 'understand how the system operates' he intends to invest meaning into the double-ness of the system and the opposition and strife inherent therein. The diminution of one term to another in the system of political-philosophy, then, is secondary to the actual system of its operation.

Notably the methodology evidenced in the later chapters of *Stanzas* demonstrates Agamben's position that 'we must learn to see ... oppositions not as "di-chotomies" but as "di-polarities," not substantial, but tensional' (Agamben, 2004a: 612). Therefore, where Agamben focuses on the barrier and the fold between signifier/signified, what he draws our attention to is not the relation between signifier and signified, but, in fact, the tension of the barrier itself (/). His theory on the state of exception marks a particularly astute example of this thinking in practice, whereby a field of enquiry cannot simply be understood by drawing a clear line across it to demarcate its substances, but instead demands that its 'polarity is present and acts at each point of the field' (Agamben, 2004a: 612). The barrier between signifier/signified, introduced consistently in Agamben's work, exists then within a system of investigative scissions whose aim it is to reveal the presence of the shadow that hides the gap which has been opened up between its subjects. My investigation of the shadow or the barrier in artistic labour, graphically represented for the question of this thesis as what is meant by artistic ~~labour~~,

is therefore an investigative practice that aims to unconceal the factors of deferral and exclusion that are operable in manifesting its own concealment and lack. Put another way, I propose that the tension that surrounds artistic labour in (bio)political economy can be disclosed by investigating the tension of labour's potentiality to be and not-be as a di-polarity.

1.10 *The possibility of artistic labour*

At the beginning of this chapter I proposed that the paradox of defining artistic labour fully within the value system of political economy comes from its encounter with exceptionality. What we have come to identify, however, is that within the paradigm of biopolitical production it is not the positioning of artistic labour within a general theory of human labour that is problematic, but, rather, to maintain the existence of distinction itself. Within the increasingly blurred boundaries of immateriality, human occupations share a time and space of production valorised by commonality and communicability. As such, it is not artists' ability to produce artefacts that attain a quality of originality and exception, but the ability of artists' labour to produce, and furthermore make visible, the third space between being at labour and being available for labour.

How aesthetics might interrogate and make visible the processes of transference from the virtual to the real in our sensible distribution of labour is what Rancière and Agamben crucially elaborate. The substantive ground that they share in defining artistic labour falls between the territories of political economy and aesthetics. What they each formulate is how biopolitical labour structures the production of aesthetics, and, conversely, how the regime of aesthetics experiences and distributes biopolitical labour. The search for artistic labour is here transformed from traditional notions of political economy into a search for the artist's own labouring identity in relation to labour's

proper and improper signification. What is signified in labour not only refers to the occupational space and time of labour, but a specific mode of occupying that space and time within a paradigm that aims increasingly to produce the real through the virtual. What ties the virtual in production to the real is the communication and consumption of labour's potentiality and creative interiority. Artistic labour occupies this terrain by revealing di-polarities: between exception and non-exception, real and unreal, and external and internal processes of production. *Artistic labour, I argue, therefore operates as a visible tendency of biopolitical production in two ways: (1) as the dissensual re-distribution of labouring time and space, (2) as a process of creative negation (~~labour~~).*

The aesthetic re-distribution of the time and space of labour occurs then, in relation to Rancière, by establishing how we can make labour's signification and its past speak without engaging the historical verbiage that historians prefer. In short, he proposes that we can get at labour's truth by removing the obviousness of its meaning and seek our interpretations of artistic labour only from a position of suspension: whereby labour is suspended from its usual perceptions. We also see this approach used in Rancière's *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* (1994), a text wherein he actively engages a non-truth of history as an outside of social categories. The nature of the outside-ness can here be understood as what effectively defines the truth and fallacy of an act based on the authority of the one who speaks and has a space and time to do so. As Rancière proposes, we cannot circumvent the problematic distribution of time and space, and, therefore, we must instead seek its encounter so that we can obtain the order by which we may move from a history based on events to a history of structures (Rancière, 1994: 22-23). What this premise outlines is a mode of thinking that allows artistic labour to be viewed as a function of the artist's subjective engagement with labour as an internal mode of speech. But this mode of speech is

conceived of as a structure of mediation rather than an objectified event and, furthermore, as expenditure based on two conflicting premises: creative expenditure and a destructive expenditure (Rancière, 1989: 226-227).

The process of creative negation that Agamben outlines with the shadow of labour (~~labour~~) proposes a way to model this mediation between art's creative and destructive tendencies. In particular his methodology of investigating the scission between polemic points, such as between the energetic and dynamic status of artistic production, discloses that it is not the conflict over artistic production that should really concern us, but the role of strife itself. The aesthetic space of labour therefore becomes a space formulated and defined by the gaps between *praxis* and production. The role of strife is hereby identified as the process that suspends the applicability of statuses. Between the energetic and dynamic aspects of labour, as between the signifier and its signified, what is really important is the barrier that separates. But this barrier is not merely a divide that categorises positions and partitions human labour or language: it is really the fold that transmits one position to the other. What we need to make visible or articulate in artistic labour, then, is the process of transference, and subsequent communication thereof, of labour's virtuality (i.e. human living labour as a general possibility) through to the reality of production (as an ideological product). Artistic labour is hereby reduced to the tension of its mediation.

Through Rancière's dissensus and Agamben's shadow the genesis of the artist's relation to labour is developed according to a thematic of possession and non-possession of labour. Coupled with the tendency of an aesthetic revolution underpinned by the immaterial, this investigation moves away from an analysis of artistic practices based on the Platonic representation of occupations governed by a time that will not wait. Instead the concept of artistic labour that I move this investigation toward follows

a regime that identifies how artists provoke modifications in the space of the sensible. A fusion of labour, theatre, performativity, and obligation, are here conjured as an interrelation between the extremes of internal and external, the virtual and the real. In summary, the aesthetics of labour that I propose approaches the space and time of labour while keeping it always at a distance. It dissociates itself from all of its own predicates and, in doing so, opens up a free space of engagement with the sensible.

If Rancière brings into disconcealment the importance of understanding labour as dissensual – capable of dissociating the exceptionality and un-exceptionality of practices and of who labours for what time as an organisation of the mimetic process – then Agamben enables us to develop the theatre of production into a space of bare aesthetic labour distinguished by its availability-toward-nothingness. By carefully listening to, watching, and translating the labour of contemporary artists today (as Rancière did with the workers of Paris in *The Nights of Labour*) we can begin to identify the aesthetic division that exists between the space and time of what artists 'do'. But, as Agamben's words from the final pages of *The Man Without Content* remind us, only an aesthetic practice that engages itself in the present and with its own history of labour, a past formed of times and planes, can hope to open up a future time of artistic labour as potentiality. The present task of understanding artistic labour, as such, must therefore begin with an engagement between aesthetics and its own sensible relation to labour. In short, this investigation must now learn to expose and subsequently understand the phantasmagoric truth of artistic labour.

2

The phantasm of artistic labour

> Whoever seizes the greatest unreality will shape the greatest reality.
> (Agamben, 1993a: xix)

Biopolitical production, I asserted in the previous chapter, articulates a mechanism of transference that takes place between the virtual and the real. The apparatus of this movement is underpinned by the Marxian concept of living labour. Artistic labour therefore occupies a disjunctive role within this apparatus of biopower as a mechanism for re-distributing, through aesthetics, the time and space of labour: that is, it operates on the threshold of proper and improper signification. How aesthetics is able to communicate the process of transference from the virtual to the real in our sensible distribution of labour is what, I propose, Rancière's term dissensus and Agamben's comprehension of the shadow of production crucially elaborate. However the authority of aesthetics' dissensual activity remains linked to its ability to valorise labour as general possibility, which is to say labour based on the internal life giving space of production. It is this problem of mediating labour's potentiality in the movement from internal to external, the virtual to the real that now concerns this investigation.

What is at stake here is a question of how artists provoke modifications in the fabric of the sensible. Furthermore, if as Critchley proposes in his lecture on 'The Infinite Demand of Art' we may also pose this question in terms of 'approaching how and in what art thinks in its own medium' (Critchley, 2010), then what is equally at stake is the question of how to communicate the artist's own medium of 'thinking' labour. In order to profess a thought of artistic practices based on the 'living' quality of their labour, we need not only to glimpse the nature of the split between one's own subsistence in life and one's production in the world, but find a common tendency in both. In order to bridge the gap between an idealised labour and its action, between the idealised labourer (the artist) and general humanity, it becomes necessary for this investigation to communicate the role of the virtual, the imaginary, and what Marx calls the general possibility, of artistic (living) labour. Furthermore, in a short proposal Marx makes in Part III, chapter VII of *Capital*, under the title 'The Labour Process and the Process of Producing Surplus Value', he suggests that labour is *presupposed* by its being raised in the imagination: that '[a]t the end of every labour process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement' (Marx, 1996: 188).

While immaterial labour distinguishes a new level of distancing or alienating human from nature, it is imaginary labour that Marx posits as the original difference that separates man from animal. This difference is not to be found in the use of tools, as the means by which we interpose objects between human labour and material nature, but in the processes by which human subjects come to *imagine* labour. In the first place labour is a process of material reaction in which man participates along with nature and labours as a force of nature. Our use of motion in arms and legs, head and hands, is the very setting in motion of these natural forces in the process of appropriating nature. But through the act of opposing man to nature in order to appropriate its productions

towards human wants, the first instinctual stage of human labour finds that the process of changing the external world by acting on it necessarily also changes human nature. It is therefore this transition of productive power and its setting to act in obedience with human desire that designates the point at which Marx proposes we move away from dealing with instincts that may be thought of as primitive or animalistic (Marx, 1996: 187-188). To use Marx's example from *Capital*, while the bee's construction of her cells may put to shame an architect, what makes the architect's labour exclusively human is that he will first of all raise the structure in his imagination before commencing on the actual labour of raising it in reality. In this way the imagination works similarly to an instrument of labour that the labourer interposes between them and the subject: the distinction being that raising labour in the imagination does not serve as a conductor for activity, but is actually the whole of the activity enacted as a presupposition of activity.[34]

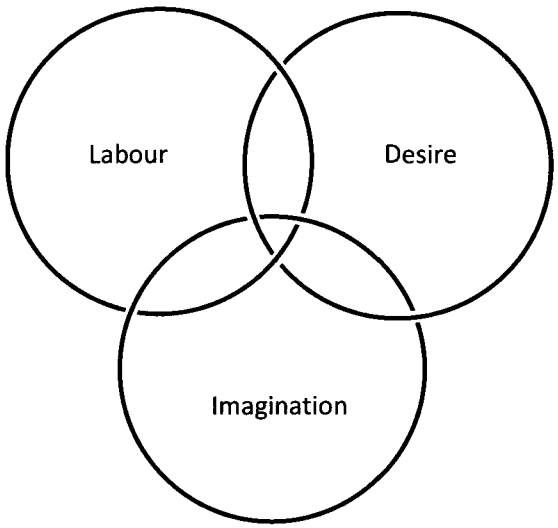
What the notion of the imaginary insinuates is not only *the* tool by which labour is essentially stamped as exclusively human, but a tool for prefiguring a subjective position of labour including what can be stamped as exclusively artistic. This posits that, insofar as a distinction of labour can be resolved in the form of an imaginary and material intercourse, this distinction takes place between a position of internal formation for the individual and their external production. What Marx understood when he suggested that labour is presupposed as imaginary, is that the imagination does not simply serve as a conductor for human activity, but that the imagination actually structures the whole of human activity (Marx, 1996: 188). The imaginary presupposition of labour is what fundamentally identifies labour as human labour.

[34] Nietzsche utilises the same example of the bee and architect in the essay 'On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense' (written in 1873 but initially unpublished). However, he uses the example to describe the way in which humans attempt to stabilise the flux of perceptions by means of concepts and schemata. The construction of conceptual material that he describes not only stands humans apart from animals, but also shows how this construction has no firm foundation because the conceptual architecture is built on the shifting ground of perception (Nietzsche, 2005).

Furthermore, the imaginary is essential because it connects our sensibility of labour to direction according to desire, and, finally, the enactment of labour in production.

This establishes a circuit of labour beyond the mere relation of objects to their use-value and exchange-value, but incorporates a notion of desire into the political economy of labour (as does Marx's concept of the commodity fetish). What Marx establishes is a connection between the processes of human desire and the real labouring power of the imaginary. However, the specific structure of this connection remains largely undefined. To give a diagrammatic indication as to what is at stake here, I propose the pre-figuration of the imaginary can be described in terms of a Borromean knot (see *Fig.1* below):[35]

Fig.1 Labour, Desire and Imagination linked as a Borromean Knot



Here artistic labour is engaged as the imaginary event of labour when labour (its pure potentiality) is pulled together with desire (the desire for actuality) by the

[35] In this thesis diagrams are intended to offer visualisation of key ideas. As such the diagram is used less to establish a map of spaces or navigations in the sensible than as a medium to help orient the reader by providing visual representations of interactions. In this context, the diagram is intended to demonstrate the fundamental movements of the phantasm and clarify the complex relations of polemic interchange.

imagination. In this schema the imagination designates the third ring of the group, the one that acts in the class of the *commuter*. By linking the free group of the other two generators, desire and labour, together, the commuter gives an indication of the extent to which binary operations fail to be interchangeable or commutative (i.e. the limit to which changing the order of the *operands* changes the end result of their interaction).[36]

The problem with defining the imagination is not simply a process of identifying what is prior to production, but identifying a mode of labour that is directed throughout production as always already a *pre-*. The imaginary here stands contrary to Bourriaud's idea of postproduction. For Bourriaud the artist enters into a productive space of cohabitation beyond the space of exhibition, where artistic tools are placed at the disposal of the visitor. Postproduction therefore defines a modality of labour based on the coexistence of productive mechanisms as part of a cultural ecosystem based on over-producing (Bourriaud, 2007: 45-47). Alternatively, a theory based on the Marxian imaginary requires that artistic activity be defined according to a structure of pre-production, founded not upon a shared system of tools but effectively a system of sense. If we take Marx's proposition as true, that labour is originally human labour because it is presupposed by an imaginary state of perception, then we can say that this state of perception is the general state by which the artist apprehends artistic labour. Hence the Borromean knot of labour, desire and imagination (*Fig.1*) does not describe a *re-*productive process but one of internal *pre-*construction. Derrida, in his analysis of Marx in *Spectres of Marx* (1994), proposes that we think of this *pre-* as what 'comes before me, before any present, thus before any past present, but also what, for that very reason, comes from the future or as future: as the very coming of the event' (Derrida, 1994: 33).

[36] The commuter can also be exemplified by the barrier in signification. As I will develop in section 2.1(c) of this thesis via Agamben's phantasmatic model of the Sphinx, and later in section 2.6 through the use of improper signification, the relevance of the barrier between the two generators of signification, the signifier and the signified, is that it not only links the binary opposition of signs together in the equation S/s, but shows how this opposition is not commutative.

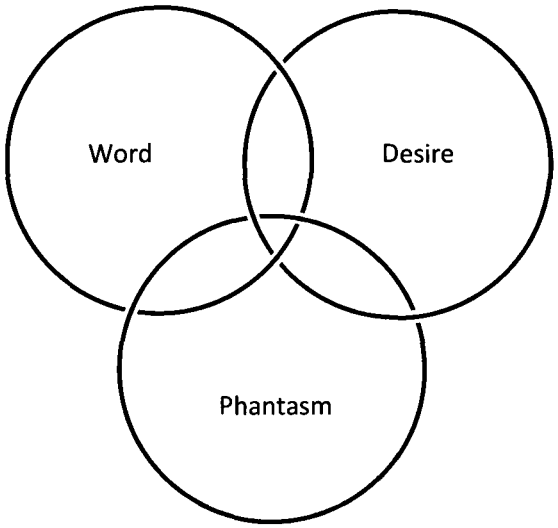
In a similar manner the *pre*-figuration of labour by the imaginary is what comes before the event of labour. But insofar as the imaginary also designates the whole of the labour, it is the pure potentiality of labour: labour, in Derrida's words, as it 'comes from the future ... as future'.

I am not concerned here with the re-production of signs in an un-delimited practice of communication between the artist and the spectator. Instead of prioritising the value of shared living experience, here I prioritise the value of translating and making sense of the singular imaginary. What Marx's concept of the imaginary proposes to the present enquiry is really a question of how the imaginary operates to pre-figure labour as explicitly artistic. Over the course of this chapter it is precisely this relationship between the imaginary and labour that I will investigate as an aesthetic process. The task is not only to situate a model of thought that allows the artist to translate the virtuality of labour to the reality of production. Rather the task is to identify the role of the imaginary in presupposing labour as not only artistic, but also dissensual: not only creative potentiality, but creative negation. To these ends I draw upon another term that Marx makes mention of in *The German Ideology* (written in1845 but not published until 1932). When speaking of labour and the imaginary here he also speaks in terms of 'phantoms formed in the human brain' (Marx & Engels, 1965: 37). The relation between phantoms and the imaginary here goes back to Aristotle, who proposed the 'imagination is that by which we say that some phantasm arises within us' (*De Anima*: 638-640). Phantasms, according to Aristotle, are therefore a force of sensible perception that relate our external sensible experience of the world to our internal imagination by way of a relationship between the sense-*object* (the external sense) and the sense-*perception* (our internal sense). However, it is in the theory of the phantasm according to Agamben that I really identify the substantive ground of my thought.

The phantasm, arising in the process of sensation, perception, and apprehension, derives from a category of perception that traditionally associates the term with notions of illusion, mimesis, imagination, and falsehood. Indeed the phantasm has a longstanding history in the relation between sense-objects and sense-perception, and forms a central point of distinction for Platonic and Aristotelian physics and metaphysics: notably concerning what *is* and what *is not*, and ultimately between *being* and *non-being*. In my view, however, it is the thought of Agamben that frees the phantasm from the narrow distinctions of illusion and mimicry that traditionally constrains it to distinctions between what is original and what is a copy. Instead he focuses on the phantasm as it arises precisely between the polemics of truth and fallacy, real and unreal, and suggests that the term truly occupies neither station except as mediation of these oppositions.

Agamben's method of perceiving the relationship between the imaginary, desire and labour, including the resultant form of production, is helpful at this point to articulate an operation that appears circular. Returning to the model of the Borromean knot, in *Stanzas* Agamben uses the same diagrammatic form to propose how the phantasm, desire, and the word (the articulated sign) interact: I have reproduced this diagram in *Fig.2* below. Each element is here woven together toward the satisfaction of desire 'in a circle where the phantasm generates desire, desire is translated into words, and the word defines a space wherein the appropriation of what could otherwise not be appropriated or enjoyed is possible' (Agamben, 1993a: 129). If we try to organise the event of artistic labour (*Fig.1*) to resolve itself accordingly, we would then have to say that: the phantasm (or imaginary perception) of labour generates desire, and desire, directed toward making the imaginary actuality, in turn is translated into the production of labour-power (or more specifically artistic labour-power).

Fig.2 Word, Desire and Phantasm linked as a Borromean Knot [37]



The difficulty remains in identifying the trope of the phantasmatic transmission of labour in this link between labour, desire and the phantasm. Agamben's resolution of the event, meaning the articulation of the phantasm, defines a space wherein the unappropriable becomes possible. But the problem with defining artistic labour according to the phantasm is, as yet, we cannot be entirely sure of the basic roles each constituent (labour, desire, phantasm) occupy: only then can we begin to model how the unappropriable in artistic labour, its general possibility, can be appropriated. To paraphrase Foucault, the task ahead of us is to make the interior speak of the exterior and the exterior speak of the interior (Foucault, 1977: 169). Or, in other words, the imaginary (or becoming immaterial) of labour must be forced to pass to the outside and

[37] This is an interpretation of a diagram that Agamben uses in *Stanzas* to describe how the pneumatic link uniting the phantasm, word and desire opens up a space he conceives of, in the context of love poetry, as *joi d'amor* (joy of love). Agamben finds the system of the Borromean knot useful because it defines the basic roles of each constituent, phantasm, word, desire, in the foundation of meaning (Agamben, 1993a: 128). In his depiction desire and the word form the two generators and the phantasm is again placed in the role of the commuter that pulls them together (Agamben, 1993a: 128). Jacques Lacan also found inspiration in the Borromean knot in order to model a topology of human subjectivity which he presented in a 1953 lecture titled 'Le symbolique, l'imaginaire et le réel' (The symbolic, the imaginary, and the real). Reality is described in this model by the interconnection between the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic.

become the schema's external referent. The phantasmatic movement therefore takes place as an oscillation that makes the imaginary of artistic labour both precede and follow itself. Like the role of the imaginary in the Borromean knot, here artistic labour is engaged as the phantasmatic event where the imaginary of labour (its pure potentiality) is pulled together with desire (the desire for actuality) by the phantasm, which acts in the class of the commuter.

The divisions of artistic labour that biopolitical production therefore worked to collapse – between interior and exterior, virtual and real, imaginary and production – instead find that the theory of the phantasm makes them extreme. But it is here in the extreme scission of Agamben's logic that I propose the phantasm demarcates a path that directs us in pursuit of understanding what is undisclosed in the articulation of artistic labour. The operation of the phantasm in Western signification is therefore crucial because it does two things: it makes manifest the articulation of artistic signs, but it does so while also designating the very place from where articulation is held while it considers its words and from where it draws its breath.

The pursuit of the phantasm is really a pursuit of a model of knowledge aimed at understanding the artist's own self-transmission. What is specific about this model is that it begins with the pre-understanding that not only is the aim of this project to know the fundamental movement of its transmission, its strife and its scissions, but that this project aims to know these mediations by their very un-attainability. Agamben was fully aware of this side of the phantasm and that is why in *Stanzas* he chose to underpin his search for a stanza or 'essential nucleus' of criticism in Western culture with phantasmal theory (Agamben, 1993a: xvi). Foremost, *Stanzas* is concerned with criticism and its authority. Derived from the extreme point of the scission between poetry and philosophy, what Agamben seeks in a theory of the phantasm is that very

point of disjuncture that brings criticism into being only when 'the word comes unglued from itself' (Agamben, 1993a: xvii). Here the possession of knowledge remains always problematic and bound up in a nexus of knowing that can be represented by the formula: 'it neither represents nor knows, but knows the representation' (Agamben, 1993a: xvii). A criticism of artistic labour is similarly problematised by the ambiguity of its own authority, which arises in a contestation between its ability to know itself and represent universalities. As with Agamben's project of criticism, what remains the most important standpoint, 'the only thing truly worth interrogating,' is the very scission of the barrier at the heart of the signifier and signified relationship, illustrated by the equation S/s. If we define the tendency of the barrier in artistic labour, however, then I propose we can identify the point at which labour comes unglued from itself.

To these ends this chapter will aim to show how a theory of the phantasm allows us to draw together labour and desire, reality and the imaginary, by acting in the role of the commuter that moves artistic labour in sense and in activity, forming an essential interrelation between sense and sense. While I am primarily concerned with Agamben's deliberations on the phantasm, it is nevertheless necessary that I expand on the context of his thinking in relation to two key figures, firstly Aristotle, secondly Foucault. Aristotle is crucial in underpinning not only key aspects of Agamben's theory of the phantasm but the phantasm in general. More specifically, I will show how Aristotle's concept of the phantasm emerges in Agamben's use of potentiality and impotentiality, being and not-being, which is crucial to the process of creative negation. Foucault is an equally important figure in Agamben's thinking for different reasons. He establishes the basis for much of Agamben's thinking, notably on the idea of what it means to be contemporary, which I will discuss in section 2.5. Furthermore, Foucault's deliberation on the phantasm in 'Theatrum Philosophicum' (1970) establishes a counter theory to the psychological path of Agamben's theory of the phantasm. These disparities prove

crucial in understanding why I do not simply assume the position of Agamben's theory but aim to find a space of co-existence between Agamben and Foucault. However, Agamben forms the dominant role in this conjuncture and it is primarily through his thought in *Stanzas* that I will establish the basis of my phantasmal theory that, over the course of the rest of this investigation I will draw upon and develop according to the processes of artistic labour.

Nevertheless, Marx has been our starting point in this enquiry because his proposition of the imaginary uniquely begins by establishing labour not as a problem of economic reductionism, but a concept that tells us about the privative relation between an individual and their labour. Furthermore, in defining labour as essentially imaginary he establishes a realm of human production that is purely immaterial, essentially ungraspable, and on the whole unsubstantiated in labour theory. The theory of the phantasm builds on this position, I will argue, by exposing the imaginary as a disjunctive element in our perception of sense that, fundamentally, cultivates dissensus in the sensible distribution of artistic practices.

2.1 *The model of the phantasm according to Agamben*

The expression '[w]hoever seizes the greatest unreality will shape the greatest reality' (Agamben 1993a: xix) aptly surmises the goal and the essential problematic of this project. In human sense perception a relationship is created between the sense-object, which we think of as the real, and sense-perception, which I have previously called the imaginary. These basic precepts of sense, as pursued by Agamben, notably derive from Aristotle's discussion on the subject and object of sensation found in Book III of *De Anima*. What he poses is that in order for a sense to sense its own sensation we must be able to comprehend the meaning of sense even when we are not sensing. For instance,

in perceiving of darkness what we sense is really the act of not-sensing or not-seeing, which is nevertheless still a result of the same faculty of sight. Sight, in effect, tells us we are not-seeing (*De Anima*: 586-596). The problem Aristotle uncovered, to which Agamben refers in his deliberations on the phantasm, is what it means to have a faculty of sense and in what way it exists.

Perception therefore always already establishes a dichotomy between the real (the sense-object) and the unreal (the sense-perception or phantasm). But the phantasm is more than the imaginary remnant of a sense-object. It is essentially the presence of a fold between these oppositions, a double presence that is both established by the relationship of the subject and object, signified and signifier, and also identified with the fracturing of their conjoined relationship (i.e. that one need essentially to refer to the other). In order to understand and model the tendencies of this movement between sense-object and sense-perception Agamben outlines in *Stanzas* three main movements of a phantasmatic model. (a) The phantasm is expressed in terms of the melancholic emblem, which is defined by the space of the ambiguous lost object. (b) The phantasm is defined according to the model of disavowal. This model is divisible into two main threads, first, in the tradition of Freudian psychological discourses and, secondly, in the discourse of the Marxian commodity fetish. (c) A model of the phantasm as an *ainos*, or mode of speaking, that alludes to the very paradox at the heart of the signifier/signified relation and displays the essential fracture of a presence at the heart of signification. Let us briefly examine each model.

(a) *The model of Melancholia*

Part I of *Stanzas*, 'The Phantasms of Eros,' begins by establishing the basic formulation of a phantasmatic circuit from the precepts Agamben identifies in the operations of

acedia (known as 'sloth' in the middle ages, or 'laziness' in the parlance of the modern work ethic) and melancholia.[38] The affliction of *acedia* designates 'the perversion of a will that wants the object, but not the way that leads to it' (Agamben, 1993a: 6). What the object in question refers to is imaginary. In the example of laziness that Agamben uses, it is the temptation of a daydream that leads one to neglect their work. Desire for the 'object', in psychological terms, is therefore barred from 'the way that leads to it' because *acedia* is really a process of 'recessus' or withdrawal in the face of a task. The 'object' is therefore unobtainable because it is imaginary, but also because it is conjured by a malady of flight whose tendency is defined by withdrawal. This occurs because the imaginary object of *acedia* remains the object of desire even though the one who desires it is unwilling to pursue it and actually obtain it. Desire for the object is then also what 'bars the path to his or her own desire' (Agamben, 1993a: 6). We can say then that the object is unobtainable only because the subject has desired it to be so, and the subject has desired it to be so because of an inability 'to control the incessant discourse (the co-agitatio) of the interior phantasms' (Agamben, 1993a: 9). Posed in Aristotelian terms, what is not controlled in *acedia* is the phantasmal discourse between the potentialities of sense: the potential of a sense to-sense but also not-to-sense, resulting in a lack of recourse to actuality from the pure potency of desire.

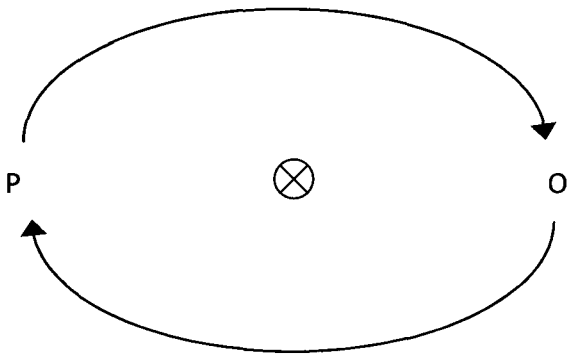
Melancholia is closely related to *acedia* insofar as both relate to the object of desire from a position of its being unattainable.[39] But what is specific to melancholia is that the object is not unobtainable because the person does not want to do what is

[38] A footnote in *Stanzas* highlights that the blurring of the terms sloth and laziness is a modern turn. In traditional discourses the two are distinguished thus; sloth is not laziness because sloth is opposed to joy, while laziness is opposed to zeal. This is why originally sloth, opposed to joy, is also a discourse that finds its focus in the discourse of desire (Agamben, 1993a: 10).

[39] In chapter 2 of *Stanzas*, 'Melancholia I,' Agamben traces the precise moment when *acedia* (the noonday demon) and melancholia (the black-biled temperament) become joined in the Middle-Ages. His supposition is that the two temperaments become joined either as the result of an erroneous understanding of sloth that gave it a 'purely negative valuation', or as part of the 'Renaissance reevaluation of the atrabilious temperament within the context of a vision in which the noonday demon, as the temptation of the religious, and black humour, as the specific malady of the contemplative, should appear assailable' (Agamben, 1993a: 13).

necessary to achieve it (because the path is barred by desire itself), but because in melancholia desire is what manifests the object in the first place and so a path does not even exist.[40] What has been made unobtainable does not follow a process of removal or destruction. Rather, the process of melancholia is not only unsure of the loss to which it refers, but cannot even be certain that the object or thing that is lost ever existed in the first place. In order to describe the melancholic process Agamben refers to the following diagram (see *Fig.3*):

Fig.3 The phantasm according to melancholia



In this model P = phantasm, O = external object, and ⊗ = the unreal object. What is thus represented by the space at the centre of this diagram is the lost object of melancholia: the contradiction of having a loss that is not confirmed by a lost object. The phantasm proper, however, is what is marked in this model by the arrows of movement that go between the distinctions of the object in actuality and in potentiality. This movement is not really circular because it does not affirm and reaffirm a singular motion of a causal relationship between the sense-object and the sense-perception.

[40] The melancholic process becomes clear if we read it with reference to Freud's paper 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917) as distinctly different although similar to the effects of mourning. On one hand, we have mourning, which deals with a loss that is real and confirmed by sense: we mourn an object that has been removed and therefore made unobtainable by no longer being present. While, on the other hand, although the melancholic mourns a loss of the object in the same way, the difference is that the loss in question cannot be confirmed by an actual loss.

Instead the movement, I propose, defines a medium of *interrelation.* While the phantasmatic movement proposes the culmination of a space that opens up between the object of referral and its phantom presence, defining that which it has 'lost', this lost object does not itself define the phantasm. The movement of the phantasm does not orbit the space of the lost object, designated by the symbol ⊗, but actually creates the space for its occurrence through mediating the relationship between external and internal sense. In fact the phantasm is that by which the lost object, as such, is affirmed: insofar as it is affirmed as lost by sense and becomes the ambiguity of the melancholic lost object. By drawing on Freudian melancholia, Agamben therefore shows how the lost object finds purchase in phantasmal discourse as a continuation of a withdrawal. The movement of the phantasm is properly a movement of withdrawal, but a withdrawal both from the sense-object and a withdrawal toward an interiority of contemplation (Agamben, 1993a: 19).

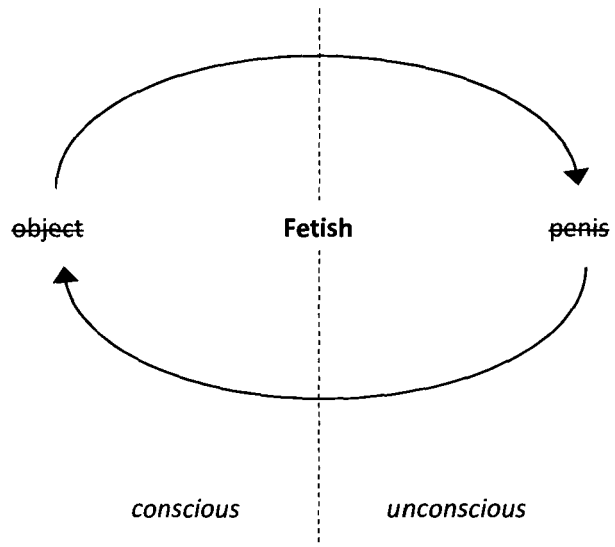
(b) *The model of Fetish Disavowal (Verleugnung)*

The Freudian act of the fetishist disavowal (*Verleugnung*) occurs similarly to the melancholic attempt to appropriate its lost object. Here the conflict occurs in a person between the perception of reality and the perception of desire formed by the phantasm. The fetish perversion occurs in Freud's theory, notably in the paper he wrote in 1927 titled 'Fetischismus' or 'Fetishism,' as a refusal by a boy to recognise or become cognizant of the fact that the mother (or women in general) is in lack of a penis, an absence which Freud posits results in a fear of castration (Freud, 1961: 152-157). Faced with this fear of absence the boy denies reality in order to circumvent the castration threat. The fetish is therefore the substitution of the mother's missing penis, which the boy does not want to 'give up', with an external object that now stands as the sign of its

absence. On one side, the child is forced by reality to renounce his phantasy (the transference of the 'missing' penis onto an object, which it knows to be a false representation), while on the other side his desire for the phantasy moves him to deny the reality of perception (or else he would have to face up to the loss and therefore encounter the fear of castration). To resolve this impasse the child in fact takes neither one position nor the other, but rather takes both positions simultaneously. This is achieved by a process of, on one hand, repudiating the evidence of reality that would cause him to give up the phantasy, and, on the other, recognising reality insofar as the perverse symptom, the fetish object, presents the very sign of the absence. The position that the phantasmatic takes in this process is in that part of the operation that seeks to resolve a conflict between reality and fiction, perception and desire, by giving a space to both potentialities.

To put this operation into a diagrammatic form, Agamben illustrates the Freudian process of disavowal (*Verleugnung*) as a phantasmatic dynamic in the following way (see *Fig.4*):

Fig.4 The phantasm according to the process of fetish disavowal



As with the diagram for the lost object of melancholia the object in the centre of the diagram, here the fetish, is produced by the movement of the interaction. Unlike the lost object of melancholia, however, the fetish is created in a point of perception that does not identify with either the object (that which replaces the lost or missing mother's penis) or the material penis. Rather, the fetish occurs in the space of a reciprocal negation between the materiality of the object and the immateriality of its phantasmal representation. The result is that the centre of the circuit designates a place that no longer identifies with its object except to say that it identifies with the object and its phantasm only insofar as they are represented as being removed: exemplified by the sign of the equation ~~object~~ and ~~penis~~, also operable in terms of the distinctions ~~material~~ and ~~immaterial~~, ~~object~~ and ~~phantasm~~.

(b. Continued) *The model of the Commodity Fetish*

If the operation of the Freudian fetish, marked by a movement of disavowal, makes its sense-object unobtainable because the subject's desire has rendered it so, then with the capitalist mode of production it is unobtainable because the commodity is rendered unobtainable by consumption. With reference to the now familiar link between consumption and desire, Agamben draws on the fourth part of Marx's *Capital*, the section titled 'The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret,' in order to elaborate how the phantasmatic character of objects occur in commodity capitalism according to a transference between use-value and exchange-value. What occurs in this point of transference is that the actuality of the object as something useful and directed toward satisfying a human need, as well as its materiality, becomes essentially immaterial as a value for exchange. The points of opposition are not just those of the Marxian terms that define the labour as concrete (use) or abstract (value), but also refer to the manner by

which the object is for the senses both subject and not-subject: becoming 'social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses' (Marx, 1996: 83). It is this double character that Marx calls the fetishism attached to labour and its products.

Beyond simply sharing the terminology of the fetish, the psychological fetish and the commodity fetish both impose an immaterial quality onto the form of things. They allude to something beyond themselves and yet what they allude to can never be fully possessed. With the commodity, the essential ambiguity of possession is that it describes a space of consumption that is impossible. Whereas a use-value could be consumed in utilising or literally consuming the object, exchange-value cannot concretely be enjoyed apart from in accumulation and exchange. But what is accumulated is only the empty negative space of an object that can only be multiplied indefinitely and accumulated indefinitely, but nevertheless remains a present absence. Just as the fetishist is unable to fully appropriate the object of desire because in reality it demarcates two contradictory elements, reality and the phantasm, so too is it impossible to simultaneously possesses the commodity as something actually useful to you and at the same time make it a value for exchange: to do so would engage its materiality and immateriality simultaneously. The impossibility of this predicament coupled with the desire to achieve it – that the materiality of product demands that its exchange-value be given up so it can be consumed, while in order to attain its immaterial value the bearer must give up its consumption – results in the same opening up of a fetish space which the model already outlined according to Freud describes. As a result both sides of the equation must be negated in order to be affirmed, and a space opens up that designates the commodity only insofar as it no longer identifies with its object. As Agamben comments: 'the entrance of an object into the sphere of the fetish is always the sign of a transgression of the rule that assigns an appropriate use to each thing' (Agamben,

1993a: 56). The phantasmatic movement, then, is operable as precisely this process of a transgression, of which the fetish is its sign.

(c) *The model of the Sphinx*

What Agamben refers to in the final section of *Stanzas*, under the heading 'The Perverse Image: semiology from the point of view of the sphinx,' is an attempt to move back from the image or sign that designates the remnant of the phantasmatic process and get at the source of the transgression of the movement itself. In his words:

> What the sphinx proposed was not simply something whose signifier is hidden and veiled under a "enigmatic" signifier, but a mode of speech in which the original fracture of presence was alluded to in the paradox of a word that approaches its object while keeping it indefinitely at a distance.
>
> (Agamben, 1993a: 138)

The struggle of the discord between the form of the sign and the signification of the sign is what he proposes the operation of the phantasm manifests in its movement between oppositional positions. Signifying is possible only because of a division that allows for the word (signifier) to approach its referent (the signifier), and only insofar as distance is maintained between the two. As much as the signifier is bound to the signified, it must remain 'indefinitely at a distance' in order to be deferred from it and, as such, exist as a sign. The problem with this division is that it is often reduced to a simple division of truth, of the original or truer over the less true. But more important than a relation posed according to a notion of the copy in respect to the original, the fracture that created the signifier and the signified is understood at its most important when we recall the barrier between them: as demonstrated in the equation S/s

(Signified/signifier).[41] For Agamben, it is precisely this bar (/), forgotten in modern semiology, which betrays the original point of deferral on which the fracture between form and signifier has been installed. The term *ainos* that he uses therefore designates the articulation of this fracture via a movement that is akin to the fetish, insofar as it proposes a paradoxical word just as the fetish proposes a paradoxical object that approaches its subject while simultaneously keeping it always removed.

Like the fetishist who appropriates the object of desire by attracting its phantasm into themselves and assuming it as their source of valorisation, the signifier is that which operates as a mode of speaking that repels the dilemma of the split by assuming it as its own paradox of possession. The placement of oppositions in one site, in the paradox of possession, can then be decoded in the model of the sphinx in two ways: as the *ainos* of the enigma (*ainigma*) which employs 'improper' terms, and as a transparent discourse aimed at interpreting the symbolic from a position of its 'proper' terms. An employment of the improper is, in essence, a process of a 'coding and concealment', while the proper refers to an expression of 'decoding'. The difference between the two comes down to what is articulated in either the coding or decoding of the sign. We are familiar with a discourse that employs proper terms through models such as the signifying practice of alphabetic writing and Freud's psychoanalytical theory of the symbol in his analysis of dreams and the semiotics of language: practices that interpret signification from the standpoint of decoding what is expressed by the figure ⊗ at the

[41] Agamben's model of the sphinx illuminates a paradox that Benjamin's discourse on the 'aura' in his well known essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility' (1936) also dealt with. The aura is defined in perceptive terms as 'the apparition of a distance, however near it may be' (Benjamin, 2006: 255). The paradox of this double movement occurs because, on one hand, Benjamin describes a 'desire of the present-day masses to "get closer" to things spatially and humanly,' while, on the other hand, notes an 'equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness.' This tendency is worked out in the technological reproducibility of art between two contradictory desires. On one hand in order to approach the authority of originality the mechanical arts need to be understood as independent objects in their own right. Conversely, the desire for 'sameness in the world' means that art must strip away the veil of uniqueness: and this leads to the destruction of the aura, which means that perception 'extracts sameness even from what is unique' (Benjamin, 2006: 256). Later in this chapter I will illustrate how this distinction occurs in the theory of the phantasm through what Foucault calls the simulacrum.

centre of the phantasmatic interrelation. On the other hand, placed under the employment of improper terms are those discourses that focus on the barrier or really the fold or the movement of the interaction, such as the emblem and the metaphor.[42] What Agamben therefore proposes is that signification does not have its nucleus in either the signifier or the signified but in the fold that 'gathers and divides all things': not as a distinction based on differences but based on the processes of *Verleugnung*, which by affirming and negating its oppositions allows us to glimpse the barrier (/) of the algorithm S/s itself.

2.2 *The phantasm as a movement of potentiality (Aristotle)*

What is common to the three models outlined in *Stanzas* is that the phantasm operates as the medium of bringing oppositions into connection. In order for oppositions to come to refer one to another, however, the model of the phantasm relies on negation and disavowal to creating a space of shared potentiality. This is what Agamben refers to as the 'just order' that defines an agreement or a juxtaposition that joins and connects: 'the idea of a laceration that is also a suture' and 'the idea of a tension that is both the articulation of a difference and unitary' (Agamben, 1993a: 157). More specifically, it designates a movement of connections that has the peculiarity of encountering the sense-object and its counterpart in perception by way of a double position: on one hand affirming the existence of each position in the interaction and, on the other hand, negating that same existence. In order to understand the complexities of this tendency I propose we first need to understand Agamben's relation to Aristotle's notion of potentiality.

[42] The metaphor operates in Agamben's argument as what may be called 'the paradigm of signifying by improper terms' (Agamben, 1993a: 142): as a dissociation of each with its own form, of the signifier from its signified.

Aristotle originally referred to this process of the phantasm in *De Anima* as its ability to speak of both what is true and what is false. 'Imagination', he tells us, 'is neither one of these [true state or false state], nor constituted from these' (*De Anima*: 653-654). Instead the phantasm mediates between what is real and what is unreal without distinction or hierarchy. Potentiality is the key element in allowing the phantasm to mediate these positions. However the phantasm's potentiality is also what makes the term so difficult to define, notably because it closely aligns the phantasm to fallacy, or what we may think of as the unreal or illusory. The crux of this argument comes down to what it means for sense to be in-act and to be not-in-act. These polemic positions find currency throughout Agamben's thinking but can notably be framed by his essay 'On Potentiality' and read in relation to Aristotle's understanding of physics and metaphysics. The lesson Aristotle teaches is that sensation does not have only 'one meaning,' that it does not sense only actively, but also potentiality. I briefly referred to this earlier in terms of the double capacity of sense faculties to both sense and not-sense. The *potency* of sense occurs, however, when 'in the absence of the sense-object there remain sensations and phantasms in the sense-powers' (*De Anima*: 589-591). The potency of sense means that sense-perception is no longer tied to the sense-object and therefore can remain potent even after the sense-object is removed (for example from vision). What remains is sensation in discourse with the operation of the phantasm.

It is important to note, however, that the phantasm does not simply designate the being in potentiality of the sense object or the potency of sense itself. The imaginary of the sense-object, the phantasm as it 'arises within us,' should instead be understood as other than merely a metaphorical replacement of one thing for another. Aristotle's proposition that the power of the phantasm and the imagination are therefore linked to a disposition from which 'we perceive and pronounce either falsely or truly' (*De Anima*: 638-640), is therefore possible because the phantasm occupies both potentialities. This

duplicity is the cause of both the phantasm's unique ability to express potentialities, but also the essential problematic of situating its structure into any specific sense faculty.[43] Aristotle's resolution, which remains pertinent to theorising the phantasm through the Freudian notion of disavowal (*Verleugnung*), can be summarised thus:

> ... since it can happen that, one thing moving, another is moved by it; and imagination seems to be a movement, and to arise only with sensation, and in sentient beings, and to be of such objects as are sensed; and since a motion may be caused by actual sensation, and such necessarily resembles sensation, – then imagination will be just this movement, never originated apart from sensation, incapable of existing in non-sentient beings, and enabling its possessor to act and to be affected in many ways, and being itself both true and false.
>
> (*De Anima*: 655-9)

What Aristotle proposes is that just as the sense-perception is moved to sensation by the sense-object, in imagining we are similarly moved by the appearance of phantasms, which take on the role of the sense-object. St. Thomas Aquinas' commentary on *De Anima* goes on to clarify that, as such, the phantasm would have bearing only in relation to those things that are sensed and not on those that are purely intelligible (St. Thomas Aquinas: 396). This crucial point defines a relation between phantasmal apprehension and the external world that ties one to the other, and which makes the phantasm necessarily a construct of its world. Therefore, in maintaining an affinity with the senses the phantasm remains a mobile site of encountering perception as an exterior sense.[44] These deliberations stem from the supposition that 'one thing

[43] In Chapter III, Book III of *De Anima*, Aristotle discounts the four faculties of sensation, opinion, knowledge, understanding, as the location of the imagination on the following grounds: Sensation, being in either potency or act, does not account for the appearances of phantasms in dream, when neither act nor potency of sensation is present. Additionally he makes the distinction that sensations are always in act or in potency in all animals, but that the imagination is not. Knowledge and understanding are discounted because these qualities are deemed to be 'always truthful', while the imagination produces phantasms that can be either true or false. Lastly, while opinion, unlike knowledge and understanding can be either true or false, it is discounted because opinion is the faculty on which we base our beliefs and, while some animals have imagination, none have the reason of belief (*De Anima* 638-654).

[44] I will later expand on this point by demonstrating the phantasm's temporal element in terms of its contemporaneity in section 2.5.

moving, another is moved by it'. St. Thomas describes this situation in the following way: '[a]ctual sensation is a being moved by a sensible object; and the movement of the actuated sense itself causes another movement which, as it proceeds from sensation, must resemble sensation' (St. Thomas Aquinas: 396). The phantasm, as for every agent that is moved, is in turn a causal movement whose motion is similar to its own likeness. This transpires in the phantasm as a movement between the two perceptions of sense, potentiality and impotentiality. By defining the movement between these polemic positions of being and not-being, the phantasm also defines the movement of each one in moving the other.

'What is essential,' Agamben says, 'is that potentiality is not simply non-being, simple privation, but rather *the existence of non-being*, the presence of an absence': in short, 'to have a privation' (Agamben, 1999b: 179). To have a privation is not, however, a privative notion in the same way as the example of seeing darkness may be thought about as a simple non-vision based on the absence of light. But rather 'to have' a privation would be the 'existence' of non-vision. Agamben even goes so far as describing this moment of having, identified with the 'abyss of potentiality', as the root of man's very freedom: not to be free to-do or not-to-do, but '[t]o be free', he tells us, 'is ... to be capable of one's own impotentiality, to be in relation to one's own privation' (Agamben, 1999b: 183). Every potentiality or ability to do is reflected by the contrary ability to not do. Impotentiality is not the absence of potentiality or simply the not being able to do something, it is the 'being able to not do' (Agamben, 2011: 43).The proposition here as it relates to artists is that in order to come closer to understanding how art can dispense 'its power only as privation,' we need to interrogate how the work actualises the power of its 'doing' (Agamben, 1999a: 64). To actualise its power of 'doing' we then need to affirm the relationship between the actual reality of artistic

labour, literally the mode of its 'being-at-work', and its potentiality.[45] Or, phrased another way: '[h]ow is it possible to consider the actuality of the potentiality to not-be?' (Agamben, 1999b: 183)

This brings us to an important aspect of the sense circuit: how one knows their own lack of potentiality. Agamben draws a distinction here, via Aristotle, between a *generic* potentiality and an *existence* of potentiality. A generic potentiality, to use his example, is like a child's potential to know something in the future. Potentiality in existence, on the other hand, refers to a person, such as the artist, who already has in their possession the specific ability or knowledge in question (Agamben, 1999b: 179). In order to know the lack of potentiality the artist is not faced with the task of knowing what one does not know (in the way the ignoramus only possesses the generic potential to labour artistically). Rather, in order to consider the potentiality to not-be means to know potentiality as denial. The logic of formulating a potentiality that is not annulled in actuality, then, is the most important point that Agamben takes forward from Aristotle. From the pages of *De Anima* he draws out the complexities of potentiality and shows how, on one side, it is a process of destruction that exhausts 'all its impotentiality' in order to bring out its opposite, and on the other side, a process of preservation that saves itself. 'What is truly potential', Agamben concludes, 'is thus what has exhausted all its impotentiality in bringing it wholly into the act as such' (Agamben, 1999b: 183). Potentiality can survive actuality then only insofar as it 'gives itself to itself' (Agamben, 1999b: 184).

The duplicity of this logic underpins *Stanzas*. Only through the Aristotelian notion of potentiality is Agamben able to describe the sign according to its not-being, and orientate how not-being operates as fully part of its being-in-actuality. We see this logic

[45] 'Being-at-work' is the translation that Agamben uses for the term ἐντελέχεια that Aristotle coined to indicate the character of 'actual-reality' (ἐνέργεια); or, 'that which enters into presence and remains in presence' (Agamben, 1999a: 64).

most evidently in the model of the fetishist and the process of disavowal, but also in the model of the phantasm that Agamben uses to disclose the barrier of signification. What can be summarised about the potentiality of the phantasm then is that the phantasm is the movement of giving potentiality to itself. *It is a form of sensible knowledge that occurs neither through actuality nor potentiality, but in the privation of potentiality. The phantasm is a movement that has actuality and potentiality only by having these positions as privation.*

2.3 *The space of phantasmagorical vacuousness*

The movement of the phantasm, as we have seen in each of the models illustrated in *Stanzas*, identifies the process of disavowal that creates a space of negation. This is the space at the centre of *Fig.3* designated by the symbol ⊗, which defines the location of the 'lost object' of desire in melancholia, or in *Fig.4* the place of the fetish according to Freudian psychology. What I propose is that, for the process of defining a theory of the phantasm in this present enquiry we think of this space as a *phantasmagorical vacuousness*.

Allow me to elaborate on my choice of terms. While the phantasm is properly only designated by the movement of the phantasmatic interchange, the space that is produced by the mediation of the phantasm designates the place where what is unattainable can be attained. What the localisation of the phantasmatic in this space defines is therefore what is 'neither within nor outside of the individual, but in a "third area"' (Agamben, 1993a: 59).[46] This 'third' area refers to a space that is not specifically defined as internal or external, sense-object or sense-perception, but really a space of

[46] The 'third area' Agamben refers to is a reference to Donald Woods Winnicott's research on the early relations between children and the external world. In the context of Winnicott the 'third area' identifies the moment when a child separates an object from its external reality and appropriates it into a 'zone of experience' that is neither truly internal nor external, but that is transitional (Agamben, 1993a: 59).

transitional potentiality. Indeed we could say this space is defined by nothing except negation, both of the sense-object and sense-perception, of an interiority and exteriority of reality.

But the 'third' area in no way designates a place removed from the person who perceives, from the human individual, even though we may define it as being neither in nor outside of the individual. Rather, what is important about this space is that it increases our proximity to the 'invisible' articulation of signification. What this means for Agamben is that the space of ⊗ has the potential to lead us toward a 'step-backward-beyond' of metaphysics and its governance of the sign in the tradition of Western culture (Agamben, 1993a: 157). But it achieves this task only presently as a form of intuition toward such a presence, rather than from a position of already having attained such a transcendence. The project of the phantasm is, in this respect, incomplete. If anything the 'third' area, although it points toward a place that is placeless, nevertheless designates what, for me, Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world as an experience of dwelling aptly defines by a process of 'holding-oneself-back from any manipulation or utilization' (Heidegger, 1962: 89). For Agamben the 'third' space is 'not outside of us, in measurable external space', but rather what 'open[s] to us the original place solely from which the experience of measurable external space becomes possible' (Agamben, 1993a: 59). What we seek in the third area of the phantasm, then, is the articulation of what otherwise would remain an invisible situation in the presence of signification. I propose we call this space of loss, suspension, and negation, textually displayed as ⊗, a space of phantasmagorical vacuousness.

The term 'phantasmagorical vacuousness' is a space of nullity created through exposure that I adapt from Agamben's single mention of the phrase in *The Coming Community* (1993). To understand what a phantasmagorical vacuousness means in the

present context I will situate it in the original context. In the chapter 'Without Classes' Agamben attempts to conceive of a humanity that can be defined by an allotment of belonging. In particular he posits that the only place of belonging in existence, the only 'form in which humanity has survived nihilism', is the petty bourgeois (Agamben, 1993b: 63). '[T]here are no longer social classes,' he tells us, 'but a single planetary petty bourgeois, in which all the old social classes are dissolved'. Agamben further proposes that nihilism is 'survived' insofar as a nullity of classes into a class without social identity takes place between, on one hand, a nullification of differences of expression and communication, and, on the other hand, but with the same gesture, the obstinate adherence to these differences of expression and communication. It is precisely out of this obscure relationship to negation that the vacuous space is produced.

The process of nullity, we find, is itself a process that both destroys and preserves. Or, as Agamben describes this position: 'the diversities that have marked the tragicomedy of universal history are brought together and exposed in a phantasmagorical vacuousness' (Agamben, 1993b: 64). The 'phantasmagorical vacuousness', broken down into its two parts defines the *phantasmagorical*, whose mediation brings together the double negation of the polemic positions of sense-object and sense-perception, and the *vacuous*, which describes the space where the suspension of these polemic positions is exposed to its own potentiality. In the context of Agamben, strife is encountered when diverse positions face the need to simultaneously negate their differences and adhere to them. The space that exposes this conflict is therefore vacuous because it substantiates nothing: neither the presence of that which must be dissolved (the old class distinctions), nor the negation thereof, which nevertheless cannot be substantiated as removed. What defines a phantasmagorical vacuousness, then, is the space of vacuous negation created by the movement of disavowal. Vacuousness is itself not a force of negation and suspension, but the space that *brings-together* and *exposes*

these tendencies of the phantasm. *What remains is a vacuous space wherein all content is suspended and the force of suspension is phantasmagorical: an opening through negation and a negation through exposure.* This is what I define as the space of potentiality created by the phantasmatic force of disavowal.

2.4 *Two trajectories of the phantasm; psychology (Agamben) & theatre (Foucault)*

One of the main problems in applying the theory of the phantasm to aesthetic discourse is its lack of external visibility. Beginning from metaphysics, the phantasmatic discourse of Agamben deals with the materiality of incorporeal things including phantasms, idols, and simulacra, encountered via the problem of illusion: a problematic that has been attached to the phantasm at least since Plato. Agamben acknowledges that his theory of the phantasm does not escape metaphysics, however he also does not see metaphysics as simply the interpretation of the fracture between signifier and signified, and the dualities of presence that come from the dichotomy of appearance and essence, sensible and intelligible, being and non-being. Instead he understands a metaphysics that is 'always already caught in a signification' (Agamben, 1993a: 156). As such the phantasm is used as a method for moving into proximity with a place of articulation that, from which, the step-backward-beyond of metaphysics becomes finally possible. In contrast, my intention is to define a structure of artistic labour as an expression of the artistic imaginary within biopolitical structures of production. This involves the evaluation of valorisation, potentiality, and dissensus, but also an evaluation of how the imaginary occupies a role in the distributive regime of sense and is socially recognised. Prioritised here is visibility in labour practices, which effectively shifts the analytical goals of the phantasm from that of Agamben's in *Stanzas* and reintroduces the performative aspect of production as a critical factor. In effect what I am proposing is

that in order to see the imaginary of artistic labour – insofar as artistic practices have an *operandi* that tends toward the production of visibility and communicability, indeed precisely as a signifying and discursive practice – we need to see it performed.

The liberation of the phantasm from the constraints that the illusory has placed on it has, however, two potential trajectories. The phantasm according to Agamben goes the way of psychoanalysis, as is evident in his application of the Freudian disavowal. Through this process Agamben aims to liberate the phantasm from the illusory by showing how it structures signification in language by acting as the barrier or fold between signifier and signified. Alternatively, the other trajectory follows a discourse of theatre. It is this trajectory that Foucault pursues in order to define the phantasm in terms of the simulacrum, which is to say as a stage of the multiple. Following Deleuze's metaphysics, Foucault proposes his critique from a standpoint aimed at the 'disillusioning of phantasms' (Foucault, 1977: 171). This pursues a mode of thought aligned with the theatre insofar as he deals with the phantasm as 'multiplied, polyscenic, simultaneous', like a theatrical performance 'broken with separate scenes that refer to each other' (Foucault, 1977: 171).

In truth, what Foucault surmises about the phantasm are also common features of Agamben's theory and are present in the disavowal of the fetishist and the imaginary of sense. Both thinkers agree that the phantasm is not reducible to a sign: for Agamben because the phantasm discloses the mediation of the barrier between the signifier and signified (as outline in section 2.1c), and for Foucault precisely because the phantasm arises between object and subject in the oscillation between their surfaces. However, the particular route that Foucault's essay 'Theatrum Philosophicum' follows is the logic of Platonic phantasmology as it is handled and reversed by Deleuze in both *Difference and Repetition* (originally published in French in 1968) and *The Logic of* Sense (originally

published in French in 1969).[47] The essence of sorting appearances by way of the phantasm is located here as a necessary process of integrating the expanding domain of intangible objects into our thought. What he specifically proposes is an articulation of phantasmal theory 'that cannot be reduced to a primordial fact through the intermediary of perception or an image,' but instead:

> ... arises between surfaces, where it assumes meaning, and in the reversal that causes every interior to pass to the outside and every exterior to the inside, in the temporal oscillation that always makes it precede and follow itself.
>
> (Foucault, 1977: 169)

On the topological nature of the phantasm Foucault and Agamben offer positions of difference that can be situated, on one hand, by Foucault's topological relation to the body, and on the other hand, Agamben's topology as a relation to language. For example, 'the problem of knowledge', Agamben says in the introduction to *Stanzas*, 'is a problem of possession, and every problem of possession is a problem of enjoyment, that is, of language' (Agamben, 1993a: xvii). Conversely, to consider the phantasm according to Foucault, it must first be set apart from physics and considered in terms of the phantasmatic *event*. 'Physics concerns causes,' he illustrates, 'but events, which arise as its effects, no longer belong to it' (Foucault, 1977: 173). The metaphysical basis of Foucault and Agamben is therefore not concerned with substances or coherence that

[47] In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze puts forward a 'philosophy of difference' that proposes a critique of representation from a position of transgression: whereby difference and repetition 'puts law into question [and] denounces its normal or general character in favour of a more profound and more artistic reality' (Deleuze, 2001: 3). This means transcendence of the order of laws (moral and natural law) that determine resemblance and equivalence. What he develops, then, is the concept of difference in itself and repetition for itself. Moreover, through the subject of eternal return Deleuze posits that repetition 'implies the destruction of all forms which hinder its operation, all the categories of representation incarnated in the primacy of the Same, the One, the Identical and the Like' (Deleuze, 2001: 126). *The Logic of* Sense takes up this argument from the perspective of exploring meaning and meaninglessness, or 'commonsense' and 'nonsense'. Foucault's interest concerning the phantasm in this text arises at the level at which sensibility transmits its constraint to the transcendent exercise, and where the logic of sense alerts us to the surface effects that 'detach themselves from objects' (Foucault, 1977: 169). As such 'to reverse Platonism with Deleuze', Foucault tells us, 'is to displace oneself insidiously within it, to descend a notch, to descend to its smallest gestures' (Foucault, 1977: 168).

describes situations of cause and effect, but one that deals with events. The event is that which is produced by the collision and intermingling or separation of things, bodies. Physics concerns causes, metaphysics concerns the event and the effect produced by such collisions. When Foucault refers to the rising of phantasms on the surfaces of bodies, he is referring to the production of effects on the surfaces of bodies as they collide and become no longer causes but effects, incorporeal. The logic of the event is not simply a state of things after such collisions: they do not serve as referents to causes or verify causes. What Foucault instead proposes is that we review the collision of bodies and things as they come together in phantasmatic interrelationships on four terms: (1) what it *designates* about a state of things, (2) what it *expresses* as such as an opinion about the state of things, (3) what it *signifies* as an affirmation of the interrelation, and (4) how it has *meaning* (Foucault, 1977: 173).[48]

Meaning is not restricted to what is knowable about an object, but the 'flux at the limit of words and things, as what is said of a thing ... and as something that happens' (Foucault, 1977: 174). This is what he calls a 'meaning-event,' which is not really an end but rather the 'unending' fastened to the verb (to labour) rather than as a proposition of an attribute (to be a labourer). As such, if we pursue the logic of language, the event has a present tense, in that it is an event, but it also has an infinitive, which introduces to it meaning. In this respect the meaning-event, in terms of its grammar, revolves around these two 'asymmetrical and insecure poles': whereby '[t]he meaning-event is always both the displacement of the present and the eternal repetition of the infinitive' (Foucault, 1977: 174). It is this placement of the eternal repetition that constitutes

[48] To follow the example used by Foucault, consider the phrase 'Marc Antony is dead'. On one hand, if we focus on the logic of the state of things, then the proposition of the referent is *death* (about which we may have a true or false assertion). *Dying*, on the other hand, is a 'pure event' that 'can never verify anything': it *designates* the state of death, *expresses* an opinion about that state of things, *signifies* an affirmation of the expression, and has a *meaning* of dying (Foucault, 1977: 173). The same logic can be applied to the incorporeal event of labour as a difference between, on one hand, the state of labour reified in objects, and on the other, *labouring* (living labour) as an event.

Foucault's move toward the simulacrum as 'the (multiple) eternity of the (displaced) present' (Foucault, 1977: 175).[49] In summary, the meaning-event defines the incorporeal limit of bodies because it fastens the present tense (of labour) to the infinitive: introducing meaning (the infinitive) into the event (a point of the present).

Within this process the phantasm occupies a space that is not the event because 'the event is that which is invariably lacking in the series of the phantasm' (Foucault, 1977: 177). The phantasmatic event instead testifies to the fact that there is no event because it is missing, but precisely in its absence what is repeated has no grounding in relation to an original or imitation: it has become freed from the constraints of Platonic similitude. What Foucault poses is a phantasm that is in 'excess' of the singular event. It is not supplemental to reality as an imaginary, nor is it that from which the concept is organised and will emerge, but it is the 'play of the (missing) event' that cannot be made singular nor compared with reality because 'it presents itself as universal singularity' (Foucault, 1977: 177). This relation to the phantasm as event is the crucial difference between Foucault and Agamben. Foucault sees the phantasm as an event that testifies to its own 'missing' event, while for Agamben the phantasm itself is not an event but a movement. Agamben's phantasm in itself testifies to nothing. Instead the event of loss, or rather disavowal, is testified to by what I have called the space of phantasmagorical vacuousness. In contrast Foucault identifies the phantasmatic as

[49] Foucault establishes the simulacrum in his essay 'Theatrum Philosophicum' in relation to an understanding of Pop Art, whereby he shows how Andy Warhol epitomises the destruction of a relation to resemblance and the copy through the use of serial, the multiple and the repeated image (Foucault, 1977: 189). The image here comes to be a simulacrum because it is torn from a relation to its original and becomes the multiplicity of the image as its own being (at which point we are also reminded of Benjamin's concept of the 'aura'). Deleuze makes a similar point in *Difference and Repetition*, stating that what eternally recurs is not the same and the similar, but precisely the difference of the multiple: whereby each multiple is still different in numerical terms from other repetitions (Deleuze, 2001: 126).

simulacrum: meaning that the multiplicity of the image or sign becomes its own referent and 'presents itself' as an event without event.[50]

Insofar as Agamben's theory of the phantasm establishes the terrain of the phantasmagorical vacuousness, he allows us to see the process of the imaginary as mediation between the virtual and the real. In effect, he outlines the role of the phantasm in creating a vacuous fold from where signification is potentiality. But it is the theatrical model of Foucault that suggests how the artist might 'play' in the space of vacuousness. If, for instance, the psychological model of Agamben allows us to relate labour to the artist as the sense-object to the sense-perception, we pursue an equation that reads: ~~sense-object~~ and ~~sense-perception~~. The phantasmagorical vacuousness of this sum then defines the potentiality of labour free from all predicates. I propose we can then use Foucault's theory to take up the equation at this point. What the theatrical model then discloses is how the artist fastens on to this displaced notion of labour and makes of it the event of labour without event: effectively an ~~event~~ in the parlance of Agamben's terminology of the shadow.

As such it would appear that the apparent point of divergence between Foucault and Agamben is really a point of division that partitions the phantasm into two discourses: one that deals with the internal (psychological) tendency of the phantasm, and one that deals with the external (theatrical) tendency of the simulacrum. Interestingly Agamben only makes a brief note of the term similitude in *Stanzas*, and yet he situates it in the signifying process as precisely what occurs after the point where

[50] As Gary Shapiro has said on this point in *Archaeologies of Vision: Foucault and Nietzsche on* Seeing *and Saying* (2003), Foucault progresses along a line of thought that proposes a notion of the phantasm based on the understanding that an image can escape from its definition as 'a kind of atomic identity' only if instead it becomes identifiable 'in its indefinite multiplicity' (Shapiro: 330). He goes on to summarise that: 'here folding and unfolding are to be understood as the diagram created by similitude in which seriality, difference, and repetition efface sovereignty, representation, and originality.' Instead, what he proposes is that the discourse of Foucault, extending that of Deleuze, 'put[s] into play ... neither the regime of the sovereign gaze nor the panoptical apparatus but a visual practice that confutes both through the mobilisation and manipulation of the phantasm' (Shapiro: 346).

desire (which was generated by the phantasm) is transferred into the articulation of language. The transference from articulation to the simulacrum takes place when the notation, or articulation, of the sign is transferred to the audience or recipient. The sign as it is then perceived and sensed by the spectator is what Agamben designates a similitude according to an interpretation of the Aristotelian theory of language. The difference between similitude and phantasm, although subtle, can be identified in the following way: first the phantasm designates the sign as it is formed 'on the lips of the speaker,' while for the spectator the simulacrum designates 'the sign and the similitude of the things in the ears of the listener' (Agamben, 1993a: 126). Whether considered as transference to the articulation of the speaker or to the perception of the listener the thing of transference is a sign. But the difference between the two is a difference of a manner of speaking and listening.

The phantasm and the simulacrum, the psychological and the theatrical therefore come together in thought, for thought alone can 'produce the phantasm theatrically' and, furthermore, 'repeat the universal event in its extreme point of singularity' (Foucault, 1977: 178). For Foucault thought would then be 'the event that befalls the phantasm and the phantasmatic repetition of the absent event' (Foucault, 1977: 178). While for Agamben, like the fetish disavowal, we can see that this occurrence of thought is only possible in affirming a disjuncture that is affirmed by disjuncture: approachable in thought as a trace of the topological event that itself formed thought. What both agree on is that the phantasm (and simulacrum) pursues thought free of historical and empirical content, from fact and actual experience. Moreover, they both pursue a phantasm freed from the reduction of a reality that tries to place it in the sequence 'perception-image-memory-illusion' (Foucault, 1977: 180).

Agamben and Foucault are pursuing different agendas with the phantasm and the simulacrum. Foucault pursues the project of Deleuze to free the phantasm from the original and the copy by allowing its recurrence to resound in a theatre of mime and the multiple: an absent event where 'difference recurs' (Foucault, 1977: 194). Agamben, on the other hand, pursues a project leading from Musil which aims to grasp the unreality of signification, the barrier and the fold, in order to get back-beyond a metaphysics that is always already signification: to situate the phantasm not as a recurrence of difference but the site of a fracture in presence. It is evident, then, that a discourse on the phantasm of artistic labour needs to comprehend a position that listens to the psychoanalytical discourse of Agamben, whose merit lies in elaborating the phantasmatic operation of artistic labour as an internal discourse that articulates oppositions. But we also need to take account of the phantasm's external visibility. Here Foucault's pursuit of the transference of phantasms to the theatre (of spectators) and toward a being-in-the-world in general, provides a theoretical basis for how this might happen. *In summary, the phantasm's psychological movement indicates a process of mediating meaning and desire in the first-person. The phantasmatic ~~event~~ then defines how the artist engages with the free-play of this space as always already a process of negation and affirmation, operable between a singularity and their being-in-the-world. Crucially neither movement refers to a point of return to its predicates, but is always original in the vacuous phantasmagorical space.*

2.5 *The phantasm & its contemporaneity*

The relationship between the phantasm and paradigms of production, what is defined by the ~~event~~, should also be understood in terms of its contemporaneity. To be contemporary as described in Agamben's essay 'What is the Contemporary?' (2009), is

not a being present in another time, but in belonging to one's time in a disconnected way. Only through this distance of disconnectedness, he posits, is it possible to obtain a critical distance that allows for one's own time to be perceived (Agamben, 2009a: 40). He writes: '[c]ontemporariness is, then, a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it' (Agamben, 2009a: 41). But in keeping a distance while adhering to one's time leads to a distinction of time that Derrida via Shakespeare summarises with the phrase 'the time is out-of-joint' (Derrida, 1994: 20). This is an untimeliness that, 'working within chronological time, urges, presses, and transforms it' (Agamben, 2009a: 47). But if we are to propose that the phantasm is temporally linked to the present paradigms of production, that is to say contemporary, then the manner of this link is potentially 'out-of-joint'. Because the concept of the phantasm rests so closely to Derrida's notion of spectrality, however, clarification is needed at this point to distinguish and analyse their relational proximity.

The connection between Agamben's *Stanzas* and Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* has already been established by Katja Diefenbach in his essay 'The Spectral Form of Value: Ghost-Things and Relations of Forces' (2006). What he specifically highlights between the two is how each deals with the symbolic space that designated for Marx the unreality of the object. What Agamben and Derrida share is a common criticism of Marx's utilitarian ideology that finds only clear demarcations between concrete use-value, which can be enjoyed, and abstract exchange-value, as that which is aberrant. Agamben's attempt to redeem the possibility of that impossible movement through the phantasm, by operating outside of use-value or act, is here applauded for its attempt to grasp the very unreality of the object in question.[51] But what Diefenbach does not

[51] Diefenbach later goes on to criticise Agamben in his search for a new 'spectral aspect of social experience' (Diefenbach). What he criticises is an analytical position in *Stanzas* that remains removed from the 'everyday experience of capitalism'. To these ends he calls *Stanzas* a text of 'deconstructive poetry.' In response, one can also point out that if the fetishistic character that Agamben outlines is removed from what Diefenbach would term the 'everyday' of capitalism's fetish commodity, it is because

address is the specific nature of how Derrida's use of the spectre and Agamben's use of the phantasm aim to grasp the unreality of their objects from different temporal quarters.

What Derrida identifies in *Spectres of Marx* is a terminological genealogy that connects spectre and 'spirit,' wherein the difference between spectre and spirit is really a differ*a*nce: namely that the former exists as a deferral of the latter (Derrida, 1994: 170-171). What is at stake here is an absence of presence. This absence first becomes apparent for Derrida in his essay 'Signature Event Context' (1977) through a reading of Étienne Bonnot de Condillac's 'Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge' (1746), which he then develops into the proposition he makes in *Spectres of Marx* regarding how discourse occurs neither 'in us, [nor] outside us' (Derrida, 1994: xiii). The gap between being 'in us' or 'outside us' designates the extension of a rupture that he proposes comes from disjoining time and the living present (Derrida, 1994: xix).

What is out-of-joint in *Spectres of Marx* is the Marxian concept of labour as a social bond that binds men to time (Derrida, 1994: 193). What Derrida pursues in particular is an account of temporal binding that is founded on mourning and can be understood as a spectral performativity. Although we may say that our knowledge of the loss to which the spectre is a revenant may be known or unknown, either wholly or truly, the mark of the loss nevertheless designates the mark of a performative name in reiteration. The spectre in which this loss manifests itself is a revenant because it is always a repetition, or what Derrida refers to as the 'coming back' of a transformative power (Derrida, 1994: 9-11). But as we have already seen, the term phantasm holds more in common with melancholia than it does with mourning. It is this distinction that divides the phantasm from the spectre. Unlike the spectre, the phantasm is not a coming

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Agamben's discussion purposely moves toward a certain aesthetic connoisseurship of the commodity world in order to engage with its place in artistic production. Obviously, for the context of this thesis such a move does not pose the same problematic it does for Diefenbach, considering that the 'everyday' of this discussion is, in fact, that of the artist's everyday.

back (from the dead) because it does not refer to a thing already negated. Rather the phantasm is always already present as the mover of negation and affirmation, it neither refers specifically to any sense-object nor to any sense-perception, but refers to a movement without a point of return: only a path of oscillation between affirmation and negation. The return that is possible for the spectre is therefore not indicative of the phantasmal melancholic character.

Each terminological model, the phantasm and the spectre, therefore affects the staging of the phantasmatic event as something contemporary to time in a different way. The central difference between the spectre and the phantasm is here a subtle difference but it is not a differ*a*nce. Insofar as Derrida poses a question of 'spectralising disincarnation' as an '[a]pparition of the bodiless body,' his relation to the conjuration of Marx, communism, and Marxian political economy, instigates the same terminology as that of a 'phantomalisation of property' (Derrida, 1994: 51). In short, his staging is problematic because it is based on the logic of the ghost. Understood in terms of speech-act theory, which Derrida refers to in order to situate the spectre as the speech of a ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, we can see how Derrida employs a third-person indicative.[52] The ghost/spectre speaks from an exterior standpoint to which the listener is commanded to respond. In terms of the theatre this is indicative of the relationship between the actor and the spectator: although the difference here is that command stems from a revenant of a loss that is a loss in repetition. What is articulated by the spectre is a sign that returns from a place that is always already external (Derrida, 1994: 61).[53]

[52] J. L. Austin, in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), is adamant that it remains crucially important for the 'utterance-origin' to be tied to the first-person (Austin: 60-61), the one who speaks, because for him 'a performative utterance will ... be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage' (Austin: 21-22). Austin's speech act theory therefore maintains that a 'relative purity' of performatives must be maintained or risk an utterance being no longer recognisable as what it was a citation of, resulting in the communicability of the citation being lost.

[53] Negri raises a criticism of Derrida in his essay 'The Spectre's Smile', part of symposium directed solely at Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* and published under the title *Ghostly Demarcations* (1999). The particular promise that Negri saw in Derrida's theory of spectrality is the promise of a correspondence between

The phantasm, alternatively, identifies a first person indicative that describes the articulation of signs as they are developed from the interior imaginary. Rather than respond to an external command, the artist responds to desire whose point of reference is not loss, per se, but the phantasmagorical vacuousness of unsubstantiated negation. It is precisely this distinction between the third-person indicative of the spectre as opposed to the first-person indicative of the phantasm, the external performative as opposed to the internal performative, which marks a crucial point of departure in these terms. Only the phantasm, Agamben insists, is therefore capable of 'an archaeology that does not ... regress to a historical past, but returns to that part within the present that we are absolutely incapable of living' (Agamben, 2009a: 51). What this means is that the artist's 'being' contemporary is disclosed by giving attention to the unlived element of the present in which indices of the archaic are nevertheless perceived but cannot be reached. Instead of the spectral return that is disjunctive because it is always a return to time that is always out of joint, the contemporary articulates a sense of a 'return to a present where we have never been' (Agamben, 2009a: 52). *The phantasm, I propose, being contemporary with the movement of* sense *defines a disjunctive relation to* sense*: it defines a topos that it knows and mediates, but nevertheless cannot attain or occupy by knowing it.*

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spectrality and common experience (Negri, 1999: 9). Insofar as this spectrality of experience is pronounced as already existing, already being here, he proposes we think of it as a 'real illusion' that is unequivocally linked to immaterialisation and a mobility of the time and space of labour within which we now exist. But with Derrida's spectre being this figment of a remnant, a sign that must move back (to death) in order to return, it is precisely unable to exit the cycle of return and link its own history to the future. Therefore Negri's criticism is that just at the point where the ontological discovery of spectrality offers an 'exit toward the future' (by illuminating the real illusion of immateriality), Derrida (and deconstruction with him) instead constrains the future to a return: which, as Negri describes, 'loses itself in that which is "inaccessible to man", in the "infinitely other"' (Negri, 1999: 14).

2.6 *The improper phantasm*

Much in the same way as the phantasm shows signification to be a fracture of the association between the sign and its object – both its being the object in name and being wholly disconnected from the object at the same time – the phantasm is contemporary because it locates presence and being-present in a fractured present: between being located in time and disconnected from time. The contemporaneity of an artist's perception therefore stems from one's ability to know and obtain this standpoint of disconnected time. Here Derrida's query as to whether or not it is possible to 'address oneself in general' (Derrida, 1994: 221) raises a question that is pertinent to the phantasm. To addresses oneself *in general* proposes a mode of speech that we can attribute to the term *ainos* Agamben uses in the phantasmatic model of the sphinx. The phantasm as *ainos* designates the enigma of a speech that employs improper terms to articulate the essential fracture of presence at the heart of signification. But more than the specific articulation of a fractured presence, expressed via the movement of a paradoxical word (or a paradoxical object in terms of the fetish), the *ainos* denotes the expression of a position that is such as it is because it approaches its subject while simultaneously keeping it always removed.

Rather than refer to the paradox of a word or sign, the movement of the phantasm poses a more general paradoxical position that relates to a movement in time as well as in signification. It approaches the time from which it draws sense-perception into imaginary figurations, and as such is responsive to paradigmatic shifts. On the other hand it also remains disconnected, operating in a circuit that must deny its very connectedness in order to exist in the space of a fold or barrier between significations: not as the lost object or the fetish object, but the movement that manifests the sign. In the final two chapters of *Stanzas* Agamben addresses how this movement specifically

comes about as improper signifiers and proper signifiers. On one hand, the improper deals with the coding of the symbolic and the emblematic. The proper, on the other hand, deals with decoding symbols and emblematic forms, placing them in their proper terms of reason. The manifestation of the improper is also understood under the operation of the metaphor, whereby the metaphor takes the role of the 'principle of a universal dissociation of each thing from its own form, of every signifier from its own signified' (Agamben, 1993a: 142). In effect the metaphor works on the principle that each thing is what we may think of as 'true' only insofar as it signifies another. Being itself and standing for something else is therefore the foundation of the emblematic form. What is therefore called into question by the emblem is the relationship of representation between things and their proper signifying forms. While by estranging each from the other, signifier from signified, the improper threatens the reason of the proper.

Agamben is aware that to signify by improper terms raises a dichotomy in Freudian thinking. On one hand Freudian psychoanalysis is an agent of the proper. Freud's analysis of the symbolic, for instance, proposes methods to dissolve the threat of the improper by situating the enigma of its emblems within a framework of repression. On the other hand, Freud's notion of disavowal, one of the few Freudian descriptions of a symbolic process that does not allow itself to be reduced to the usual analytical method of de-coding, provides the phantasm with its template for signifying by improper terms. Here the improper stands as the familiar that has been alienated from the form of proper representation. Thus, Freudian discourses of the proper direct a course of psychoanalysis that aims at a process of translating or decoding the improper (what stands as the unconscious) into the reason of the proper (what is conscious). What Agamben proposes, on the contrary, is that in the improper '[w]e should learn to see something intimately human' (Agamben, 1993a: 144). As such he proposes that the

improper needs to be investigated beyond its placement in a mechanism of repression and understood, instead, as a mode of signification that might actually pose a 'more familiar and original kind of signifying, one that does not tamely allow itself to be reduced to our cultural scheme' (Agamben, 1993a: 144). It is toward this more 'original kind of signifying', what he identifies behind the repression of the fetish and behind the emblematic character of signs, that the theory of the phantasm and the contemporaneity of its articulation are directed.

The disassociation between conscious and unconscious, proper and improper is delineated in Freud on the following grounds: clear and proper speech is associated with the conscious, while the project of the improper designates the language of the unconscious. The problem with the metaphor is that in Western reflection on the sign, Agamben tells us, it derives from a position that is split into two terms, one proper and one improper. The metaphor is therefore understood as the transition or movement that substitutes one term for the other (Agamben, 1993a: 147). What the process of the *Verleugnung* demonstrates, however, is how in actuality nothing is really substituted but also nothing is repressed. Where we think there is a substitution of the improper for the reality of the proper what really takes effect is a displacement whereby what is repressed is not simply pushed back, but is also affirmed by its denial without constituting a return in improper signification. The sign is both the presence of a something and the presence of nothingness. This is what we have already displayed in our schema whereby the fetish occurs as a result of the equation: ~~object~~ and ~~phantasm~~.

This 'unique compromise' is what the disavowal of the fetishist highlights by maintaining itself in the nucleus of a split between signifier and signified (Agamben, 1993a: 146). The elusive 'third area', which I call the space of phantasmagorical vacuousness, arises from the equation of disavowal (~~object~~ and ~~phantasm~~) to denote

how we can appropriate the improper, unreality, and the unconscious, without ever bringing it into its opposite state. This is what Agamben refers to as the wisdom of the 'sphinx' or the *ainos*. What he proposes is that by the same gesture that the analyst might learn something about pleasure from the pervert, so too can signifying by proper terms learn something about symbols from the improper (Agamben, 1993a: 147). But what this 'third' space designates is really an encounter or confrontation with what is neither one nor the other position of the binary opposition. As such it constitutes itself as an 'emblematic tension that arises from their confusion-difference' (Agamben, 1993a:148). Hence, if we look for a 'third' area between the equation of the unconscious imaginary of artistic labour and its proper expression in artistic labour-power, we encounter emblematic tension, this being neither one nor the other, but rather a process that Agamben might refer to as a 'never substantialisable negation between an absence and a presence' (Agamben, 1993a: 149). If there is not really any transportation of terms taking place here, or any substitution of the improper in replacement of the proper (as a coding into emblems), or a transportation of the improper into the proper (by way of decoding through analysis), then what is really expressed is not only what Agamben calls 'a game of negation and difference' (Agamben, 1993a: 149), but the interrelation of the phantasm's movement, which only illuminates itself as displacement.

The work of analysis is to translate a passage from the unconscious to the conscious, from one discourse to another. The importance of Agamben's theory of the phantasm is that it describes a process of articulating signs, not according to the passage or mode of translation that make them communicable, but by acknowledging the mediation of the barrier between the signifier/signified relation. While a model of decoding the object of sense perception allows us to comprehend the meaning behind speaking, seeing, and sensing, only a process that includes its own coding allows us to

understand not-seeing, not-speaking, and, in general, not-sensing. This is the 'intimately human' element of signifying that Agamben hoped to expose behind the notion of the sign and what is, in effect, the very format of signification. *What makes the mediation of the phantasm so appropriate and so contemporary to the present paradigm of immaterial production is that it allows us to comprehend the essential process of negation in sensing, signifying, and articulating the world of labour. The force of disavowal affirms all predicates in privation and opens the space of production to the potentiality of phantasmagorical vacuousness: which nevertheless contains every stage of production from author through to reproduction and into reception, as general potentiality.*

The event (or more correctly the ~~event~~) of artistic labour therefore identifies itself with improper signifiers. Why this is crucial, I propose, is because under the current tendencies of biopolitical production only an improper approach to signification is capable of provoking modification of the sensible. With immaterial labour blurring the boundaries between production and social life, a system of representation that proceeds by defining and affirming resemblances, and which continually reduces all symbols to our cultural scheme of mass interconnectivity will merely work to confirm a consensus of distributions. However a phantasmal methodology proceeds by discrepancies. It resists interpretation and the reduction of signs to schema that forgets the essential fold of the barrier (/). As such, only the phantasm is capable of applying dissensus to the current paradigm of production. Not only does it dissociate 'every form from its signified', but 'the [improper] symbol presents itself as the new Sphinx threatening the citadel of reason' (Agamben, 1993a: 144-145).

2.7 *On the Phantasm of Artistic Labour*

In order to understand how the phantasm allows aesthetics to valorise the process of transference from the virtual to the real, I will now outline the key theses that define the phantasm of artistic labour.

1. A phantasm is a form of sensible knowledge that occurs neither through actuality nor potentiality but in the privation of potentiality. It moves from one to the other as the having of a privation.
2. The phantasm is an indicator of the first-person. Its movement does not refer to a point of return but is always original: it is always already a process of negation and affirmation operable between a singularity and their being-in-the-world.
3. The operation of the phantasm defines its *topos* without knowing it or attaining it, but defines the manner in which it becomes attainable and known through signification.
4. Tension in the phantasm is created by never-substantialising negation. In creating a phantasmagorical vacuousness between binary oppositions the phantasm is illuminated only by its role in displacing distributions.
5. The phantasm's relation to signification is concurrent with its relation to being contemporary: it occurs as having disjuncture or having the fracture of presence. It approaches the dominant paradigm of sense and draws sense-perception from it, and as such the phantasm is responsive to paradigmatic shifts but signifies these predicates only through disjuncture.

The artist's ability to address oneself in general is dependent on knowing the operation of one's own phantasmal processes. But for the artist to know artistic labour as both the actuality of labour (to do) and the potentiality to not do requires an engagement with labour at the point of its phantasmagorical vacuousness. Foucault's definition of the liberated phantasm proposed two paths or 'two privileged stages' that lead to this point of understanding: one is that of psychoanalysis, the other that of the theatre. The problem with a reconciliation of these divergent theories was, to his mind, a reductionist problem. To reduce either perspective to the other results in what he calls the ridiculousness of a 'psychodrama' (Foucault, 1977, 171). But the topology of the artistic phantasm that I propose now risks this ridicule. The aim here is not an attempt at reconciliation between the two stages of the liberated phantasm, but to incorporate each in its own place respectively in the artist's phantasmatic interrelation of sense, and the attainment of the phantasmatic event. Maintaining the precepts that Agamben has outlined, the phantasm remains the fold of a process of signification and the movement that prepares for the articulation of signs. But the phantasm is also encountered in the articulation of signs itself: although here it engages with a different force composed according to a critique of theatre and multiplicity. The acts of listening, reading, seeing, and doing of the visual arts in each of its numerically different significations nevertheless re-transmit something of the artistic phantasm. 'Phantasms ... topologise the materiality of the body' (Foucault, 1977: 170), Foucault said, and his assertion is indeed correct when dealing with artistic labour: whereby the body has a performative role in aesthetics (a topological place). Theatre must therefore be accounted for in artistic phantasms.

To avoid the problem of representing a psychodrama we need to understand something specific about Agamben's theory of the phantasm. Although his theory is essentially rooted in Freudian psychology, the crucial adjustment he makes is to place

(or rather displace) it within a 'just order'. This order is not about the decoding of phantasms by proper terms, but presents itself as an articulation that joins, connects and articulates its fragments as improper and, therefore, gives the improper a situation in presence through testifying to the barrier of signification. As such, the phantasm alludes to the 'solidarity between signification and metaphysical articulation, in the passage from the visible to the acoustic aspect of language' (Agamben, 1993a: 157). This is the goal of his 'step-backward-beyond' of metaphysics, which aims to get beyond an 'interpretation' (decoding) of the sign in Western thought and instead engage with a 'mode of speaking that [is] neither a gathering nor a concealment' (Agamben, 1993a: 157).

Furthermore, Agamben is particular in his choice to take forward from psychology only the principles that fall outside of its own nature: namely the concept of *Verleugnung*. As a result, what he means by suggesting we engage with a mode of communication that is neither a gathering nor concealment is a mode of articulation wherein the emblematic gathering of unconscious codifications, which psychoanalysis always aims to de-code, does not properly occur. Specifically decoding does not occur because the phantasm is neither a coding nor a decoding process, but occupies the tendency of both in the affirmation and negation of its interrelation. Where the psychological model of the phantasm meets the theatrical simulacrum, then, is in the common moment of referral that takes place between positions that are divided and co-dependent – Agamben's description of the sign as a *sym*bolic that is also a *dia*bolic here comes to mind (Agamben, 1993a: 136).

The theory of the phantasm that I will pursue throughout this investigation therefore assumes something of the task that Musil set himself in *The Man Without Qualities*. By seeking to understand how the seizure of unreality can lead to a new

grasping of reality, I aim to understand how grasping the imaginary of labour can lead to a new understanding of aesthetic production and meaning. The theory of the phantasm allows us to approach this ground. But to approach artistic labour as it is transmitted to the artist themselves, and as it is transmitted to an audience, Agamben's liberated phantasm of signification needs to be incorporated with Foucault's liberation of the phantasm in theatre. I do not intend, however, to engage with a phantasmatic topology that elaborates a mere psychodrama, rather I aim to more fully apprehend the artist's phantasmatic event in all of its complexities from the imaginary processes that generate desire, through desire's transference to the sign, and in its (re)performance as a simulacrum. The postmodern paradigm of production, a system that is incorporated with communication, reception, and re-communication at every level of production demands nothing less.

If, as Agamben proposes in the closing pages of *Stanzas* that 'the human is precisely this fracture of presence,' (Agamben, 1993a: 156) and furthermore if we are to reduce, as he proposes we must, the algorithm S/s to the space of the barrier itself (/), then the phantasm of artistic labour promises a way to investigate how the artist might occupy signification as a fracture between aesthetic-sense and aesthetic-meaning. What we aim to see is not the difference between the signifier and the signified, nor a difference between the phantasm in the mind and its referent external object. Instead I propose that the theory of the phantasm I have described, and will develop over the next two chapters, aims to see the fracturing of presence as it is articulated by a reciprocal movement both internally, for the artist, and universally, in the distribution of a community of signs. This is not a psychodrama: it is the phantasm according to its contemporaneity within our paradigm.

3

The Artist and His Labour

> Like researchers, artists construct the stages where the manifestation and effect of their skills are exhibited, rendered uncertain in the terms of the new idiom that conveys a new intellectual adventure.
>
> (Rancière, 2009a: 22)

The artist, I have attested, encounters the phantasm of artistic labour in a space of vacuousness. How this encounter defines the artist's being-in-the-world of labour depends on how the artist fastens to the event of labour as a meaning-event: which is to say how the phantasmatic movement translates to an event of labour that nevertheless testifies to its own negation.

A problem we face here is in defining the space where an intersection is possible between the phantasmatic movement of sense and artistic labour as performance and sign of aesthetics. In effect I mean to define a relationship between visual (conscious) production and the imaginary (unconscious) conditions of sense. However, because we are effectively talking about an internal process of sensible discourse, we are dealing with a movement that is effectively invisible. But the problem here is not due to a lack of comprehension over the phantasmatic movement – such as I have demonstrated its tendency through a close reading of Agamben's *Stanzas* – but in elaborating its

trajectory into artistic practices as such. In effect we are faced with trying to place the phantasm, whose power exists in disclosing the barrier of signification, in labour and on a visual stage: or in terms of Foucault's proposition, within the theatre of the simulacrum as a theatre of phantasmatic labour.

In order to resolve this dilemma, over the next two chapters I will propose two specific 'stages' on which artistic labour in its phantasmal operation can be visualised. To do so I will employ a triangulation of positions. The first position is that of the artist, and specifically the sensory reality of the artist's labour and how he or she combines different 'senses' or suggests another sensory reality in artistic production. Whether we think of this sensory reality according to the process of metaphor, representation, mimesis, or fiction, what I am interested in here is how the artist transmits the imaginary of labour in order to construct an aesthetic sensorium: which is to say a space that visualises artistic production within time and space. Secondly, the method of translating the artist's labour requires a certain conceptual framework of philosophy. In Chapter 1 of this thesis I identified this framework as having two main points of focus: Rancière's concept of dissensus and Agamben's use of the shadow to describe labour as creative negation. Presently I will focus on applying the philosophical framework of dissensus to orientate the space and time of artistic labour as essentially a dissensual re-distribution of labouring time and space. Subsequently, in Chapter 4, I will focus on how the dissensual re-distribution of labour can be situated within the discourse of the shadow (via Agamben) in order to model the phantasm's internal and external interrelation of artistic production. In both cases each philosopher provides a certain orientation to the specificities of the conflicts inherent in our first position: i.e. that of the artist's labour. Notably I envisage such conflicts arising in the present chapter between the sensory worlds of labour as history and labour as fiction, but also between the artist and the spectator according to divisions of knowledge, activity and passivity. Our third position

or point of orientation is supplied by the framework already laid out on the theory of the phantasm. The peculiar movement of the phantasm will operate here to conflate these conflicts and regimes of sense. From this intertwining of contradictory positions and the conflicts of polarities I therefore aim to draw out the sustained critical movement of these tensions as a visible expression in the phantasmatic processes of artistic labour.

The 'stage' that Rancière lends to this investigation frames the transmission of labour by the artist according to its specific occupation within the distribution of the sensible. In particular he outlines how, within this distribution of a sensible world that is based on numerous acts of labour intertwined and brought together from places that we can distinguish as being places of 'occupations', the aesthetic regime works as a force of rupture. Established around the movement of the artist as non-representative individual – whose crucial role Rancière initially details in *The Nights of Labour* – what the aesthetic rupture defines is an antagonistic movement against the constraints of a representative regime of labour. In particular I will frame the present investigation around a conflict of orientating labour by proper terms and the contrary but extensive history of its circumvention by improper placement.

At the centre of this argument I locate the aesthetic stage as a space of dissensual production that structures disconnection. The question that is then raised is what role does the artist occupy in this structure of disconnection, and, furthermore, how do they orientate the aesthetic stage toward visualising conflicts between two regimes of sense (the proper and the improper), and also between private and public space-times of labour? What I particularly move toward is an investigation into how the aesthetic break or rupture in labour distinguishes the moment when what was fixed is given free-play over space-time: allowing one function to enter into relation with the general order functions from a disjointed position. The theatre of labour, I propose, offers us a rare

glimpse into this moment of rupture. Dissociation between opposing standpoints is here developed in line with two terms of movement I progress from Rancière: the Visitor and the Poor as movements of visiting and escaping. The distinction I make here between who is the visitor and who is the poor, or who is the actor and who is the active spectator on the stage of aesthetic production, is also a distinction of when does theatre becomes a hyper-theatre of interrelation.

The aesthetic regime hereby frames a critique of the artist's distribution of his or her mode of thought that will help to determine the phantasmal operation of labour as itself a way of acting and communicating. Posed another way, Derrida's question concerning the potentiality for one to 'address oneself in general' (Derrida, 1994: 221) is determined here with recourse to how artists address themselves as a labourer through the discourse of aesthetics. I therefore propose two specific indices with which to analyse the interrelation between the visitor and the poor, the artist and his labour: on one hand, as a distribution of knowledge, and, on the other, as a transmission of mute speech. The first positions the artist according to a distribution and index of knowledge. Specifically I refer here to Rancière's proposition for intellectual emancipation in order to raise the question as to whether the artist, through the aesthetic stage, teaches us his or her labour as his or her knowledge, or, alternatively, the spectator learns what the artist does not know themselves. What becomes important here is the identification of the minimum common link between the artist and the spectator, or what Rancière calls the 'third thing', which stands between the artistic performance and the spectator as an autonomous meaning in signification.

This leads to a question of transmission and translation. The position of the artist in this investigation therefore hinges on the translation of their artistic labour according to its manifestation in two conjoined modes of speech that are both mute. On one hand,

I interrogate the hieroglyphic presence of artistic labour. In particular I focus on the relationship between Santiago Sierra and his 'poor', and how his remuneration of workers who labour for him is mediated by a process of visibility and disappearance. With particular reference to *586 Hours of Work* (2004) and *24 Blocks of Concrete Constantly Moved During a Day's Work by Paid Workers* (1999) as hieroglyphs of labour, I aim to disclose the conscious procedures of artistic labour in unconscious production. The proposition I make is that the artistic trace of labour here becomes a passageway between visibility and its loss, identity and dis-identification whereby the artist's and the worker's labour, as a sign, becomes its own referent. The second mute speech, soliloquy, instead presents us with the voiceless speech of artistic labour that signifies nothing. In order to interrogate the nothingness of this expression I pursue a reading of Bruce Nauman's *Setting a Good Corner (Allegory & Metaphor).* What I show is how Nauman effectively uncouples the relation between traces of things and their causal logic, notably identified in the scission between cause an effect, truth and fiction, that moves conversely to the path of the hieroglyph. In particular I seek here the unconscious production evident in Nauman's conscious procedures of labouring on his ranch in New Mexico. This is a path that leads from the clear back to the obscure in order to show how the thought of labour in Nauman's film plays with his own movement between fiction and testimony, between 'what happened' as a truth and the 'what could happen' of potentiality. Here the signifiers of labour are opened up to a freely associating complex of signs whereby both proper and improper signifiers are dissociated from the time and the space of his working/performance.

In summary, the aim of this chapter is to identify how the artist's activity in the theatre of labour is directed toward a movement to and from the polemic positions of theatre and living, visiting and escaping. In order to become equal to the social relations that they bear, the artist, I propose, therefore needs to engage with the living life (and

living labour) of the poor in order to engage with labour as an event without any predicates. This is what I call (following Foucault) an event without event, which I develop textually as the ~~event~~. Of the artist's relation to the ~~event~~ of their own labour I therefore ask two questions I borrow from Rancière. In *The Nights of Labour*, while focusing on translating the traces of labour left by a select group of workers in nineteenth-century Paris, he asked:

> How is it that our deserters, yearning to break away from the constraints of proletarian life, circuitously and paradoxically forged the image and discourse of worker identity?

And, secondly:

> What new forms of misreading will affect this contradiction when the discourse of labourers in love with the night of intellectuals encounters the discourse of intellectuals in love with the toilsome and glorious days of the labouring people?
>
> (Rancière, 1989: x-xi)

The theatre of labour that I will outline in this chapter sets a stage for these enquiries to carry over to the artist, such as they do in Rancière's theorising on aesthetics. Furthermore, in orientating the position of labour as a 'stage' of time and space, we must be specific in our understanding of the one who constitutes the 'deserter'. Here we are not addressing a question to the masses of proletarian life or aesthetics directly, but toward them through the circumnavigation of a few, who, nevertheless, allow us to enter into discourse with what is normally voiceless. The position of the artist fulfils a similar role in this thesis to the non-representational individuals of *The Nights of Labour*. What I wish to investigate then is how these positions of the artist and the spectator, the artist and the community of social relations,

intertwine in expressing a dissensual approach to labour: whereby divisions of labour can come together in their difference, between different actors and spectators, who nevertheless manifest a conjoined movement of visiting and escaping in the theatre of labour.

3.1 *The distribution of the sensible by non-representative individuals*

In order to frame the points of strife, flux, and ambiguity that the phantasm of artistic labour brings into contention between history and fiction, knowledge and ignorance, and the visible and the invisible characteristic of labour, I wish to elaborate on what Rancière means when he says that the artist 'provides a public stage for the "private" principle of work' (Rancière, 2006: 43). In pursuing the problem of artistic distribution within the sensible from a Platonic position, Rancière identifies the most important principle of antagonism as stemming from artists' visible duplicity of roles between private and public spheres. Duplicity is what brings confusion, disruption and reconfiguration to the sensible order of occupations, as far as the Platonic principle of a 'well-ordered community' is concerned: whereby 'every citizen of a well-regulated community is assigned a single job which he has to do' (*Republic*: 406c-e). Rancière's chapter 'On Art and Work' in *The Politics of Aesthetics* makes this assertion the specific site of his reconfiguring process. At the centre he places the role of the artist as a figure capable of staging a space of theatricality that effectively escapes the Platonic order by disrupting the divides between what is public and what is private labour.

Naturally such an enquiry brings to the foreground a number of key problematic tendencies and polemic divisions that allude to the topic of this thesis. Most notably, the key distinction arises between artistic practice and what might be presented as its outside, namely the idea of 'work', such as it corresponds to the community. The artist's

relationship to labour is therefore drawn by a paradoxical system of apportionment that clashes its distinctions and exclusions with ideas of indifference and commonality. The general point of the argument nevertheless remains whether or not artistic practices actually form an outside to a general notion of labour, or whether a relationship is possible in which human activity can be spoken about in both general terms and specific terms. The idea of the theatrical stage forms a central motif in these arguments most obviously because it establishes the standpoint *par excellence* at which artistic practices are made visible and re-presented to the common community. In terms of positioning a theory of the phantasm in relation to artistic practices this connection is important in two ways. First, as I have already mentioned in relation to Foucault and the simulacrum (see section 2.4), by establishing how artists lend a visual dimension to the phantasm allows us to establish the phantasmal interrelation as a specific (and multiple) phantasmatic event within a wider operation of aesthetic distribution. Second, it expresses the phantasmatic process as a privative movement with public resonance. To take such deliberations forward we need then to understand the processes of the artistic re-presentation of the sensible, specifically as a point of conflict between distributions: between the place and time of labour and public and private divisions. Ultimately, if the phantasmatic force of negation continues through to aesthetic production, then because it dissociates all predicates of private and public, singular and universal, our confrontation with the phantasm of artistic labour invokes the question 'whose labour?'

The first point of consideration requires us to understand how the sensible is distributed within an aesthetic regime. Here Rancière makes a distinction between a *distribution* and a *factory* of the sensible. A factory of the sensible takes into account human activities in their immense plurality and presents them within a formation that can be called a 'common habitat' or a 'shared sensible world' (Rancière, 2006: 42). In the factory of producing and reproducing the sensible world, artistic practices are

essentially comparable and indeed concurrent with other human practices. The distribution of this system, however, acknowledges that this space of the 'shared sensible world' is never truly shared, but remains a distribution based on numerous acts as they are intertwined and brought together from places that we can distinguish as being places of 'occupations'. As he goes on to say of the distribution of the sensible: '[i]t is from this perspective that it is possible to raise the question of the relationship between the "ordinariness" of work and artistic "exceptionality"' (Rancière, 2006: 42). The polemic positions of the factory of the sensible and the distribution of the sensible system therefore establishes for us a common world of labour according to exclusive parts. Any move to establish what are essentially disparate and specialised occupations into a homogeneous commonality nevertheless remains, then, always aware that what constitutes the distribution, however homogenised, still defines particulars.

In order to understand how Rancière formulates the aesthetic regime, as capable of expressing privative movements of labour within a public sphere of reception, requires an engagement with *The Nights of Labour*. A precursor to *The Politics of Aesthetics*, *The Nights of Labour* details a surprise encounter between Rancière and a group of Parisian workers from the 1830s, and traced through the literary archive of poetry, philosophy and journals that these labourers produced. In searching for information on the constraint of human time to a specific space of labour, Rancière's research instead encountered a historical chronicle of leisure and idleness that he did not expect. One May Sunday in nineteenth-century France, in particular, would change his perspective on how the distribution of occupations occurs. While following the lives of a certain group of Parisian workers he expected to find men whose time away from work was dedicated to subsistence in preparation for the coming week's labour. Instead, what he finds recounted in the memoirs of three workers is a Sunday dedicated to:

> ... the leisure of aesthetes who enjoy the landscape's forms and light and shade, of philosophers who settle into a country inn to develop metaphysical hypotheses there, of apostles who apply themselves to communicating their faith to all the chance companions encountered on the path or in the inn.
>
> (Rancière, 2009a: 19)

Rancière retells of this encounter numerous times as defining a crucial moment in his thinking. What this time of leisure exposes for him is a disruption of the very notion of a Platonic distribution. Whereas Plato would have it that time does not allow for an individual to do otherwise than what his position of work allows, Rancière finds in this chronicle of leisure time proof that belies that belief. As a result, he sees in these workers a potential 'reformation of the established relations between see*ing*, *doing* and *speaking*', which would lead him to readdress the question of how the sensible is distributed (Rancière, 2009a: 19). Both the notion of emancipation and the regime of art therefore coincide as a blurring of boundaries 'between those who act and those who look' (Rancière, 2009a: 19).

We find the groundwork for this coincidence laid out initially in his early reading of the Saint-Simonian community in *The Nights of Labour*. Here the resolution between the actors of labour and the spectators of labour are placed according to a religion of future work. In particular the Saint-Simonian proposal is aimed toward a paradigm of 'new social individuality', through which they hoped to surmount the division between egoism and association (Rancière, 1989: 215). 'Work will be religion', Rancière goes on to express of their doctrine, 'only if religion becomes theatre' (Rancière, 1989: 215). But his proposition is not that theatre itself can be engaged as an emancipatorary tendency, rather that it provides a regime for re-associating various points of connection between privative and public space times. In particular I would like to focus on a single chapter

titled 'The Hammer and the Anvil', and, specifically, the illuminating incident of one particular kind of festival of labour that came out of the Saint-Simonian doctrine.

The event in question took place on July 1st 1832. It is referred to in *The Nights of Labour* as a 'communion of the theatre', or a festival of work, that was held in the Saint-Simonian garden of Ménilmontant. In these grounds the Saint-Simonian apostles invited the workers of Paris to witness the first opening of their Temple constructions. What followed is, foremost, a performance of labour on the scale of a theatre: a theatre of labour for labourers, enacted with the rites of a religion. From the official chronicler of the ceremony we read of the event:

> The shovelers fill the wheelbarrows. The wheelbarrowers set off in file, preceded by the fillers walking two by two and followed by four additional fillers as reserves. ... The wheelbarrowers come four by four to take on a load. They go to the excavation by the left road and return by the right road, thus circling the upper part of the lawn.
>
> (Rancière, 1989: 215-216)

In response to this display we are told that the crowd of spectators were 'not gripped by the rapturous intoxication of this new theatre', but give it a mark of respect, 'an approving curiosity that leaves it at a respectful distance from the spectacle' (Rancière, 1989: 216). The spectacle, we would have to say was un-spectacular insofar as it is theatre. More correctly we can call it foremost a 'moral demonstration'. The question that remains, then, is why the spectacle is placed at a distance when the demonstration of labour to a group of labourers is entirely un-spectacular? Moreover, what makes it astonishing to bare witness to something so familiar? Rancière proposes that perhaps it is because labour is here elevated to the stature of a religious ceremony, and thus enforces a distance between the one and the other by way of consecrating labour. But this distance of reverence, we are told, is not given over to the event from

the ones who watch it or accompany the parade with song. The distance is found in the disposition of the ones who themselves labour. The spectator cannot give to the spectacle of labour a respectful distance because it relies on two transitions: firstly of labour to theatre, and, secondly, from theatre to religious ceremony. The spectators are only privy to the second, and therefore already at-one-removed. Instead, the problem here is not that the spectators have nothing in common with the labour they are spectators to, but that the nature of the labour is already abstracted from itself in order to become theatre. What has specifically been made abstract is labour as a progression to its normal condition, namely fatigue, toil and obligation. It is 'the work of bourgeois men "inoculating themselves" with the proletarian nature' (Rancière, 1989: 216).

The distance between the labourer as spectator, and the performance of labour by those unaccustomed to it (the bourgeois apostles), is further complicated, however, by one more piece of theatre that we must yet add to the spectacle. We are told that not all of those performing the spectacle were 'bourgeois men'. In fact the display was comprised in equal number between the apostles and the normal labouring 'men of Paris.' Suddenly we face not a singular sacrifice of labour but a double one. What these men of Paris offer is not just their labour but their time of subsistence to the same religious discipline as the apostles. We therefore see that the sacrifice of both sides is not of equal proportions, 'not of the same nature' (Rancière, 1989: 216). While the bourgeois performers inoculate themselves with a labour that is Other, can we say the same of the labourer? I propose we can, but only if we acknowledge that what defines the transference of positions here is not the mimetic act of pursuing a medium of labour not normally attributed to the bourgeois man or the worker. But rather it is what is theatrical about the labour from both perspectives that equally changes the signification of each.

What we see performed in regard to the apostles are men going through the apprenticeship of command, which finds its equal in the training regime of officers in any army, be it the peaceable army of workers or otherwise. The apostles, in their devotion to hard work in the hot sun, therefore portray their own going through a test of sacrifice, whereby they sacrifice their labour to demonstrate obedience to the Saint-Simonian belief. The crucial function of the theatre is that it provides a stage of visibility, as a space where the private can become public, and without which the sacrifice of the private principle of the apostles' labour would not be a public demonstration of inoculation. In contrast, the workers demonstrate 'the already present capability of this command' (Rancière, 1989: 216). They do not inoculate themselves with their own 'proletarian nature', but through the visibility of the theatre demonstrate only that they do not have the choice of the position they occupy in the spectacle: they play themselves. While the apostles were not made 'proletarians' by any accident of birth but have arrived at this place of labour by choice and by assuming a role or character, the workers participation precisely highlights their own lack of choice. In effect the workers of Paris involved in the Saint Simonian theatre of labour inoculate themselves with the theatre of the spectacle.[54]

The men of Paris and the Saint-Simonian apostles both lose something to the theatre of labour. What is lost is the event of labour as a real order of things. By this I mean that these men demarcate different extremities of labour: labour as it is either withdrawn, on one hand, by the workers' movement from labour to the theatre, and, on

[54] Georges Bataille gives us an even starker example of this disjuncture that I would like to mention in order to frame the placement and displacement of roles found in the Saint Simonian theatre of labour. 'The victim is a surplus taken from the mass of useful wealth', we read in Volume 1 of *The Accursed Share* (1949), 'he can only be withdrawn from it in order to be consumed profitlessly, and therefore utterly destroyed' (Bataille: 59). The labourer in the theatre of the Temple building is not a victim in the same sense that Bataille refers to the sacrificial victim of Aztec rites, but each draws a dichotomy between useful and useless expenditure, between a proper order and an improper one. As Bataille goes on to say; '[o]nce chosen, he [the victim] is the accursed share, destined for violent consumption' (Bataille: 59). As such, 'the curse tears him away from the order of things; it gives him a recognisable figure, which now radiates intimacy, anguish, the profundity of living beings.'

the other hand, by the apostles' movement from theatre to labour. Fundamentally each correspondence to the time and space of labour is here enacted by 'nonrepresentative individuals' who disrupt the norm of sensible distribution (Rancière, 1989: x). In both cases the process of withdrawal enacted in the visibility of theatre is a withdrawal from the normal distributions of labour. Withdrawal, in the terms of Rancière, is here an operative of what he generally terms 'dissensus'.

> What 'dissensus' means is an organisation of the sensible where there is neither a reality concealed behind appearances nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation of the given imposing its obviousness on all. It means that every situation can be cracked open from the inside, reconfigured in a different regime of perception and signification. To reconfigure the landscape of what can be seen and what can be thought is to alter the field of the possible and the distribution of capacities and incapacities. Dissensus brings back into play both the obviousness of what can be perceived, thought and done, and the distribution of those who are capable of perceiving, thinking and altering coordinates of the shared world.
>
> (Rancière, 2009a: 48-49)

The dissensual is what structures disconnection. It assumes the stage of a conflict between two regimes of sense and questions their obviousness. Moreover, as Rancière deems this activity to be specific to each situation – neither seeking a universal truth behind signification or aiming to orientate signification to its own singular interpretation – the force of reconfiguring labour must be considered on its own merit: 'cracked open', we should say, from the inside. The movement of the Saint-Simonian apostles and the workers of Paris between labour and theatre is therefore a movement that locates a dissensual activity of labour. This is a conflict of sense fought first and foremost in one's own sensorium. The crucial role of the theatre, then, is that it provides the localisation for an improper signification to occur. Furthermore, what Rancière's example of the temple building frames within the present discourse is how a system of

orientating labour by proper terms has an extensive history of its circumvention by improper placement.

3.2 *The 'visitor' and the 'poor'*

The reason why these characters occupy our attention is because they make visible the very things which Rancière says that he will not talk about in metaphor.[55] In these examples he aims to find a certain authenticity of truth in the articulation of the labourer's words for themselves. In the words of worker-poets as in the labour of artists, what is not talked about in metaphor is present in desire. This desire, however, is not to replace or substitute one thing for another. The worker-poets forewent the subsistence of sleep in order to reclaim a certain time of labour for themselves to devote to learning and philosophy. But this does not describe a situation where the first (labour subsistence) is given up in order to reach the second (leisure). To borrow the words of Agamben from his reflection on the metaphor, this movement instead designates a desire 'to escape from the first' (Agamben, 1993a: 32). The escape in *The Nights of Labour* is what is stolen away from the cycle of work and rest, and, as such, designates a particular power to 'turn the world upside down' (Rancière, 1989: vii). The movement here is a proclamation of action against the intolerable situation of the period. Not the intolerable nature of poverty and hunger, but the servitude of time and to time, for no other reason than to maintain this very servitude by time.

In the event of the Saint-Simonian temple building, for example, it is the exchange of roles within the order of occupations that produces the effect of escape. The terms

[55] In the author's preface to *The Nights of Labour* Rancière states: '[r]eaders should not look for any metaphors in my title. I am not going to call up the pains of manufacturer's slaves, the unhealthiness of working class slums, or the wretchedness of bodies worn out by untrammelled exploitation. There will be no exposition of all that here, except through the glances and the words, the dreams and the nightmares, of the characters who will occupy our attention.' (Rancière, 1989: vii)

Rancière uses to discuss the apostle/worker relationship, the 'Poor' and the 'Visitor', are therefore very apt in describing this process of relations between the two. The 'poor' here designates the proletariat, while the 'visitor' refers to the Saint-Simonian apostle. The latter takes the role of the visitor because in trying to assist in the assuagement of worker misery these bourgeois men and women 'visit' a space and time that is not their own. They visit the poor with the hope of 'discovering the materiality of popular sufferings' (Rancière, 1989: 194). On the other hand, the 'poor' proletariat are defined by those who are 'trying to escape' through a reverse pathway.

What they seek is a moment of double negation that eliminates 'both the poor and their visitors [in order] to break the circle of demand that its course reproduces indefinitely' (Rancière, 1989: 197). But the achievement of this goal would produce a figure that is neither the poor (proletariat) nor the visitor (apostle). What remains would be a person who is unable to operate from a position that satisfies neither the demands of labour nor humanitarian love. The theatre of labour offers us a rare glimpse into this moment. Where the untenable double erasure reaches a pinnacle of dissociation between the opposing standpoints is where the person exists as having their own privation. The distinction of having a privation is not to suggest an abbreviation of labour by arriving at an equation of labour removed from labour. Rather I am speaking of a moment when making any distinction between who is the visitor and who is the poor, or who is the actor and who is the active spectator in the given situation becomes a blurred moment of hyper-theatre (i.e. a position that transforms passive representation into active presence).

From the position of the proletariat, for example, involvement in the initiation rites of the apostles is one of visiting. But he has not become the apostle, nor has he rightly become a being of the middle ground. Instead the proletariat occupies a world of labour that is a non-identical same, separated by a force of privation. His disposition toward

labour is now more evocative of a game or vacation. He undertakes tasks of work without engaging the normal stimulus that would normally accompany his position as a proletariat obliged to go out and beg for work. What he finds lacking is the relationship between toil and its normal accompaniments of fatigue. As one worker of Paris, a man named Bergier, said of taking part in such labour: 'all these jobs, presented under their natural face ... are performed with unflinching zeal; they do not tire us' (Rancière, 1989: 221).

It is not that the labour itself has changed, or that the proletariat has changed. How the proletariat originally identified with labour remains the same, but now for him it carries none of the idea of rough apprenticeship (which conversely it does for the Saint-Simonian apostle). His position, then, is one of alienation. Or, to put it another way, the signifier of labour has changed its relation to the signified. Where previously labour meant toil, now it means labour minus toil. What has been alienated is the normal distribution of his sensible position in relation to labour. From the other point of view, one Saint-Simonian speaking to another apostle about his inoculation of labour tells him:

> Your affection for them [the workers] is still merely *theatrical*. It is necessary that it become *practical*, mingling with your blood and your flesh. ... To command *workers*, you must first know the *worker*....
>
> (Rancière, 1989: 217)

Here we have the separation clearly spelt out for us between labour as theatre and labour as practicality, the false and the true. For the proletariat, engaging labour as a force of privation gives it a sense of theatricality but only as a deferral of its practical ends (he will eventually have to go out and beg for work again). For the apostle labour is practical insofar as he inoculates himself, but all the while it remains theatrical because he is nevertheless playing the role or character of the worker. Both situations are to some

extent removed from the practical and from the theatrical, but neither finds a permanent destination in-between. The question, then, is can theatrical knowledge actually become practical, or, inversely, can the practical become purely theatrical? Is it possible to actually know the other side of labour?[56]

What is 'untenable' about the position of a middle ground between the two poles of occupation (visitor/poor) is that it demarcates a space that is beside itself. In an attempt to serve and at the same time use the proletariat, the Saint-Simonians could not get past a relationship that was still based on what can be described as the 'two-fold character [of] the "suffering worker"' (Rancière, 1989: 200). This is a contradictory identity caught between, on one hand, being a 'chronic recipient of aid', and, on the other, 'a potential master'. If they try to transcribe what signifies the worker onto their own identity of a human body they are merely mimicking what is not their own. The expression would be a hypocritical act that only exposes the original distance between the visitor and the poor as a gap of mimetic displacement. The Saint-Simonian festival of labour similarly attempts to make the labour of a community present to itself by trying to induce a free-play of appearances between the 'visitor' and the 'poor' through the theatre of production. Intended to rupture the categorisation of individual functions and submit them to a general order of functions, the theatre of labour aims to affect an 'aesthetic rupture': whereby 'the place of work and exploitation' is appropriated 'as the

[56] Rancière is sceptical of such a possibility. Speaking of his own circumstances of an intellectual visitation to the 'poor' he describes how scholars are in fact ignoramuses: 'who knew nothing about what exploitation and rebellion meant and had to educate themselves among the workers whom they treated as ignoramuses' (Rancière, 2009a: 18). His research into the archives of the worker-poets therefore falls under a kind of visitation to the poor in order to try and breech the barrier of knowing the Other. But after his visiting with the supposed ignoramuses he states that he is left only with the impression of having undertaken an endeavour of whose merit he was unconvinced. Nevertheless, what he does take away and what we find evidenced through *The Nights of Labour* and later in his various texts on the politics of aesthetics, is his understanding that 'the affair [between workers and the intellectuals] was not something played out between ignorance and knowledge, any more than it was between activity and passivity, individuality and community' (Rancière, 2009a: 18). Instead it convinced him that to go from the 'merely theatrical' to the practical takes more than a mingling of blood and flesh, or intellectual knowledge. Because any involvement with the Other is attained only from a position of visitation, the condition of knowledge is here always maintained at a distance.

site of a free gaze' (Rancière, 2009a: 71).[57] What the 'free gaze', similar to the idea of 'free-play', means is that a space is appropriated that otherwise is not accessible to the one who labours: because their function and the order of that function would normally have remained fixed to another destination. The aesthetic break or rupture in labour hereby distinguishes the moment when what was fixed is given free-play over space-time: allowing one function, such as that of the visitor, to enter into relation with the general order functions from a disjointed position. Why the Saint-Simonian theatre fails to do so, however, is because it does not overcome the essential disconnection of each original sensorium and so it remains caught between two poles: as a sensorium of fabrication (in the aspect of the visitor who inoculates himself) and a sensorium of enjoyment (in the aspect of the poor who temporarily escapes the predication that labour equates to toil, but does not escape labour itself).

3.3 *The knowledge & ignorance of the visitor*

The artist's movement between visiting and escaping times and spaces of labour that are not their own cannot simply be calculated according to simple descriptions of 'what happened' in these moments of interchange (or, in the parlance of the phantasm, interrelation). I therefore propose two specific indices that I take from Rancière in order to understand the interrelation between, on one hand, transmitting the free-play of appearances (between the visitor and the poor, the artist and the spectator), and, on the other, translating what the free-play of appearances signify. The first, which I shall

[57] In order to frame the idea of the gaze Rancière quotes a specific passage by Gabriel Gauny, one of the 'non-representational' figures of nineteenth-century Paris whom he refers to frequently in *The Nights of Labour*. The specific passage originally comes from 'Le travail à la tâche', *Le Tocsin des travailleurs* (June 1848), and is cited in *The Nights of Labour* (Rancière, 1989: 81), *Dissensus* (Rancière, 2010a: 140), and *The Emancipated Spectator* (Rancière, 2009a: 71). The passage from Gauny reads: 'Believing himself at home, he loves the arrangement of a room, so long as he has not finished laying the floor. If the window opens out onto a garden or commands a view of a picturesque horizon, he stops his arms and glides in imagination toward the spacious view to enjoy it better than the [owners] of the neighbouring residences.'

discuss presently, positions the artist according to a distribution and index of knowledge. Specifically I am thinking here of Rancière's proposition toward intellectual emancipation. The second positions artistic labour according to its manifestation in two different modes of mute speech that, on one hand, allowing us to decipher artistic labour according to its hieroglyphs (for example the hieroglyphic presence of the labour in Santiago Sierra's remunerated activities of workers), and, on the other hand, soliloquy as a voiceless speech that uncouples the traces of things from causal logic (such as the scission between cause an effect, truth and fiction in Nauman's *Setting a Good Corner*). I will return to the two modes of mute speech in the following sections of this chapter. Currently, though, I will begin by making a distinction between knowledge and ignorance.

Engaged with different potentialities of doing, seeing, and thinking, the artist's activity in the distribution of the sensible not only proposes itself to us as a question of 'what happened', but also as a question of what is intelligible about what happened? In order to answer this question of artistic labour's intelligibility I draw on Rancière's essay 'The Emancipated Spectator' in which is outlined a set of theses on intellectual emancipation.[58] What intellectual emancipation is based on (coming from Rancière's earlier work in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*) is the idea that an equality of learning and an equality of intelligence are possible if we can identify the 'minimal link of a *thing in common*' (Rancière, 1991: 2). Fundamentally, what this 'minimal link' describes is the base level from which point all humans learn in the same way. One intelligence, regardless of its manifestation, is equal with any other intelligence. Each person

[58] 'The Emancipated Spectator' largely develops its argument form Rancière's previous work *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. The investigation (in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*) follows the theory of the schoolteacher Joseph Jacotot who, in the early nineteenth century, claimed that illiterate parents could themselves teach their children how to read based on understanding an equality of intelligence. Jacotot's demonstration of the ability of one 'ignoramus' to teach another what they themselves do not know was revived by Rancière in the 1980s as an entrance into the debates of that time on public education. In *The Emancipated Spectator* the argument is revived again as an entrance into the debate of the aesthetic spectacle, and, specifically, the relation between the artist and the spectator.

therefore learns by venturing, as Rancière puts it, 'into the forest of things and signs', and 'by observing and comparing one thing with another, a sign with a fact, a sign with another sign' (Rancière, 2009a: 10). He refers to this process as an intellectual emancipation because it is counter-posed to the stultification of the pedagogical model, which asserts that the difference between the one who knows and the ignoramus is really dependent on one's '*knowledge of ignorance*' (Rancière, 2009a: 9).

Knowledge of ignorance: by this Rancière means that while the task of the schoolmaster is to reduce the gap of knowledge between their position and the pupil's, it begins by teaching the one who is ignorant their own inability. As such what is established is a hierarchy of knowledge that asserts a specific ordering or collection of knowledge, from what is simple to what is complex, on which trajectory the ignoramus' position of knowing is asserted as always below the schoolmaster's. Intelligence is therefore unequal. 'In pedagogical logic, the ignoramus is not simply one who does not as yet know what the schoolmaster knows', Rancière tells us, 'she is the one who does not know what she does not know or how to know it' (Rancière, 2009a: 8). What the pupil lacks is *knowledge of ignorance*, namely a knowledge of how to actually make the unknown an object of knowledge, which requires knowing the precise distance that separates knowledge from ignorance.

This division is overcome when learning is prefigured by an intellectual regime fore-grounded by what we may call a 'poetic labour of translation' (Rancière, 2009a: 10). This means that, whereas before the distances between the poles of knowledge were vast and almost ungraspable, here the distance, although not abolished, is assumed as simply 'the normal condition of any communication' (Rancière, 2009a: 10). Learning is therefore simply a matter of practicing one's own ability to translate the sensible world. The equality of this model stems from the basic assumption that we all learn the same

way, which expresses itself as a dialogue of translation and counter-translation of sensible stimuli. The capacity for intelligence is therefore equal and not separated by an artificial partitioning between types of intelligence (although specific manifestations of intelligence may represent different value). The visitor (artist) and poor, therefore, equally have the capacity to know their opposition. The role of the visitor like that of the schoolteacher or expert is therefore uncoupled from a position of fixed hierarchical mastery. For example the artist's position is not based on what knowledge is disseminated from his or her knowledge, but disseminated by way of their leading the ignoramus 'to venture into the forest of things and signs, to say what they have seen and what they think of what they have seen, to verify it and have it verified' (Rancière, 2009a: 11).

The model of intellectual equality therefore addresses the different potentialities of doing, seeing, and thinking, as they are manifest in an artist's activity from a position of verifying and having verified its visible signs. Learning ceases to be about learning from the artist's position, or, conversely, about the artist learning from the poor. Instead what becomes important is that artistic labour, as a question of 'what happened', is addressed through what one sees and thinks for oneself. It is from this perspective that the 'The Emancipated Spectator' approaches a radical shift in the presuppositions that underpin the artist/spectator divide in the theatrical spectacle.[59] In particular, the division of knowledge that we are interested in here stems from the basic formulation of what Rancière calls 'the paradox of the spectator': simply meaning that 'there is no theatre without a spectator' (Rancière, 2009a: 2).[60] But the paradox is also concerned with the notion that while theatre requires the spectator in order to be theatre, the position of the

[59] The essential relationship between actor and spectator is established by Rancière to include, at its widest definition, any situation that places 'bodies in action before an assembled audience' (Rancière, 2009a: 2).

[60] When Rancière says 'there is no theatre without a spectator' he takes the point of view that this can include only a single person or a concealed person (Rancière, 2009a: 2). We may also think of the spectator then as virtual and physically 'absent'.

spectator is essentially a negative one. The assumption here is that the spectator occupies a position of ignorance in the theatrical process, and that this position corresponds to a place of passivity. The spectator/actor divide is hereby formed on a basic principle that the stage is the proper place of activity, while viewing is a passive state traditionally aligned with not-knowing (Rancière, 2009a: 2). At this point the discussion invariably becomes embroiled in a concern with critique of the spectacle, which encompasses whether or not theatre is 'bad' because it invites passivity, as Plato originally proposed, or whether it is positive, such as when conceived of as activating the audience as a kind of 'drama'.[61]

The idea of producing theatre without spectators therefore comes about by activating the passive relationship of spectatorship and transforming the spectator into an equal participant. The theatre of Saint-Simonian labour that we have already discussed might romantically be thought about in this context as an idea of a living community whose whole body is in action. We can progress this idea even further if we assume that theatre, by assembling people in a specific space and time (for example Ménilmontant on 1st July 1832), has the power to progress a standpoint from which they (the spectator) 'become aware of their situation' – as Rancière says following Brecht following Piscator (Rancière, 2009a: 6). However, the spectacle nevertheless remains an exteriority in the manner that Guy Debord describes it in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) as a practice dominated by vision (Debord: 23). Therefore, while the theatre without spectators may displace identities through an interchange of positions, this movement is only one of visiting without escape. But what remains important is that the exteriority of the sense does not necessarily translate to a passive reception.

[61] Drama is understood here to be: 'Theatre [as] the place where an action is taken to its conclusion by bodies in motion in front of living bodies that are to be mobilised.' (Rancière, 2009a: 3)

Rancière approaches these networks of connections from the viewpoint of assignments of knowledge. What he introduces is the idea of intellectual emancipation as a disruptive force, which reforms the relationship between actor and spectator by first questioning the *a priori* association between spectatorship and passivity. Intellectual emancipation therefore does away with the distinctions between active and passive because it identifies intelligence as being equal on both sides. It understands that both the actor and the spectator mutually occupy a process of venturing forth and verifying or having verified their thoughts in theatrical space. Here we are reminded once more of Aristotle's distinction of what it means to occupy a space of potentialities, for example the sense of sight occupying a place of being and not-being (seeing and not-seeing) as nevertheless an active sense regardless of whether it is operable in actuality or potentiality. Active and passive hereby designate only variations of potentialities of knowledge and ignorance. The spectator's transference from one state of being to the other still needs to be thought of as a mobilising of intelligence toward the attainment of knowledge. But now we can say that any point of distinction between the spectator and the actor is negated. The actor is not regarded by the spectator as instructing from a position of hierarchical knowing, but is accorded the same position of mobility in this system as the spectator. In fact, as Rancière insists, we are all spectators. Furthermore, '[b]eing a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity', rather, '[i]t is our normal situation' (Rancière, 2009a: 17).

What I would add to this is that the 'normal situation' is furthermore phantasmal. The equality of intelligence is fundamentally based on identifying a point of indistinction between the artist and the spectator. But as we have seen with the relation between the visitor and the poor, attempts to move from one position to the other will fail because the process of withdrawal is destructive. What is sought, then, is a moment of double negation that eliminates 'both the poor and their visitors [in order] to break the

circle of demand that its course reproduces indefinitely' (Rancière, 1989: 197). But this produces an untenable position. Therefore the process of intellectual emancipation, like the phantasm, identifies its points of indistinction by negation and affirmation. With the phantasm sense is determined by disavowal produced by the equation ~~sense-object~~ and ~~sense-perception~~. With intellectual emancipation activity and passivity are overcome by acknowledging the duplicitous role of actor and spectator, visitor and poor, as equally the situation of every human. In effect both regimes produce equality from a space of phantasmagorical vacuousness (~~activity~~ and ~~passivity~~).

Following this logic, two distances will be present in the distribution of artistic labour: the first can be identified between the artist and the spectator, the second instigated by what is inherent in the performance. The first distance corresponds to what we have just been discussing about the relationship between the actor and the spectator, and the schoolmaster and the ignoramus. The second distance refers to the spectacle's autonomous subsistence. Here a distance arises between the spectacle and both the artist and the spectator. It is autonomous insofar as it exists external to the idea of the artist (rendered sensible from the phantasm), and also insofar as it remains autonomous in itself from the spectator's sensible comprehension (Rancière, 2009a: 14). From our understanding of the first distance, which is imposed between the distinction of the artist and the spectator, we can ask what it is we learn from the artist's labour. Can we say, for instance, that the artist teaches us *their* labour as *their* knowledge? Or, rather, is it something that the spectator learns that the artist does not themselves know?

The second distance, that which is inherent in the performance of labour, connects the equality of intelligence and the immaterialisation of labour through what Lazzarato refers to as 'mass intellectuality' (see section 1.4), and what Marx called 'general intellect': indicating the degree to which 'general social knowledge has become *a direct*

force of production' (Marx, 1973: 706).[62] However, Marx's analysis of the degree to which the 'processes of social life have come under the control of the general intellect' can no longer simply be drawn as a direct line of connection between the formation of the 'powers of social production' and their insertion into the role of 'organs of social practice' and life (Marx, 1973: 706). Rather, today, the formation and insertion of the powers of social production into life follow multifarious directions that point to the broad changes in the superstructure of labour, which move increasingly toward making subjective thought autonomous as 'raw material'. The academic context of this thesis can be viewed within this process, as can be, as Nina Power proposes, academia in general (Power, 2010a).[63] In a manner akin to Rancière's intellectual emancipation, the academic space of knowledge captures the basic features of immaterial labour insofar as it is directly social work that is necessarily grounded on a relational awareness of affective outputs, consumption and communication: or more specifically, as Lazzarato would say, by occupying the role of the consumer/communicator that links the consumption of knowledge inextricably to the act of communicating it. The process of constructing and communicating the argument of this thesis, for example, is also a process of visiting and escaping a position of occupancy and consumption in the world of signs. Mine is not only a process of reading the paradigmatic shifts in art and labour, but in performing what unites them to the time of their presence, which is also my own time of presence. What the event necessarily imposes, however, is a distance that is instigated by what is inherent in the performance, namely that the 'ideological' product be rendered sensible in its own right.

[62] The concept of general intellect that Marx raises has notably been written on by Paolo Virno in his essay 'Notes on the General Intellect' published in *Marxism Beyond Marxism* (1996).

[63] Power's essay 'Axiomatic equality: Rancière and the politics of contemporary education' (2009) specifically elaborates on the relevance of Rancière's position of intellectual equality in academia. What she frames is the problem of enacting intellectual equality within the pedagogical situation in the University system in the UK, and taking into account the broader changes imposed by the immaterial structure of work and labour (Power, 2010a).

Take for example the (pseudo)events of education that the artist Nicoline Van Harskamp employs in her conferences and lectures. Events such as *Any other Business* (2009), billed as a conference on 'Communicative Excellence in Civil Society and Politics', is intended to 'help' organisations by offering models and strategies for communication and organisational psychology. However, although proposing to promote communicational excellence as a method for dissolving political antagonism, the conference in fact is a scripted and regulated breakdown of communication. What is elaborated by the actors inability to achieve 'communicative excellence' due to disturbances, their 'struggle to suppress their urge to act rather than talk' (Lütticken: 129), and the distancing of the spectators, encourages a point of disjuncture between the event-act and event-language of the performance: the event-act is specifically designed to break up its own system of communication. The art collective The Faculty of Invisibility approaches communicability and intelligibility in a different way but with a similar goal of transgressing the formats of social organisation. Founded in 2006 with *The Speech*, The Faculty of Invisibility invited artists to open departments within the Faculty relating to their own individual practices: these included the Department of Uncertainty, the Department of Haunting and the Department of Doubt. What these Departments present is an organisational psychology of artistic speech as an encounter with its own deferral and the uncertainty of its own communicability. Following the resignation of the Faculty in 2008, however, the collective has since been less an institution that establishes itself in terms of a definite place, continuity, or position of speech, and more a gesture of constituting and withdrawing itself. What Van Harskamp and The Faculty of Invisibility render sensible is their own distance to the immaterial tropes of communicability and intelligibility, and, as such, they express language at a point where it becomes autonomous from them.

This double constituting and withdrawing of artistic language, and the introduction of a disjuncture that divides the relation between act and its signification, is an important element in intellectual emancipation.[64] The withdrawal of authority over the voice is here what allows for the artist to present the event of their labour as distinct from themselves: to alienate speech (or the signification of artistic activity in general) from the artist and, conversely, the artist from their speech. The introduction of these distances – the first between the artist and the spectator, the second instigated by the performance – is what in Rancière's logic of emancipation culminates in the introduction of what he calls the 'third thing'. This is the thing that is always interposed between the two other points of distance (the teacher and the ignoramus, or the artist and the spectator) through which they can verify a common ground of learning. The 'third' thing is necessarily alien to both parties, otherwise it would give preference to one or the other, but also must stand as something to which they can both refer to as a common point of verification. For Joseph Jacotot (in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*) this 'third thing' was a bilingual book (a copy of *Télémaque*) that formed the minimal link of the thing in common and made transmission possible. The same applies to the performance of artists.

> It is not the transmission of the artist's knowledge or inspiration to the spectator. It is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect.
>
> (Rancière, 2009a: 15)

The 'third thing' is the performance of artistic labour as it assumes an autonomous meaning in signification: autonomous from the artist and autonomous from

[64] This locus of continual detachments, or rather interruptions, could be described with Deleuze & Guattari's term 'schizzes' (in French *schize*): a term based on the Greek verb *schizein* meaning 'to split', 'cleave' or 'divide' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:43).

the spectator. In relation to Foucault's identification of the simulacrum, the multiplicity of the artist's labour as a sign becomes its own referent, an event without event: the ~~event~~ (see section 2.4). The folding and unfolding of knowledge through the ~~event~~ as it is translated and verified are then to be understood as a common space of subsistence between the artist and the spectator which disavows the sovereignty of signs. Foucault's designation of the phantasm as simulacrum hereby becomes the thing in common. *As such the transmission of artistic labour does not properly belong to anyone, but subsists as its own ~~event~~: both a* visiting *to the improper and an escape from the proper.*

The signification of labour then stands between the spectator and the artist as a mutual point of reference on which to base the process of verifying the sensible. As the 'third thing', artistic labour then allows both parties to form an interrelated sensible understanding by interpreting what it designates about a state of things, what it expresses about the states of things, what it signifies as an affirmation of the interrelation, and how it has meaning. In order to designate, express, signify, and mean equally, however, artistic labour must overcome the division of the stage (the artist) and the auditorium (the spectator). The transmission of artistic labour therefore requires a space to subsist independently of the artist's biography, of this or that artist's labour in particular, and transmit only itself as a vacuous signifier in its own right. Furthermore, this transferral over to another site, to being a thing that is simultaneously alienated and common, necessarily exists outside of a physical place. Activities aimed at exploding the constraints of theatre by taking possession of the street, for instance, only allow us to go so far in breaking down the barriers of stage and auditorium by enforcing active participation.[65] A sensible redistribution of labour occupations, knowledge, time and space, however, requires more than a dislocation from the ordering of places, it requires

[65] As Rancière notes: 'in theatre, in front of a performance, just as in a museum, school or street, there are only ever individuals plotting their own paths in the forest of things, acts and signs that confront and surround them.' (Rancière, 2009a: 16)

a dislocation of knowledge. The project of intellectual emancipation here conjoins with the distribution of the sensible insofar as both share a process mediated by a point of dissensual dis-identification. What we contemplate in the spectacle of artistic labour is no longer 'the activity [we] have been robbed of' (Rancière, 2009a: 7), but the activity we have yet to make our own potentiality.

It is at this point that the ~~event~~ of labour requires deciphering in order to make of it our own potentiality. Over the next sections I will show this process in two alternative movements that, although inverse in their trajectories, present a single domain of making what is mute speak. First, through Sierra I will aim to disclose the conscious procedures of artistic labour in unconscious production, moving what is obscure into clarity. Secondly, I will then take the opposite path with Nauman, and seek the unconscious production evident in his conscious procedures of labouring on his ranch in New Mexico (in *Setting a Good Corner*): a path that leads from the clear back to the obscure.

3.4 *Labour's phantasmagoric hieroglyph (Santiago Sierra)*

Faced with the hieroglyph of artistic labour, we face the task of deciphering a signifier of labour that is mute. Insofar as the ~~event~~ of labour is alienated from both the artist and the spectator, and yet common to both in order to attain the place of the 'third' thing, translating the ~~event~~ requires making the obscure clear. The distinction between speech and mute speech can be simply illustrated. Speech (living speech) teaches and directs according to the knowledge of the orator, who persuades and leads an order of knowledge according to their knowledge. The word, on the other hand, is a mute speech. It is capable of both simultaneously speaking and keeping silent, 'that both knows and does not know what it is saying' (Rancière, 2009b: 33). Furthermore, being inscribed, the word cannot speak any differently than it does: it cannot choose not to speak, or

whom to speak to in the same way that living speech can. A similar distinction can be drawn between the living labour of the artist and the mute speech of artistic labour as it becomes the hieroglyph: namely an aesthetic signifier.

To give an example of this mute status I would like to consider the occupation of the Spanish artist Santiago Sierra. The series of artworks that I am particularly interested in here are his remunerated activities: such as *8 people paid to remain inside cardboard boxes* (1999), *24 Blocks of Concrete Constantly Moved During a Day's Work by Paid Workers* (1999), *The wall of a gallery pulled out, inclined 60 degrees from the ground and sustained by 5 people* (2000), and *A person paid for 360 continuous working hours* (2000). The nature of these remunerated activities, with Sierra's typically self-explanatory titles, vary from workers being paid to remain seated inside boxes, secluded behind a brick wall, or labour at menial tasks such as pushing concrete blocks around a gallery or supporting a wall. What Sierra purposely displaces in all of these tasks though is the relation between the visibility and invisibility of labour and, also, the visibility and disappearance of the labourer (including his own artistic labour). Consider *24 Blocks of Concrete Constantly Moved During a Day's Work by Paid Workers* (see *Fig.5*). This performance in ACE Gallery in Los Angeles, July 1999, involved ten workers of Mexican or Central-American origin who were employed to constantly move 24 two-ton blocks of concrete around the gallery over the course of a day's work. The resulting exhibition, after the day's work had been competed unseen, exposed only the results of the labour, including damage to the gallery, disposed food and drink containers and the simple metal bars they were given as tools for moving the blocks.

Fig.5 Santiago Sierra, '24 Blocks of Concrete Constantly Moved During a Day's Work by Paid Workers' (1999)

First, we should understand that the term hieroglyph, insofar as we talk of social hieroglyphs, is a term taken from Marx and refers to his review of the relations that take place between people – for whom Marx meant producers of commodities. When, for instance, products are exchanged they are placed in qualitative relations of exchange-value. But behind the qualitative value of exchange what is also being placed in relation is a qualitative measure of the human labour-power contained in those products. As such the product is hieroglyphic insofar as it does not parade itself as a descriptor of what it actually is (human labour). Social hieroglyphics therefore designate the process by

which this exchange is hidden from us, or hides the true nature of the social exchange we enter into. It is that which lies beneath the surface of commodities and whose overt exchange is enacted in our stead. By way of this conversion process through the notion of value, artistic labour as a product is similarly only made visible and aware to us as a social hieroglyph.

In *24 Blocks of Concrete Constantly Moved During a Day's Work by Paid Workers* Sierra overtly plays with the visibility of the hidden process of exchange. The first point I wish to raise is how Sierra separates the aesthetic space of the viewer from the living space of labour. Both inhabit one and the same space, but in dividing the labour of production from the theatre of labour, he effectively reduces the workers to hieroglyphs. Ross Birrell's essay on Sierra, 'Meaningless Work – Art as Abstract Labour; notes on Santiago Sierra and the Political Economy of Man under Capitalism' (2004), comments on this point. He says that the remunerated workers 'simulate the conditions of manual work in an aesthetics of labour' (Birrell: 99). The simulation of the conditions of labour is here what stands as hieroglyph for the condition of de-humanisation in the commodity of labour. Sierra indeed foregrounds his role in this process and goes so far as to refer to those he employs as commodities like any other artistic material. He is quoted as having said: 'I treat them as objects in coherence to their availability in the market' (Birrell: 108). Furthermore, in paying these workers for a 'day's work' Sierra maintains his coherence with the market of exchange, which, like all 'good' capitalist enterprises, is defined by a monetary interaction.[66] But precisely because Sierra does not provide his participants with 'social purpose' his activities nevertheless fail to function within the normal tradition of production to 'articulate stable individual or collective identities' (Birrell: 98). It is this unproductive quality of

[66] Although Sierra always pays his workers in their local currency the value is always converted into American Dollars, the general currency of the international art world. Money, for Sierra, therefore stands in the normative place of mediating human interaction, but does so specifically by tying the art world to the capitalist 'reification of the general form of [human] existence' (Birrell: 101).

Sierra's remunerated activities that Birrell focuses on, including how these workers, through the repetitive, alienating, and often degrading tasks that Sierra employs them for, operate to intensify economic repression. In contrast, rather than focus on the economic repression that is raised and intensified in Sierra's activities through unproductive labour, I want to focus on how in objectifying labour Sierra in fact not only stimulates the conditions of labour in an aesthetic context, but like the distinction between living speech and the word, labour is split between living performance and mute speech.

What the spectator engages with, I propose, is not the living force of the workers – who would, in person, be able to communicate knowledge as *their* knowledge – but with knowledge transcribed on the space and the detritus of labour. This brings me to my second point: that the forced scission between the living space of labour and the hieroglyph in *24 Blocks of Concrete Constantly Moved During a Day's Work by Paid Workers*, as between social hieroglyphs and the true nature of social exchange, is expressed by the destructive act of the workers on the space of exhibition. Sierra expressly asked the workers to proceed with the day's work without regard to any resulting damage caused to the gallery space. As such the traces of labour, the hieroglyphs that would mark the presence of labour, are based on damage done to the floors and walls. The social exchange that takes place between the workers and the spectators who view the remnants of their labour is, therefore, mediated by a hieroglyph that itself conjoins labour with destruction.[67]

[67] The association between artistic labour and its mediation by traces of destruction references a tradition of auto-destructive art practices. The artist whose hieroglyphic traces are perhaps closest to those employed by Sierra in *24 Blocks of Concrete Constantly Moved During a Day's Work by Paid Workers* is Lucio Fontana, with his series of *Concetto spaziale* (Spatial Concept or slash series) pieces. *Anilines, cuts and holes on canvas* (1958), for instance, where the artist's activity is simply designated by the holes or slashes he leaves on the surface of monochrome paintings.

To understand the truth of the hieroglyph we need to get, as Marx put it, 'behind the secret of our own social products' (Marx, 1999: 45). Behind the aesthetic hieroglyph, Rancière proposes, lies the 'phantasmagoric dimension of the true' (Rancière, 2006: 34). The true expressed as a phantasmagoric dimension of the hieroglyph, I propose, means that proper signification is concealed in the hieroglyph behind the process of disavowal. The hieroglyph does not negate what a signifier is emblematic of, but in giving equality to every sign a process of levelling takes place. As aesthetic thought proclaims, 'everything speaks' (Rancière, 2009b: 34). Here there is no hierarchical order of representation in the hieroglyphic sign, but instead everything is seen to have a trace of history that can be translated and transcribed by the archaeology of signs and by the transcribers of signs. Our interrogation of the historical store of signs reconstitutes new imaginings from what is a remnant, a fossil, a hieroglyph or a vestige. Any distinctions of 'same' or 'similar' no longer apply to our reading because these distinctions in no way describe what can now be made to say or signify anew. Everything speaks means that everything speaks *equally.* Furthermore, each sign, we understand from Rancière, must be 'torn from its obviousness in order to become a hieroglyph' (Rancière, 2006: 34). In being torn what is divided is the ordered equation of the S/s relationship. Instead the sign becomes the trace of a sign, composed of signifier + signified + the barrier (/). Furthermore, the phantasmatic function in this process makes the hieroglyph the 'trace of the true' because the relation between the signifier, the signified and the barrier, in phantasmagorical terms, is really an equation that should be expressed ~~signifier~~ and ~~signified~~. Therefore, the hieroglyph does not obviously convey itself as a descriptor because the established order of the signifier/signified relationship has been torn apart. Yet it is this tearing apart of the process of signification that allows us to glimpse what lies 'behind' social labour distributions.

Uncovering the true in the traces of destruction is expressed by Rancière as a process of deciphering and re-writing the 'signs of history written on things' (Rancière, 2009b: 34).[68] The emblematic function of hieroglyphic constructions is therefore to position the sign outside of its ordered relations so that it can be something that crosses history and fiction, or, in the terms of the phantasm, the real and the unreal. This is precisely what occurs in the Los Angeles gallery space where Sierra has ten workers labour, unseen, and then invites spectators to view the vestiges of their production/destruction. The sign that crosses history and fiction here is the trace of the worker's marks left on walls and floors, and even in the detritus of metal bars, drinks cups and food wrappers. The sign of their labour is, on one hand, historical in the way that we think of artefacts. On the other hand, labour is also fictive because outside the hierarchies of a representative order the position of truth is given to each detail and each detail is autonomous: therefore they can be read as 'the elements of a mythology or phantasmagoria' (Rancière, 2009b: 37).[69] The aesthetic space of production facilitates this interchange between fiction and history because, like the theatre, it offers – as I have previously quoted from Rancière – 'a stage where opposites never cease to interchange themselves' (Rancière, 2003: 121). Like the impossible movement of the visitor visiting and the poor escaping from one set of ordered relations to another that are not their own, Sierra traps the futility of these movements in the space of exhibition. The workers occupy the gallery, and as such they occupy an aesthetic terrain of visibility. But in

[68] In particular Rancière places his thought in the literary context of Balzac's *The Wild Ass's Skin*. From the beginning pages of Balzac's novel we are given a specific example of how literature assumes the task of re-writing the signs of history and describes 'the emblem of a new mythology, a phantasmagoria formed entirely from the ruins of consumption' (Rancière, 2009b: 34). In the protagonist Cuvier, the geologist, Rancière sees 'a new idea of the artist ... defined as one who travels through the labyrinths and crypts of the social world', from which '[h]e gathers the vestiges and transcribes the hieroglyphs painted in the configuration of obscure or random things' (Rancière, 2009b: 35).

[69] This position is only made tenable by the aesthetic revolution's abolition of thought constrained by a representational regime of thinking about the arts. The aesthetic revolution, as Rancière defines it, is what then brings to an end the 'ordered set of relations between what can be seen and what can be said, knowledge and action, activity and passivity' (Rancière, 2009b: 21). According to this regime we can then posit history and fiction as coming under the same regime of meaning whereby everything is transmutable to the sign.

separating their living visibility from the spectator, their escape (through the theatre) is merely a visitation. Conversely the spectators (visitors) visit the poor but encounter only the shadow of an event that they are participants of. They can translate and verify it for themselves and learn something of the labour that transpired, but they do not learn the worker's knowledge. In effect the aesthetic space of the gallery/theatre has become the hieroglyph that mediates an interchange of visiting and escaping. But it also stands between the two as what is alien and common.

In the hieroglyph we therefore no longer approach artistic labour as a question of the artist's relation to labour or as a relation to visiting or escaping certain occupations, times or spaces. All of these predicates are now transmutable to signifying traces. How the spectator forms a sense of artistic labour from 'the ruins of consumption' (Rancière, 2009b: 34) will then take place without being afraid of pre-existing arrangements of ordered relations. In short, the hieroglyph of artistic labour arrives at the one who translates it as an event without event. The transcribers of hieroglyphs therefore engage with emblems that are historic and bare witness to history, but which represent that history with equal footing given to every symbol. It is the reversible task of aesthetics then to transmit the truth of these signs and their phantasmatic elements. But we should remember that this is not merely a process of decoding. More specifically we are talking about a process of re-transcription based on the idea that everyone is a spectator and an actor in the field of signs. Everyone transcribes, verifies, and transmits these phantasmagoria based on their own unique position. *The artist's role in this process is to distribute an equality of signs and an equality of potentiality: to give the insignificant an equal place of visibility in social relations. The phantasmagoric truth of each sign is not based on what is said, but much more so in the potentially of what can be said.* Each hieroglyph tells a story and is capable of signification. In the traces of damage inflicted

by Sierra's workers moving concrete blocks around a gallery, the story of a day's labour has not only become aesthetic, labour has become a phantasmagoric truth.

3.5 *The artist (Sierra) and his poor*

I would like to consider the role of the artist here in correspondence to the role of the visitor. As I have already said on this matter, the visitor is named such because they define a process of visiting a space and time that is not their own. Visiting, as such, requires also a subject and a time and a space to visit that is Other. This would be the poor. However what is most important here is not simply the relation between, for instance, Sierra and the migrant workers who comprise his subject matter, but the relationship between visiting and escape. Insofar as the poor are defined by those who are 'trying to escape' through the reverse pathway of the visitor (Rancière, 1989: 194), the two movements visiting and escaping are established as the double movement of emancipation. The escape/visit of the artist is something quite different in context to that set out by Rancière in *The Nights of Labour*, yet surprisingly similar in effect. The collision of bodies and things, times and spaces that constitute the causes of each event are similarly separated by histories and biographies, but fundamentally each (the visitor and the poor) find their effect in corresponding to time and space as 'nonrepresentative individuals'.

Sierra's performances are all too often associated with bringing to account the dreams (although failed and futile) of modernity and globalisation. Certainly his projects question the validity of the capitalist idea and dream of labour: notably evident through his practice, which balances on a precarious space between 'spectacle and consumption, between productivity and nihilism, between art and politics' (Sierra, 2002b: 13). But what is left out of this interpretation is an understanding of his specifically untenable

position in relation to the 'suffering worker', with whom his time is nevertheless employed. The transactions that pass between Sierra and the disenfranchised individuals who are his subject are not at all a straightforward process of remunerating people for their labour, even aside from the false accusations of exploitation on his part. Rather, the particular relationship Sierra exemplifies is a disillusioned shadow of the Saint-Simonian one. Here the possibility of any educational mission or of erasing the distinction between Sierra as the visitor to the immigrant workers, prostitutes, and destitute individuals, namely the poor that are his usual employees, is already acknowledged by him as a fallacy. Once the activity is over, each return to his or her own world as either the 'worker' or the 'artist'. As such we can say that there is no escape from either occupation. Any hope that the enfranchising activity might displace one or the other, or even both from a sedimented belonging to their original world in order to enter a shared space of equality is never realised.

Sierra's performances are an admission of this futility. To this end he purposely operates without engaging any dream of escape (to emancipation) in his work. However that is not to say that the visitor/poor relationship and the movements of visiting and escaping are not engaged. More properly what we can say of Sierra is that his activity moves the Saint-Simonian theatre of labour into a 'carnival of reality' (Sierra, 2002b: 15). This does not mean that he destroys the hopes of emancipation by brutally returning them to (capitalist) reality, but by striving to achieve two things: first, acknowledge the impossibility of attaining a middle-ground between the polemic distributions of occupations, and second, bring the mediation of labour into visibility – or what Rancière would call providing 'a public stage for the "private" principles of work' (Rancière, 2006: 43). Therefore, he in fact pursues the potentially traumatic realisation that we need, in general, to acknowledge our own perspective as visitors.

Consider for example another of Sierra's projects, *586 Hours of Work*: which involved the construction of a 400cm x 400cm x 400cm cement cube in Plaza de las Veletas, Cáceres, Spain in April 2004 (see *Fig.6*). The cube took 586 hours of visible labour to make, and once completed this total number of the workers' hours was boldly displayed in metallic letters on its side. If we take Sierra at his word when he says that the general intention of his practice is to illustrate 'the conditions of your life, which you don't want to see' (Sierra, 2002a), we could ask if he is addressing the workers who laboured for 586 hours, or if he is addressing a universal humanity? Between the artist's labour, the workers' labour, and the community to which the private time of labour is elevated to public theatre, there is an interrelation taking place between the visitor and the poor, Sierra and his workers, and also between Sierra, his workers and the spectator. Therefore what arises is the problematic of assigning to whom and in view of whom this work is addressed?

Fig.6 Santiago Sierra, '586 Hours of Work' (2004)

Undoubtedly the emblazoning of the total number of hours laboured on the cube is a hieroglyph that speaks to us of the labourers, whose traces of time is visualised by the object in space. Yet this reading is confused by Sierra's description of the work that states a 'number of extra hours spent performing unforeseen tasks were not to be included' (Sierra, 2004). The paradox, which I am sure is not lost on Sierra, is that while his sculpture tries to make one type of invisible labour visible, what remains unseen as labour alludes to the visibility of Sierra himself. Sierra nevertheless exists in the mute presence of *586 Hours of Work*, but he has made his own visibility invisible. It is as if the actor has given over his stage to the poor. Nevertheless, his monument to labour still describes a disjointed gap between the artist and his poor for much the same reasons as the workers who participated in the temple building at Ménilmontant in 1832: they have no choice in the role they play or the position they occupy in the spectacle, Sierra does. However, the choice of aesthetic visibility that Sierra makes allows the workers' labour to be inoculated through the visibility of the theatre precisely by demonstrating their position. What is therefore at stake in Sierra's cement cube is not what happened as labour (because the workers play themselves), but an articulation of what and who are visible *through* labour.[70] The theatrical event of artistic labour, like the significance of the metallic letters '586 HORAS DE TRABAJO' placed on the outside of *586 Hours of Work*, refer to the 'minimal thing in common' between two positions of knowledge.

I would like to draw two comparisons here with Sierra's monument: the first is Thomas Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* (2002) in *Documenta XI*, the second Piero Manzoni's *Scultura Vivente*, or *Living Sculpture* (1961). Firstly, Hirschhorn's approach to the problematic of what and who are visible in and through artistic labour operates by

[70] Deleuze & Guattari express this problematic with the production of what they call 'monuments' in *What is Philosophy?* (1991): this is where Rancière takes up their argument in the essay 'Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community' (2008). On the relation between the artist and their monument we read: 'Art undoes the triple organisation of perceptions, affections, and opinions in order to substitute a monument composed of percepts, affects, and blocks of sensations that take the place of language' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994: 176).

incorporating a structure of reorganising perceptions in a similar manner to Sierra. His *Bataille Monument* not only deals with the distribution of knowledge (about Bataille, of whom Hirschhorn claims to be a 'fan'), but also about the distribution of visibility. Rancière's equality of intelligence is here placed in direct association with the equality of visibility: raising a question of who are and who are not visible or visited in art, but also about the quality of the relations that are made in producing visibility. Hirschhorn's monument, located in Nordstadt, a suburb of Kassel several miles away from the main Documenta venues, consisted of three installations that included a library of books and videos (organised around five Bataillean themes: word, image, art, sex, and sport), an installation of information about Bataille's life and work, and a television studio. These shacks were also accompanied by a bar run by a local family, a sculpture of a tree, and a lawn surrounded by two housing projects. To reach the *Bataille Monument* Documenta visitors also had to 'participate' by securing a lift from a Turkish cab company contracted to ferry them to and from the site.

If we read the monument according to Deleuze & Guattari's problematic production of what they call 'monuments' in *What is Philosophy?* (1994), we could say that the putting into language of the artist's articulation occurs through the twisting of language, or what they call a vibration or a rending of language (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994: 176). Both Hirschhorn and Sierra twist and rend in their respective ways the perception of the visitor. Hirshhorn achieves this by bringing the art-goer and the non art-goer, the visitor and the poor, into (antagonistic) communication by making visible the *distance of communication* between the usual visitors of art (Documenta's art-goer) and those not normally included in this demographic (the people of the suburb of Nordstadt). Furthermore, the traditional precepts of art's language are brought into contention as a question over to whom and in what way it speaks (for example of Art Fairs and Biennales, the philosophy of Bataille, and art-goers in general).The artist's

monument, therefore, does not commemorate or celebrate something that happened but embodies the event through the mediation of relational antagonisms created between the 'visitors' and the 'poor' and those who normally occupy these roles. In contrast Sierra's mediation of labour through the space, time and measure of workers' labour – for instance through the detritus and destructive force of labour in *24 Blocks of Concrete Constantly Moved During a Day's Work by Paid Workers*, or with the disjointed presence of (in)visible labour in *586 Hours of Work* – more specifically twists and rends the *distance of occupations* into a shared, although disjointed, aesthetic space.

Secondly, Manzoni's *Living Sculpture*, which involved Manzoni signing his name with a marker pen on a nude female model, offers a comparison to Sierra's signing of the workers' labour ('586 HORAS DE TRABAJO') as a sign of his own position of labour. The marking and exhibiting of others by Manzoni specifically enacts an artistic gesture that turns the model into a hieroglyph (as opposed to the aim of relational aesthetics which is to make the spectator a co-author). For Manzoni the participant as hieroglyph becomes a parody to serial production. Similarly, Sierra's signature on the labour or body of those he remunerates (literally in the case of his tattoo pieces including *line of 30 cm tattooed on a remunerated person*, 1998, and *250 cm line tattooed on 6 paid people*, 1999) demarcates an antagonistic engagement with the territory of capitalist production. But the trace of Manzoni's signature and Sierra's various forms of remuneration both also testify to traces of Manzoni's and Sierra's own labour. What Manzoni effects on the body (his own and others) is a visual mechanism that exposes the common condition of the body and biological life, both of art (including his 'Poor') and of the artist. The surfaces of representation, single and continuous, are therefore broken or exposed as an 'open condition': which, as Germano Celant put it, means that 'the artistic process is endless in Manzoni', insofar as he affects an eternal

return to biological life (such as Manzoni's famous *Merda d'artista* or *Artist's Shit*, 90 cans of faeces 'Produced by Piero Manzoni' in May 1961) (Celant, 1991: 18).

What Manzoni intensifies is the tension of art with life, what Francisco Calvo Serraller calls an 'overextreme tension caused by subordinating "saying" to "being" and "living"' (Celant, 1991: 38). Sierra affects a more brutal realisation than Manzoni. What is starkly realised in his remunerated activities is that, as Sierra himself has said, 'You can make people do whatever you want if you pay the money. These are the working conditions in the whole world' (Birrell: 94). As such, tension is made 'overextreme' in his actions – stressing what Claire Bishop calls 'relational antagonism' (Bishop, 2004: 79) – precisely because he does not aim to change these conditions, but because he takes on the important task of highlighting the (complicit) participation of his participants, himself, and the spectator: to which the hieroglyph testifies. Hirschhorn in a similar way makes complicit the role of artists and art-spectators in the un-changing conditions of what and whom art addresses and the quality of that address. Manzoni offers an interesting comparison to Sierra, though, because he expands the 'linguistic horizon of the artistic subject' by bringing together the oppositions of the 'living' being that is produced as a surface of signs and the human biological dimension (like shit in *Merda d'artista*, or breath in *Fiato d'Artista* also known as *Artist's Breaths*, 1960). *The artist's monument to labour here becomes a passageway between visibility and its loss, identity and dis-identification. What it testifies to, however, is that the two movements of visiting and escaping only coincide in the shared similarity of their aim to visit and escape their oppositions.*

If we break down Sierra's hieroglyph and the 'carnival of reality' we expose what Rancière expresses in *The Philosopher and His Poor* (2003) as a trajectory leading to the realisation of the 'art of becoming *historical agents*' (Rancière, 2003: 121). What

Rancière means by this is that historical agents escape the burden of bearing social relations *simply*: that the misfortune of 'the simple "bearers" of social relations', he tells us, is 'not [their] being unaware of real conditions but of not being *equal* to what they bare' (Rancière, 2003: 121). The shift that Rancière proposes, and which we see in the activities of Sierra, is activated in the relationship between the visitor (the artist) and the poor whereby each engages with a duplicitous position: a position that locates them as both opposition and their own identity. This means that the poor learn to not just bear the social relations that define the distribution of labour, but become equal to the divisions that determine their position in social relations. Still there is no middle ground between the polemic positions of occupations (the visitor and the poor), but through 'the art of performing on a stage where opposites never cease to interchange themselves' (Rancière, 2003: 121) the poor and the visitor at least realise their potentiality as visitor.

The workers of Paris who participated in the Saint-Simonian temple building testify to one method for this interchange of oppositions to occur. The result is that the causal sequences of actions are disrupted from their necessity, functionality, or plausibility, and torn from a sedimented arrangement of social relations and placed in a free arrangement of signs. What the Saint-Simonian apostles undertook in the nineteenth-century was therefore a trip through a landscape of proletariat labour where the topography of spaces and times of labour became an interrelation of oppositions. Such a topology necessarily includes 'the physiology of social circles [and] the silent expression of bodies' (Rancière, 2006: 37). The artist undertakes his trip in a different way because it is directed not at making the theatrical practical, but directed at an aesthetic undertaking for which fiction and theatricality are already elements of its own practicality. The importance of moving to visit the space of opposition, a space that does not belong to the artist, however, is also a movement of escaping. '[T]he question of the actor', Rancière proposes, 'does not revolve around the art of showing but the art of

living' (Rancière, 2003: 121). Counter-posed to the previous comments of Francisco Calvo Serraller that Manzoni creates tension between art and life by subordinating 'saying' to 'living', Rancière posits that 'showing' (or saying) is already a question of living. The distinction here is based on a division, on one side, of the art of living which is associated with the poor, while, on the other side, the art of showing and the aesthetic regime, which defines the occupation of the artist. As with much of his philosophical itinerary on art and politics, the project of identifying the relation between the visitor and the poor, exemplified by *The Philosopher and His Poor*, here revolves around the Platonic admonition that workers do 'nothing else' than what is proper to his or her place in the system of social relations determined by occupations. But against the idea that 'every citizen of a well-regulated community is assigned a single job which he has to do' (*Republic*: 406c-e), Rancière proposes, through the visitations of Marx, Sartre and Bourdieu to the poor (as well as his own in *The Nights of Labour*), that the actor (visitor/artist) always already concern themselves with the poor in order to constitute themselves as other. Sierra can similarly be included in this category of visitors. By visiting the poor he not only introduces the private space-time of workers' labour to the stage – where 'opposites never cease to interchange themselves' (Rancière, 2003: 121) – but also utilises the stage in order to engage in an interchange with his own opposites. *In order to move past showing to living, visiting to escaping, and in order to become equal to the social relations that they bear, the artist therefore needs to engage with the living life (and living labour) of the poor.*

3.6 *The artist (Bruce Nauman) and his voiceless-voice*

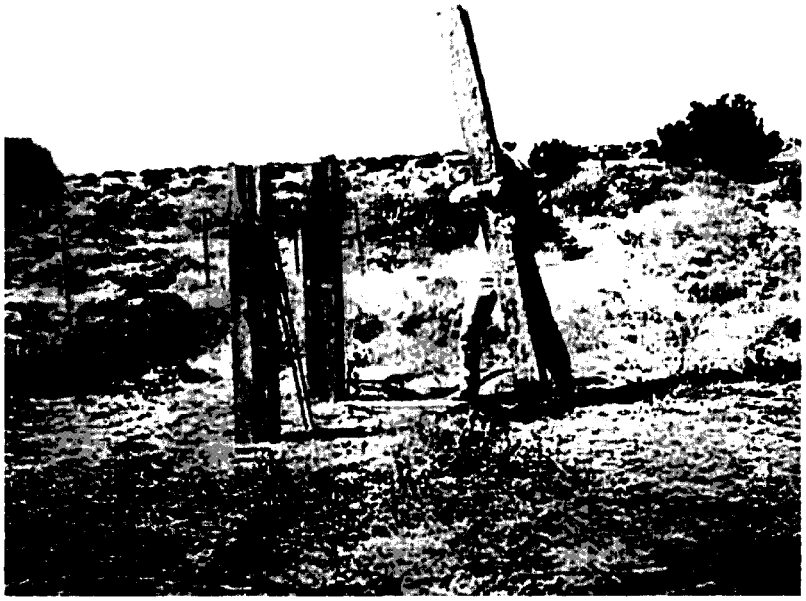
Translating artistic labour means piecing together a topology of labour from the causal sequences of actions that have been disrupted from their necessity, functionality, or

plausibility, and placed in a free arrangement of signs. Another alternative is to take the reverse path and locate only the unconscious production present in the procedures of conscious artistic labour. Rather than move from the obscurity of the ~~event~~ to the clear identification of labour, we can move toward the obscure and allow it to speak without translation or verification. This second path brings us to a form of mute speech which seeks the un-thought in thought. The operation of this movement is described to us by Rancière as soliloquy: 'speaking to no one and saying nothing but the impersonal and unconscious conditions of speech itself' (Rancière, 2009b: 39). This, we understand, is an unconscious discourse that, rather than expressing the thoughts of its characters, expresses a confrontation with nihilism. Rather than focusing on the traces of truth that can be revealed through the sensible materiality of signs and language, it engages the meaninglessness of a causal logic that attributes choices as means to ends. By uncoupling the traces of things from a form of logic that gives meaning to such choices we encounter something naked and bare: the thing-in-itself.

I will set the scene for our encounter with the thing-in-itself through Nauman's film *Setting a Good Corner (Allegory and Metaphor)* (see *Fig.7*). Over the course of an hour the film portrays Nauman labouring on his ranch in New Mexico. He is in a field setting a fence post in the ground. In the end he stands back and admires the efforts of his labour, having produced the corner section of a field boundary from which a gate will eventually hang. The different traces we can pick out of Nauman in this film, such as Nauman as labourer and ranch owner, Nauman as artist, Nauman as image, and even through the written words that are given as a prologue and an epilogue to the film, we encounter potentialities that offer different possibilities for thinking about doing and seeing. In short, we are forced to recalculate the value of truth we have placed in 'what happened'. In the words of Rancière, '[t]he real must be fictionalised in order to be thought' (Rancière, 2006: 38). In order to think 'labour', Nauman's film therefore plays

with this balance between fiction and testimony, between 'what happened' as a truth and the 'what could happen' of potentiality, in order to open up the signifiers of labour to a freely associating complex of signs. Faced with this dislocation of signs we must reconstitute our understanding of a seemingly linear event.

Fig.7 Bruce Nauman, 'Setting a Good Corner (Allegory & Metaphor)' (1999)



In the chapter 'Is History a Form of Fiction' (in *The Politics of Aesthetics*) Rancière raises precisely the kind of relationship that *Setting a Good Corner* explores by way of a separation between an artist's occupation and an 'economy of communal occupations' (Rancière, 2006: 35). The defining feature of this separation arises between fiction and lies, or rather between 'the logic of fiction and the logic of facts'. The artist's occupation consists of a path toward its end purpose that is played-out in a determined space time. Nauman's activity in this film is determined by the place of his ranch and the time of a specific activity that actually needed doing. The fiction of the filmic arrangement arises between the various actions of the artist to which a causal logic

confers an event. However, the logic of causality that proposes a direct line between cause and effect is erroneous because the boundary between history and fiction, or the logic of facts and the logic of fictions, is fundamentally blurred. The artist's labour circulates within signs that constantly confer upon it a new fictional reality in a way that the labour of an agricultural worker does not. Nauman therefore plunges labour into the order of signs and images whereby it takes on 'the silent language of things' and 'the coded language of images' (Rancière, 2006: 36) concurrent with theatre.

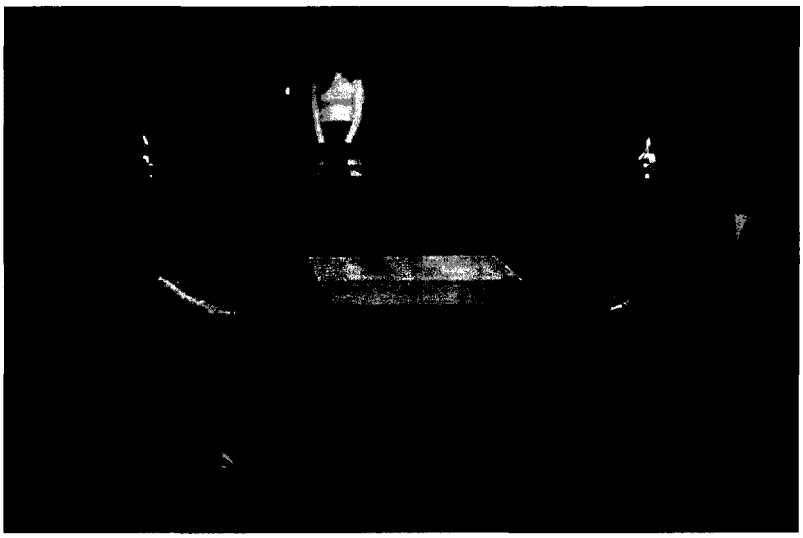
Whereas the mute speech of the hieroglyph brings us into an engagement with the 'life of the anonymous' sign, insofar as it describes the sign as uncoupled from an obvious order of history, the anonymity of the second mode of mute speech, the voiceless-voice, derives from its uncoupling from all identification. It is not transcribed in the traces of things but in what is anonymous about the voice itself. It is no mere coincidence that the parenthesised subtitle of Nauman's film is 'Allegory and Metaphor'. Metaphor denotes a process of transfer while allegory is the extension of metaphor: the carrying of metaphor and its extended transference of an instance of description that speaks otherwise than one seems to speak (Little, Fowler, & Coulson). Together, allegory and metaphor should be understood as a transference that takes place in the instance of a description that attaches to that which is not normatively appropriate, or can only be thought of figuratively in the modality of such speech. Metaphor is also what Agamben calls the paradigm of signification by improper terms and the dissociation of things from their own form (Agamben, 1993a: 142). Dissociation takes place here not only in terms of each object dissociated with its own appearance, but also 'each creature to its own body': or, I should say in the case of Nauman, each signifier of labour disassociated from its own signified.

What is expressed by the metaphor of Nauman's labour is not the solidification of its historiography, but the presence of a certain movement between negation and affirmation, which, I propose, corresponds to the double movement of the phantasm. The tension of this movement is then what properly constitutes the voice, the word, the sound, or the action that is then read, heard, and seen in artistic labour. For Nauman's labour the parenthesised title 'Allegory and Metaphor' not only highlights the fact that his labour is speaking figuratively when he performs the action of setting a post in the ground, but also that the figurative nature of this mimetic act is out-of-place. It denotes transference to, or a carrying of the meaning over to, an inappropriate or not usually appropriate surrogate object. The meaning itself is what becomes the nexus of Nauman's visiting and escaping signification. Whereas in Sierra's *24 Blocks of Concrete Constantly Moved During a Day's Work by Paid Workers* the 'third' thing that mediates knowledge is the site of the gallery (or workspace) as an aesthetic space of interchange, here the third thing is the artist themselves.

Another encounter I would like to discuss beside Nauman is the peculiar position of visiting Marina Abramović in *The Artist is Present* (2010) (see *Fig.9*). The performance consisted of Abramović sitting at a table in the Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium in the Museum of Modern Art in New York for the entire duration of her retrospective exhibition (14th March – 31st May). Visitors were encouraged to take the seat opposite her and engage the artist silently across the table. This performance was about that encounter: an encounter between the visitor and the artist mediated by their exchanged stares. Not only is this performance a spectacle of visibility, of seeing and being seen by the artist, but the affective quality of the encounter also offered the spectator the chance to 'enter the model' (Haidu: 158). The seated female form of Abramović, while recalling a long history of the labour of seated women in Western art, also highlights that even while being seated opposite the artist the visitor, mirroring her

pose, is still distinguished as formally separate from her by their visiting the artist: the model cannot, in fact, be entered. Even though they share a common action in their gesture and posture, the distinction is made by the very acknowledgement that it is the artist who is present. What Abramović makes visible is the alienating event in which the visitor and the object of visitation come together. She explicitly shows what Nauman does less overtly, that in order to attain a middle ground between the visitor and the poor the artist must alienate their own presence. It is the 'artist' not the person 'Marina Abramović' who is present for visitations from the spectator.

Fig.8 Marina Abramović, 'The Artist is Present' (2010)



Artistic labour is therefore both proper and improper to the time and the space of its working/performance. Read within the wider discourse of Rancière's theory, the role of his aesthetic distribution also assumes a project of emancipation. In particular the emancipatorary role is here produced by the introduction of what Rancière calls the 'proper-improper' as a challenge to order (Rancière, 2006: 86): much in the same way as the phantasm introduces a (vacuous) space of proper-improper (neither proper nor

improper, but ~~proper~~ and ~~improper~~) into the order of signification. Abramović and Nauman enter into this polemic situation because their labour describes not only artistic labour uncoupled from its normal order, but what is anonymous about the labour itself. Labour here is not a substitution of one thing for another: as Agamben tells us, 'in metaphor nothing is really substituted for anything else, because there is no proper term that the metaphorical one is called upon to replace' (Agamben, 1993a: 148). Instead the metaphor should be considered in relation to the realm of language as what the fetish is to the realm of things, namely a phantasmagorical vacuousness. Rancière likewise proposes that we understand the metaphor as much more than a 'simple ornament of language' (Rancière, 2010aa: 171). What he indicates is its proper use is in defining 'a passage or a transport.' As such, the passage or transport suggested by artistic labour does not define a substitution – of labour's proper signification with the obscurity of the improper – but a proper-improper mediation. From here it becomes a voiceless-voice, 'speaking to no one and saying nothing but the impersonal and unconscious conditions of speech itself' (Rancière, 2009b: 39).

The aesthetic regime operates in general to separate functions and destinations by placing them outside of anything but the aesthetic experience. Labour, for example, inserted as a thing of the aesthetic regime is subjected to two acts of separation: on one hand, to an order of the body, on the other, to an order of place (Rancière, 2009a: 69). The separation of order between body and place in Abramović's *The Artist is Present* occurs in framing herself as alienated by the aesthetic experience of being encountered. While Abramović presents herself as bodily present, a point of abstraction occurs in her presenting her presence as its own performance (which I will return to in the next chapter in terms of the 'pure gesture'). The visitor's complicit participation in this aesthetic regime of encountering her presence similarly frames them as 'other', and 'as an abstraction in itself' (Haidu: 161). What makes Abramović's performance and

Nauman's film into an encounter with labour from the position of the 'third thing' is that, by confirming the break from the representative regime, they present an unconscious discourse of labour that describes an exposure of language from a position of its unknown.[71] It is unknown because it denotes a position without a body as such, just the vacuousness of pure dissociation. *Here the aesthetic voice given to labour has not only been dissociated from the representational order, but been completely dis-identified from its bodily emission in the artistic event and left to engage with the naked forces of life.*

To understand the voiceless-voice in *Setting a Good Corner* as a testimony of labour linked to Nauman, therefore risks falling into a narrow definition of representation. To read Nauman's performance as representational testimony is to be deceived by the suggestion of its filmic sufficiency in representing labour. The fallacy is in believing that what the film frames follows as a causal logic. Instead we must remember, as Rancière's insists, that 'testimony and fiction come under the same regime of meaning' (Rancière, 2006: 37). An aesthetic critique that focuses on the causality of *Setting a Good Corner* as solidified representational markers – for example in the way the faintest mark on a sculpture is analysed, or the individual marks of a brush on a canvas – presents only an un-problematised articulation of the event that appears to give a totality of the whole. Yet behind this analysis there remain two mute voices: what is unsaid by these traces but contained therein as phantasmagorias of the true, and, as we have presently discussed, there is also the anonymous voiceless voice, which breaks still further from any connection to the artist and performance. Here, testimony runs up against a critical tension between history and fiction, the voice of the visitor and the

[71] In *The Aesthetic Unconscious* Rancière identifies the mute speech of the voiceless-voice as 'the thought of the "third person" who *haunts* the dialogue' (Rancière, 2009b: 39-40. My emphasis added). For the reasons I have already established in section 2.5, through a comparison of the terms phantasm (as a first person indicative) and spectre/ghost (as a third-person indicative), I propose that the voiceless-voice in artistic labour is phantasmal rather than a haunting.

voice of the poor against that of the anonymous. The role of self-testimony cannot then merely aim to prove the peculiarity of artistic labour, but must testify to the necessity of its own divisions and its nihilistic tendency of dis-identification.

The nihilism of signification is what allows for new relationships between appearances to operate not from a space that poses a new frame, but from the very space of 'free-play' that aesthetic efficacy demands: 'a paradoxical kind of efficacy that is produced by the very rupturing of any determinate link between cause and effect' (Rancière, 2009a: 63).[72] In particular when we investigate the voiceless-ness of an artist's performance we investigate what remains outside of a critique of the spectacle. The artistic hyper-theatre aims not only to critique the spectacle, but to do so from an optimised position whereby it affirms 'the idea that art has to provide us with more than a spectacle, more than something devoted to the delight of passive spectators, because it has to work for a society where everybody should be active' (Rancière, 2009a: 63). Because the indeterminacy of an aesthetic efficiency ruptures any link between the artistic cause and its effect, it offers art a certain 'free-play' with appearances without obligations (Rancière, 2009a: 64).[73] This freeing of appearance from representation allows us to then comprehend a perspective built on social disconnections rather than social interactions.

New sensory relationships still result here from an intertwining of frames of perception, between what is and is not visible. But these perceptions stem not from a

[72] Critchley makes reference to a space similar to the zone of free-play in speaking on the infinite demand of art, which he called the space of 'anarchic creation' (Critchley, 2010). In reference to the artist Philippe Parreno's film *The Boy From Mars* (2003), Critchley summarises anarchic creation as a space not for the creation of things, but where 'a frame is established which allows something to happen'. More specifically: 'Anarchic creation is the attempt to track material particulars in their course ... and to return authority from the author, the artist as author, to things in the happening of their truth' (Critchley, 2010). Conversely, because the phantasm is not concerned with measures of truth, but equally engages a space of truth and fallacy, I choose not to employ Critchley's term.

[73] In Chapter 4 I will expand on the division between the artist's cause and effect by proposing that artistic labour's relation between means and ends (action and production) should really be understood as 'means without end' (Agamben).

signification only of Nauman's labour, rather from the artist making a space without connections. Just as the equality of knowledge meant that each person was responsible for approaching their own knowledge in the forest of signs, so too can we say each artist is responsible for cracking open their own regime of perceiving labour. 'It does not involve an illusion', we are told, 'but is a matter of shaping a new body and a new sensorium for oneself' (Rancière, 2009a: 71). Only by Nauman affecting a re-distribution of his own idea of the sensible will he assume a dissensual position in social relations.[74] The point that the artist occupies in the community, which can generally be called an aesthetic community of sense or a '*sensus communis*' (because what constitutes a common ground is 'sensation' itself) (Rancière, 2009a: 56-57), is thus defined by the two mute speeches. What the second of these mute translations of labour (the voiceless-voice of soliloquy) specifically identifies, though, is labour dis-identified with every sign of labour. In speaking of nothing the voiceless-voice takes a key position in the frontline of the community's phantasmagorical interrelations. The language within the language of artistic labour tells us *nothing* of Nauman, and precisely in saying nothing and speaking to no-one it gets behind labour as a history or fiction that retells his relationship to labour. What it expresses instead is a language that is now separated from the subject. It has become voiceless and, as such, relates only to an anonymous multiplicity that essentially inserts artistic labour back into the forest of signs, where it is equal to its social relation because it is dissociated from all social relations. *The artist must be more than a translator of labour: they must also be a subject for their own dissensual translation. This is the paradoxical identity of artistic labour.*

[74] Rancière states that the characteristic of the dissensual figure, as a notion connected to the tearing of sensible elements, attains particular currency in the modern regime through the aesthetic regime of art, and specifically in the figure of the artist (Rancière, 2010a: 173).

3.7 *The artist and his labour*

'How is it that our deserters, yearning to break away from the constraints of proletarian life, circuitously and paradoxically forged the image and discourse of worker identity?' (Rancière, 1989: x-xi). Returning to the question that Rancière posed to the non-representative characters of nineteenth-century France, we may similarly ask: how will the artist's desire to visit and escape the sensible consensus of labour forge a new paradoxical identity of the artist?[75] And, furthermore, what 'new forms of misreading' will arise from this position when the discourses of artists who desire dissensus become signifiers of an aesthetic community?

In response to the latter question, I have proposed that two mute modes of signifying artistic labour present themselves for translation. On one hand we encounter artistic labour as a construction of mute hieroglyphs. The hieroglyph in Sierra's *586 Hours of Work* or Nauman's *Setting a Good Corner* is what presents a passageway between visibility and its loss, identity and dis-identification. What these hieroglyphs testify to is the linked movement of visiting and escaping as they coincide in the equality of their aim to visit and escape their oppositions. Most specifically, in the context of the aesthetic regime, the hieroglyph operates in general to separate functions and destinations by placing them outside of anything but the aesthetic experience. Labour inserted as a thing of the aesthetic regime is subjected to two acts of separation: on one hand, to an order of the body, on the other, to an order of place (Rancière, 2009a: 69). *The Nights of Labour* sets the foundations of this separation as a notion of disrupted times and spaces of work. In Nauman and Sierra I then propose that this process declassifies the perceptual links that orientate a thought of (Nauman's or Sierra's) artistic labour to any other labour via pre-established boundaries. The lines of

[75] Consensus refers to an idea of the proper signifier based on a distribution of places and times that are not only proper but also based on a hierarchical logic: 'agreement between sense and sense ... between a mode of sensory presentation and a regime of meaning' (Rancière, 2010a: 144).

connection are here re-thought and re-drafted according to new possible passageways of modifiable interconnection. What labour is able to be and do, and how we are able to think and do with labour is what this interrogation opens up and maintains between its synchronic and diachronic functions as potentiality. Furthermore, the having of this disjuncture or having the fracture of this presence is essentially a phantasmatic trope. The artist approaches a time and space of labour, and draws from it (as the visitor does from the opposition of the poor) sensible knowledge that will inform his own sensorium. Yet what was fixed is given free-play over space-time because the artist introduces labour to the force of an aesthetic break, allowing one function, such as that of the singular artistic body, to enter into relation with function as a universal (namely the wider social order of functions), although from a disjointed position.

On the other hand, a speech that belies any figurative or historical placement and speaks of nothing does more than translate labour as artistic labour, but makes of the artist a subject for their own dissensual translation. What is mute here alludes to the goal of Agamben's phantasmatic theory because it wants to take a step-backward-beyond of metaphysics. Through tearing the trace away from itself, the voiceless-voice contains a glimpse of the barrier (/) between signifier and signified, or what Rancière calls the presence of language within language (Rancière, 2009b: 83). In the voiceless-voice of artistic labour we therefore encounter the artist's nihilistic entropy in the configuration of the aesthetic system. The power of mute signification is here precisely found in the power of silence and, as Rancière tells us, it leaves the 'direct mark of an inarticulatable truth' on each action (Rancière, 2009b: 63). It is this mark of truth that we seek in both the disappearance of Sierra and his paid workers, and also in the ambiguity of Nauman's occupation. The inarticulatable in the event of artistic labour is that from which labour itself cannot be removed because it is already an ~~event~~. As such the transmission of artistic labour does not properly belong to anyone, but subsists as both a visiting to the

improper and an escape from the proper: an ~~event~~ that disavows the sovereignty of signs. What we are left with is an operation of the aesthetic regime that is comparable to the unconscious movement of the phantasm. It manifests itself precisely in the tension of its polarities, whereby both forms of mute speech confront the other as *other* in a phantasmatic interrelation.

'Perhaps', Rancière suggests, faced with the dilemma of speech as soliloquy and unconscious movement, 'what the stage needs is for this speech to be incarnated in a new body: no longer the human body of the actor/character but that of a being "who would appear to live without being alive", a body in shadow' (Rancière, 2009b: 41). What I propose is that this new body is not something we can ascribe to the human person, because it must be positioned outside the actor and spectator, the visitor and the poor, and neither ascribed to a hybridised figure of the two. Instead the body in shadow is what I posit as the phantasmatic ~~event~~ of labour, which subsists as its own speech. The ~~event~~ of labour without the event of (ordered) signification therefore appears 'live' in terms of living labour, but without being 'alive' as its signifier. Within this framework the vacuous identity of artistic labour becomes a strategy for questioning, dissociating, and fracturing what appears most self-evident about the distribution of labour according to its normal space and time of occupation.

The sensory fabric of the ~~event~~ therefore describes how a dissensual community is formed by various positions of sense. These positions constantly intertwine in an already intertwined expression: they come together in their difference, between different actors and spectators, who manifest a conjoined movement of visiting and escaping in the theatre of labour. The aesthetic community comes into focus, then, built on the maintenance of this phantasmatic tension. The artist's vital role in this regime, I propose, is to offer a visible stage for these private tensions. As such, the movement

between the artist and their labour is defined by a movement of confirming and negating one's identity: whereby in visiting labour – or escaping, which are essentially the same movement from non-identical same social registers – the artist tries to dislocate themselves from an ordered regime of signification in order to visit the vacuous space of living labour.

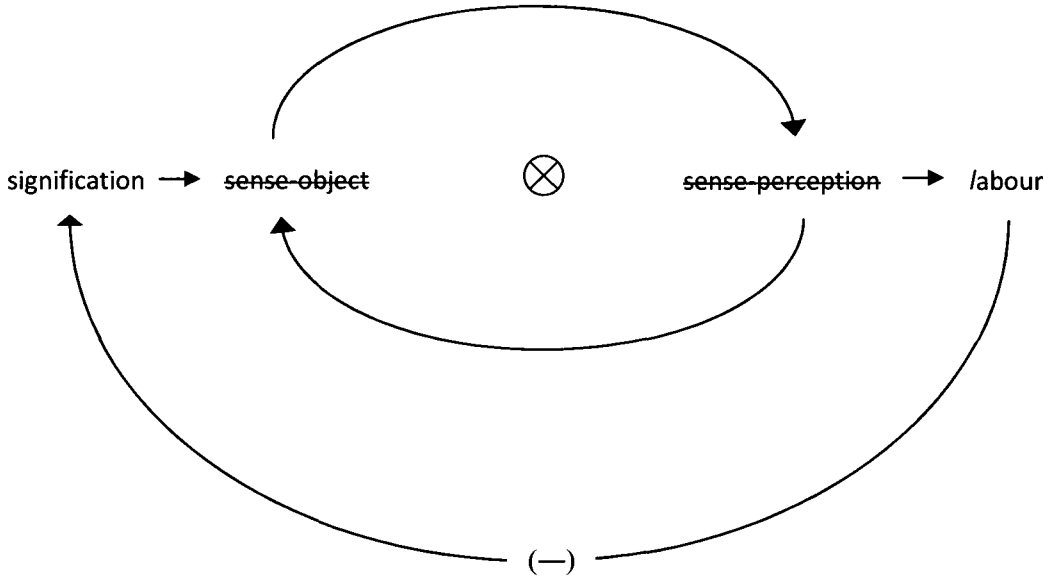
4

The phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production

> Thus, there is a truth, without the possibility of transmitting it; there are modes of transmission, without anything being either transmitted or taught.
>
> (Agamben, 2007a: 160)

What I call *the phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production* (see *Fig.9*) is my model for structuring artistic labour and artistic production around the theses of phantasmatic theory. So far our attempts at a more original understanding of the artist's phantasmatic structure have bordered the threshold between an internal process of the imaginary and an external distribution of an aesthetic unconscious. What is now called for is a model that formulates the interrelation between the artist's internal sensibility and the force of its aesthetic transmission in unified processes. To these ends the course of this chapter traces a double-edged question: on one hand asking how the taking place of artistic labour constitutes the originary articulation of the phantasm, and, conversely, the extent to which the movement of the phantasm exposes artistic labour to its own taking place. To begin, let me propose how this interrelation is formulated diagrammatically in its entirety:

Fig.9 The phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production



To reiterate what we already know about this diagram: at the centre of *Fig.9* we find the movement of a phantasmatic interrelation whose tendencies I have previously summarised by five theses in section 2.7 of this thesis. As we saw then, specifically with referral to Agamben's melancholic circuit on which this diagram is partly based (*Fig.3*), we have two poles that identify a relationship between the input of the sense-object and the artist's imaginary sense-perception. Between these poles, marked by the double arrows that cycle between the sense-object and sense-perception, is the movement of the phantasm itself. The points of reference do not directly interact with each other, but rather interact via the exchange of the phantasmatic mediator, which always carries the momentum and energy of one over to the other. In this way we can say that the phantasm never-substantiates negation or affirmation, because each pole is not negated by means of a simple transference that would subject one position, for example the sense-object, to the force of the other, the sense-perception. Rather, this process of interaction assumes the form of a fold between the polemic sense positions

(as Agamben described the barrier (/) between the signifier and the signified in signification). It is this process of affirmation and negation, whereby the force of each pole is suspended, that accords the phantasm its power of disavowal (as previously illustrated in *Fig.4*). At the centre of this diagram (illustrated with the symbol ⊗) what we then define is a space of nullity, which no longer directly relates to either of its predicates except to say that it relates to them in negation. This is what I have called a space of phantasmagorical vacuousness.

Going beyond this, the intention of this chapter is to explore how the pre-figuration of labour in the artistic imaginary reaffirms its phantasmatic tendency in the production of aesthetic labour. In the previous chapter I approached the production of artistic labour from the point of investigating the relationship between the artist and their labour as an interchange of social relations, as between the visitor and the poor. What I expressed was that artists approach a time and space of labour, draw from it sensible knowledge that will inform his or her sensorium and then affect an aesthetic break with its signifiers through the theatre of labour. What was once fixed in signification is therefore given free-play over space-time, allowing one function, such as that of the singular artistic body, to enter into relation with the wider social order of functions from a disjointed position. This position is what I call the ~~event~~: the exposure of the presence of labour within labour, which speaks with the two mute voices of the hieroglyph and soliloquy. But if the ~~event~~ of labour, which is to say the event without event, appears as the incarnation of the shadow of artistic labour – which appears to 'live' (in terms of living labour) without being 'alive' (as its signifier) – then our task, finally, is to define how the phantasmatic movement of disavowal sets up the conditions for the shadow. Not just the shadow as an event of labour, but the shadow as a phantasmatic trope that is orientated throughout the entirety of the phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production.

Here we turn our attention to the problem of indication, or what permits that the phantasm be indicated in the articulation of aesthetic labour. My aim is not to privilege the superiority of the unconscious imaginary, as the site of pre-figuring artistic labour, over the external conscious application of *praxis*. The specific character of this project is expressed, on the contrary, in affirming how the originary movement of the phantasm in the aesthetic unconscious is always already active in conscious activity. Indeed it is this *always already* aspect of the phantasm that concerns us.[76] Here I am not simply interested in interpreting the phantasm's fracturing of presence, as is Agamben, but precisely the having of the fracture. Furthermore, I propose that the artist's having of the fracture as negation and dissociation defines the artist's originary experience of the phantasm: as what is always already present in aesthetic labour.

Expressed in diagrammatic form, the internal and external movements of the phantasm are interconnected or always already connected interchanges. But while I propose that the format of this interconnection is always already present, I do not mean to indicate that the processes are circular. If we describe the phantasmatic movement, for instance, as a circuit, then the following can be said. The pre-figuration of labour in the imaginary begins by formulating the idea of artistic labour (as the disavowal of the

[76] The meaning of the phrase 'always already' is positioned here according to Derrida and, following him, Agamben. What Derrida says, in *Memoires for Paul de Man* (1986), is that: 'We cannot write what we do not wish to erase, we can only promise it in terms of what can always be erased.' (Derrida, 1986: 123) Derrida qualifies this sentiment in the context of Paul de Man's *Blindness and Insight* (1983) and *Allegories of Reading* (1979), and in particular de Man's passage 'there is no need to deconstruct Rousseau', which Derrida proposes is unnecessary because 'the latter [Rousseau] has already done so himself' (Derrida, 1986: 123). As such Derrida proposes that 'there is always already deconstruction, at work *in* works'. The always already is what, then, allows him to propose that 'Texts deconstruct *themselves* by themselves' (Derrida, 1986: 123). Agamben subsequently uses the phrase 'always already' in a similar context when he proposes in *homo sacer* that 'language ... holds man in its ban insofar as man, as a speaking being, has *always already* entered into language without noticing it' (Agamben, 1998: 50. My emphasis added.). Furthermore, I draw on his application of 'always already' in *Language and Death*. In the context of Hegel's deliberation on animals eating negativity – found in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel, 1977: 65) – Agamben proposes that: 'Just as the animal preserves the truth of sensuous things simply by devouring them, that is, by recognising them as nothing, so language guards the unspeakable by speaking it, that is, by grasping it in its negativity.' (Agamben, 1991: 13) Within this context he therefore proposes that we are involved with a process of 'experiencing the negativity that is *always already* inherent in any meaning' (Agamben, 1991: 13. My emphasis added).

sense-object and sense-perception). Subsequently, expressed through aesthetic distribution, artistic labour asserts itself into the shared sensible world of the aesthetic community through production. Once in the field of signs, labour ultimately becomes potentiality for transmission and re-transmission: effectively re-inserting a new distribution of labour into the public imaginary: whereby it is potentially a sense-object that can be drawn on, verified, and translated. However, the problem with such a circuit that rotates its subject through the processes of a loop is that it fails to elaborate its own crux, which, in term of signification, the phantasm exposes as the barrier (/). A circular analysis of the phantasmatic process follows a causal path and the phantasm, as I have specifically demonstrated in the previous chapter, dissociates the logic of causality.

The reason why I designate the phantasm as an interrelation rather than a circuit is precisely because this system is not dependent on the circulatory system for self-maintenance. As we have indeed seen over the course of this thesis, the phantasm is a force of dissension, dis-identification and negation. It is as much defined by what remains un-substantiated (and potentially never substantiated) through its movement as it is descriptive of a process of folding signifiers and their signified into the production of signs. What is at stake now is a model of the phantasm that goes beyond the unconscious in a way that allows us to identify and express the phantasmatic tendencies of interrelation within the artist's external expression. What I indicate in *Fig.9* with the lower arc of movement is my understanding of how the phantasm's disjunctive element is introduced between praxis and signification by way of the shadow, which I mark at the apex of the transition with the symbol (—). To interrogate this space and its disjunctive format of transmission, I propose a conjunction of three traits that I take from Agamben: the critique of *pure gesture*, labour as the shadow (—) of *availability-toward-nothingness*, and the *articulation* of memory and death.

First, a critique of gesture lays the foundations for our discussion by defining how the fundamental relationship between action and aesthetic visibility is crucial in defining artistic labour as pure gesture. Situated between what we know as human action (*praxis*) and human production, the pure gesture is what is exposed or made visible through the aesthetic dimension of activity. As such we open artistic labour to a critique of its pure mediality, dissociated from the false alternation of producing ends, suspended from signification, and allowed to exist simply such as it is. To this critique of mediality, our second term availability-toward-nothingness introduces a force of suspension (expressed in terms of the state of exception) that negates the energetic (being-in-work) and dynamic (availability-for-work) statuses of labour. Neither in-work nor available for work, what Agamben calls the shadow of being at work (~~work~~) crucially opens up the ambiguous place of production and makes it available only toward the nothingness of its own negation.

Both the introduction of the gestic critique and the form of the shadow crucially operate from a position of negation and suspension. What the attainment of this position allows us to disclose is not a being-in or being available-for signification, but a third place that is formulated by suspending the normal predicates of action and production. This space is where I define the movement of artistic labour. In particular I will describe how the pure gesture operates as a 'gag' in communication: expressing itself as the mediality of its own articulation, saying and signifying nothing. In *Language and Death* Agamben expresses this process by means of the movement from the *phoné* of voice ('the mere sonorous flux emitted by the phonic apparatus'), through articulation, and subsequently into becoming the event of meaning (signification) (Agamben, 1991: 35). It is this pathway that I pursue in *Fig.9*, through the scrutiny of which I propose to identify the very 'taking place of language' specific to artistic labour (in terms of its phantasm): which Agamben calls the point of 'originary articulation'. Where the

problem of defining an originary articulation for Agamben, though, is one of relating voice to signification, here the problem posed by the phantasm is in relating the imaginary of labour to labour-power.

In order to reinforce the argumentation behind *Fig.9*, and in order to demonstrate the alignment between the visibility of the phantasm and aesthetics, I will address the mechanics of this interrelation to Tehching Hsieh's *One Year Performances*. These five year-long performances took place between September 1978 and July 1986, and each one intentionally pushes at the limit of a perceived divide between life and art, and what is and what is not artistic labour. *One Year Performance 1978-1979*, also known as the 'Cage Piece', involves Hsieh placing himself in strict solitary confinement, literally in a cage, where he is deprived of almost all means of communication and cultural stimulation. *One Year Performance 1980-1981*, 'Time Clock Piece', involves Hsieh punching in a time card at a functional worker's time clock installed in his studio, on the hour, every hour, 24 hours a day for the entire year. In contrast *One Year Performance 1981-1982*, 'Outdoor Piece', opposes the previous performance's restrictive binding of Hsieh to a specific space by forcing him to spend one year outdoors. During is time he is not to take any shelter of any kind and his means of travel were severely limited to almost nothing but foot: in effect manifesting an endurance walk inhabiting the outdoors. In the fourth performance, *One Year Performance 1983-1984*, 'Rope Piece', Hsieh is required to spend the year tied together with the performance artist Linda Montano. The pair's lives entirely intertwine together for the year, bound by the highly restrictive conditions of intimacy enforced by the length of 8ft of rope. The final performance of the series, *One Year Performance 1985-1986*, known as 'No Art Piece', consists of Hsieh abstaining from art: stating that he would not produce, participate or partake of art of any kind. What these performances and their rules, simple but highly restrictive, confine are both the life of Hsieh as an artist and his life as a human being to

the same way of living through each year. Here simple divisions break down and fail under the exposition of the artist's labour reduced to its mechanisms of gesture. Furthermore, what I propose these performances expose, or really force into aesthetic visibility, is not only a general enquiry into how artists produce, perceive, move, and apprehend themselves in art or in life, but how artists construct, reform, transmit and conceal themselves.

Through the analysis of *Fig.9* and its application I intend to show the mediality of the phantasm as only the mediality of a mediator itself. I aim to allow the processes of transmission to be understood and witnessed simply according to their own forces, not in order to make artistic labour speak or perform, but to expose the gap of its presence in performing: and therein allow it to speak or remain silent, to transmit itself or not, and to be truthful or false. The aim is not to get back-beyond the phantasmatic movement of negation, or to affirm what has been denied or suspended. Rather the aim is to let the factors of suspension and negations remain as forces of mediation. By grasping the shadow of labour I propose we behold the relation between labour and negation. And through the critique of gesture I propose we are able to dismantle the shadow on its own terms, allow negation to remain negation, and, in doing so, make the phantasmatic force of negation visible in the transmission between praxis and signification.

4.1 *The critique of pure gesture*

Linguistics, for Agamben, has a problem in describing its own methods, and it is one that is shared by the phantasm. Insofar as we can talk of objects and things as having this or that quality, in linguistics – as Agamben demonstrates with reference to Ferdinand de Saussure – 'we deny on principle that objects are given, that there are things that

continue to exist when one passes from one order of ideas to the next' (Agamben, 1993a: 153).[77] With the phantasm we similarly cannot say that the object of sense perception is entirely as given, indeed we can only deny that it is given insofar as the relationship between the sense-object and our perception of it exists only in passing from one order of sense to the next. The interrelation between our senses and the object of sense are always already mediated by the movement of the phantasmatic disavowal, and so the object exists only in negation. The object cannot reside in a single place, as sense-object or sense-perception because the phantasm negates all relation to its predicates. Like the word left to stand on its own, the phantasm is without value except as the negative dimension of differentiation: being not this or that thing, but affirmed by being non-object and non-perception. In the phantasm we would say that its value is precisely a movement of negation that is never-substantiated. What the barrier (/) in signification tells us, then, is 'the impossibility for the sign to produce itself in the fullness of presence' (Agamben, 1993a: 155). Returning to the quote with which I opened this chapter, in effect we are talking about a situation whereby truth and its transmission are unlinked: whereby we have the truth of the signified 'without the possibility of transmitting it', and the signifier as a mode of transmission 'without anything being either transmitted or taught' (Agamben, 2007a: 160).

The contradictory coupling of truth and transmission is conflated in the problem of the phantasm in relation to artistic labour, however, because we are dealing with not only a linguistic mode of transmission, but essentially the non-linguistic foundation of human labour. Here we are talking about the *praxis* of human enactment, the actual moment of the 'to do' of this or that action, this or that performance. In short, the non-linguistic speaks of presence, while the linguistic exists only as a disconnected order of ideas. In the Marxian tradition this divide occurs in the product between valorising the

[77] This passage, quoted by Agamben in *Stanzas* is actually attributed to Saussure and comes from 'Notes inédites de F. de Saussure' in *Cahiers F. de Saussure* (1954: 63).

non-linguistic as what is concrete in its value, insofar as we can deal with objects as use-value. While the abstract exchange-value of things basically describes a linguistic amendment in the form of a signifier of value, which, in itself, has nothing to actually do with what it is as a thing. The commodity fetish overcomes this problem, as I have shown in Chapter 2, through subjecting both distinctions to the disavowal of the phantasm. What is subsequently required in order to behold the linguistic and non-linguistic elements of phantasmatic production, then, is a method of critique that crosses these divides, or, more correctly, negates the linguistic and non-linguistic to open up a threshold between them. This critique is what we find in the gestic.

In his essay 'Kommerell, or On Gesture' Agamben describes three levels of criticism: the philologico-hermenueutic, which is dedicated to interpretation of work; the physiognomic, which acts to situate the work according to historical and natural orders; and thirdly, the gestic, which 'resolves the work's intention into a gesture (or into a constellation of gestures)' (Agamben, 1999b: 77). The present investigation, as I outlined in the introduction to this thesis, rather than focus on the labour of artists by way of interpreting the artwork or by situating or giving historical place to the artwork or the artist, focuses on the third field of criticism, the gestic. The three fields of criticism, I propose, can be aligned with the three generators that I previously outlined in the Borromean knot at *Fig.1*: consisting of labour, desire and the imagination. The gestic critique, as I will shortly explain, allows us to designate the role of the imagination as the commuter that links the free group of desire and labour together. Nevertheless, the other two fields of criticism propose situations for the analysis of artistic labour proceeding from the two alternate positions of desire and labour as the commuter. Situating the labour of artists according to historical and biographical orders, for example, would provoke an investigation toward determining how the processes of desire drive artistic will (which links the imagination to its expression in labour).

Alternatively, a level of criticism that begins from the position of interpreting artworks moves labour into the position of the commuter: insofar as the imagination and desire are brought together and exposed through their traces in the artist's hieroglyphic object or event. All three levels of criticism cannot however be adequately dealt with here. I wish only to point out the placement of each level of criticism, and where potential points of interconnection exist for future analysis.

Returning to the gestic, let us first ask what gesture is. Gesture is a term that situates human activity at a point that is neither truly action (*praxis*) nor production. Production, we come to understand through Agamben's 'Notes on Gesture', constitutes a means with a view to an end. We can explain such an activity with the example of a body in movement, for instance a body walking. Walking designates the human body as an active aspect of production when the means of placing one foot in front of the other is directed toward realising the desired end of arriving at a specific location. Action, or *praxis* (the 'to do' of acting), on the other hand, is what defines itself as its own end. Continuing with the same schema of examples, Agamben uses dance to explain this term. Here dance is *praxis* when the performing human body directs its movements not as a means toward an end in the same way as walking, but as an end in itself. Let us say that the format of a dance were itself composed of performing a walk, here the means of the walk as an action of travel does not apply because the means of 'walking' is dissociated from walking somewhere. As such walking has walking as itself the desired end of the action (i.e. it being dance). In this way action is defined as an 'end without means' (Agamben, 2007a: 154-155).

Gesture is contrary to both of these statuses. What gesture defines is the aesthetic dimension of *praxis*, which is neither truly a means directed toward an end (production), nor action as an end in itself (*praxis*). Instead the gestic describes a process of

'undertaking and supporting' (Agamben, 2007a: 154). What is meant by this gestic status, insofar as it denotes purely the 'undertaking' or 'supporting' of human action, is that rather than focus on the alternative positions of means and ends, gesture focuses on the act of mediality itself. If we pursue the example of dance further we would say that *praxis* becomes gesture when dance assumes an aesthetic dimension, which is to say it attains a certain visibility that makes evident the means of one's bodily movements. What the visibility of aesthetics crucially does, then, is make evident the artist's ability 'to do' by giving value to action just as it is: rather than only comprehending artistic action through its reification in the art product. If we were simply to focus our critique on *praxis* (rather than gesture) as an end without means, we would still fail to escape attributing means to ends because, as Agamben tells us, '[a] finality without means is just as much of an aberration as a mediation that makes sense only in relation to an end' (Agamben, 2007a: 155). Only through giving exclusive visibility to *praxis* as pure *praxis*, and therefore as gesture, do we escape a process of valorising artistic labour by its end product.

Take for example the performance of dance, which we previously used to describe *praxis*. According to Agamben 'if dance is gesture, it is so ... because it is nothing more than the endurance and the exhibition of the media character of corporeal movements' (Agamben, 2007a: 155). Dance changes from being *praxis* to being pure *praxis*, gesture, when it is *nothing more* than the endurance of action, and *nothing more* than the exhibition of action. Instead of dance being an end without means because it is its end in itself, the aesthetic dimension brings our attention back to the act of one's being-in-dance rather than the end of dancing. In conclusion: '*Gesture is the display of mediation, the making visible of a means as such*' (Agamben, 2007a: 155).

Now if we return to the role of the gestic in criticism, '[c]riticism', Agamben proposes in the introduction to *Stanzas*, 'is born at the moment when the scission reaches its extreme point ... where the word comes unglued from itself' (Agamben, 1993a: xvii). What we therefore find in describing artistic labour by its gestic status is an understanding of the moment and the movement whereby artistic action (*praxis*) and artistic production (doing) come unglued from the signifier 'artistic labour'. Artistic labour, in effect, is here stripped of the linear causality that defines artistic action only within a process of resolved production. Artistic labour is unglued insofar as it is dislocated from being a means toward an end or an end in itself. To expose artistic labour by resolving its intention into gestures fundamentally affects a force of dissociation: whereby the means of labouring is dissociated from all other considerations except its own mediality. In terms of my diagram (*Fig.9*) of the phantasmatic interrelation, what this means is that we focus on and crucially make visible artistic labour as a media only in mediation (see *Fig.10*).

Fig.10 The phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production
(highlighting the medial position of gesture)

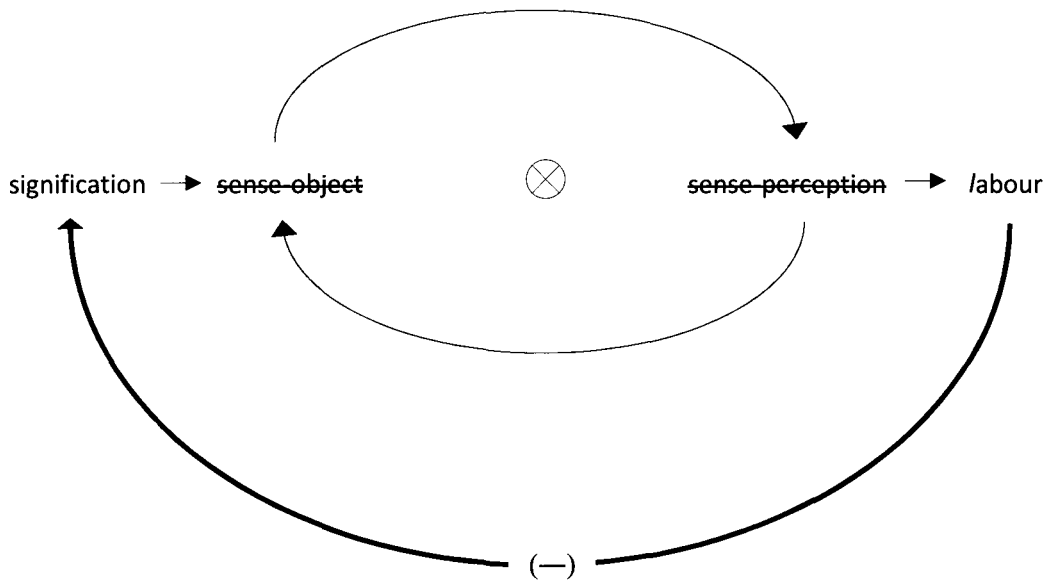


Fig.10 highlights the medial position of gesture as the arrow of movement between *l*abour (the italicised lowercase 'l' is used to define labour expressed in praxis, distinct from labour as the living quality of the human ability to produce: section 4.6 elaborates further on this distinction) and signification. Furthermore, the medial position of gesture we come to understand in the discourse of Agamben 'is not an absolutely nonlinguistic element but ... a forceful presence in language itself' (Agamben, 1999b: 77). Both language and action, we find, have a gestic element in their expression. This crossover is suitably illustrated by Agamben's understanding of the gestic element of the face, whereby language (linguistic language) is present as the other side of language (i.e. what is itself speechless or non-linguistic) (Agamben, 1999b: 78). The term 'face', corresponding to Agamben's use of the word derived from his essay 'The Face' in *Means Without End* (2000), describes what is 'at once the irreparable being-exposed of humans and the very opening in which they hide and stay hidden' (Agamben, 2000: 90). The face therefore becomes 'the location of a struggle for truth' (Agamben, 2000: 91) that borders both language and gestic expression by exposing what cannot be spoken about. The face says nothing, and yet in saying nothing is still able to expresses the presence of what language has not put into words. Similarly the individual, even by producing expression linguistically, exposes its being-in-language as a point of mediation that is gestic (such as in the case of an actor drawing attention to their performance of oratory). Gesture, however, does not reveal any particular truth about a specific state of one's being in relation to mediality as such, but reveals only the mode of communicability that presents each person as 'open' in the community (Agamben, 2000: 92). What we call the face is, therefore, a gesture of language that silently exposes language. Or, in the words of Kommerell as quoted by Agamben, '[a] face often seems to tell us the history of solitary moments' (Agamben, 1999b: 78).[78]

[78] This phrase originates from Kommerell's *Gedanken über Gedichte* (1956).

But, while the face may appear to expose the history behind a solitary moment, the gesture itself tells us nothing about it except one's being-gestural. The importance of the solitary moment according to Agamben is instead as a descriptor of the dissensual character of the gesture, which defines 'the stratum of language that is not exhausted in communication and that captures language, so to speak, in its solitary moments' (Agamben, 1999b: 77). What the capturing of language in a single moment, solitary from the rest of language, dislocates, then, is the procedure of language as a natural progression to communication. Namely it defines the suspension of language in the singularity of being-language, or what we have already described as a means without end. Furthermore, the idea that communication can be thought of as a process that is exhaustive of some elements of language while other elements, such as the gesture, remain preserved, sets up a complex interrelation between negation and preservation: which I will later resolve through Agamben's discourse in *Language and Death* as a localisation of memory and death in articulation (see Section 4.6). For now, what we can say about the gesture is that in preserving language as a 'solitary moment' of mediation it dislocates language. And, in particular, gesture preserves its own relation to language even after being brought into communication (signification). It is this force of gestic dissociation and preservation that we now take forward and establish as the ground for this enquiry, which seeks to define how the potentiality of the phantasm (the imaginary presupposition of artistic labour) might yet transcend the point of its own being produced-into-presence (and communicated as artistic labour).

The critique of pure gesture that I pursue is a critique aimed at freeing gesture of its link to a causal reality defined by action and production. Furthermore, it empties action and language of their communicability by capturing every moment as solitary mediation. Through addressing artistic labour as pure mediality, I propose we find artistic production opened onto a stage or theatre of activity where meaning has been

disassociated from action, and action from performing for itself. On this stage sense only makes sense in the suspended context of itself, whereby artistic labour alludes only to being-artistic-labour. Here I do not aim to code labour with a definite symbolic meaning. Instead I intend to open artistic labour to a critique of gesture that firmly takes us beyond a narrow theory of the phantasm firmly fixed in linguistics and psychology. This critique makes us see the phantasmatic according to its non-linguistic moments, while simultaneously orientating labour as a linguistic enterprise of communication. Ultimately, through the gestic I propose we see the phantasm of artistic labour as solitary: not described as an aspect that requires decoding, interpretation, or translation, but treated on its own terms.

4.2 *The pure gesture of Tehching Hsieh*

If the human being is characterised by Agamben as '*zoon logon echon* (living thing using language)' (Agamben, 1993a: 156), then gesture, we can say, specifically aims to denote the human being as the *living thing in-language*. To speak of artistic labour as gesture is not to differentiate between action (*praxis*) and production, acting and doing, but to point toward a third sphere of human activity in-itself. For Rancière, as we saw in the previous chapter, the 'third' space or thing is the important minimum common link between the artist and the spectator, which stands between the artistic performance and the spectator as an autonomous meaning in signification. The minimum link in common is necessarily alien to both parties, but also must stand as something to which they can both refer to as a common point of verification. For Agamben, the 'third' area refers to a space that is not specifically defined as internal or external, sense-object or sense-perception, but a space of transitional potentiality from which the external space of the world can be experienced as measurable (Agamben, 1993a: 59). What this space denotes

in his thought is a point of proximity to the 'invisible' articulation of signification: an encounter or confrontation with what is neither signifier nor signified: it is the position of the barrier that constitutes itself as an emblematic tension arising from the 'confusion-difference' of binary opposition (Agamben, 1993a: 148). For me, although the 'third' space of artistic labour points toward a place that is placeless, it nevertheless designates the artist's being-in-the-world through expressing the living thing in-labour. Like Agamben I define this space in artistic labour by the tension of binary oppositions: between the sense-object and sense-perception, as between the interiority and exteriority, or virtuality and reality of production. What I further propose, however, is that artists know this space in aesthetic labour by knowing labour and having labour, as a space of constantly expressing labour *itself* in addressing itself to its own concern and 'discussing it': which means making visible what I call the space of phantasmagorical vacuousness. In artistic practices this third space is present when the artist's labour as a sign becomes its own referent, or an ~~event~~, which, like Rancière's minimum common link between the artist and spectator, stands as an autonomous meaning. It is here that the sphere of gestic critique is useful because it properly denotes neither acting nor doing, but identifies a new zone of indistinction in aesthetic mediality.

The movement of the phantasm marked in *Fig.9* by the arrows that go between the sense-object and sense-perception denote a zone of indistinction created by carrying the energy of one over to the other as negation. This process is similarly enacted, I will argue, by the momentum of the movement that I have highlighted in *Fig.10* as a transition between the points *l*abour and signification. Agamben's definition of gesture as a means without end should also be understood as a play on Kant's expression 'purposiveness without purpose' (Agamben, 2000: 58). What we call the gesture in artistic production does not, therefore, refer to the process by which artists produce artworks or artistic labour, because each of these stations in presence are what we can

call purposeful. Instead gesture makes us see the artist's labour as the purposiveness of certain means, apparent in their being-toward-purposiveness: namely, artistic labour as a means without end.

Consider Hsieh's *One Year Performance 1981-1982*, the 'Outdoor Piece', in this context. This, the third of the one year performances, involves Hsieh performing what can only be described as an endurance walk as a result of his self-restricted habitation of the outdoors (of Manhattan). In the customary statement released to accompany this performance on 26th September 1981, he declares:

> I, Tehching Hsieh, plan to do a one year performance piece.
>
> I shall stay OUTDOORS for one year, never go inside.
>
> I shall not go in to a building, subway, train, car, airplane, cave, tent.
>
> I shall have a sleeping bag.
>
> The performance shall begin on September 26, 1981 at 2 P.M. and continue until September 26, 1982 at 2 P.M.
>
> (Heathfield & Hsieh: 160)

Hsieh embarks on this performance carrying only scant provisions, some maps (on which he meticulously hand-marks his course around the city), a sleeping bag, a camera (with which he takes around one hundred photographs), a torch, a radio, and some clothes. On first account, if we place his daily walks in the context of a form of production, i.e. walking from point A to point B as the means of moving Hsieh towards an end location, we face the anomaly that Hsieh approaches each day with no such desired end location in mind.[79] While his course transects a pedestrian space of

[79] Tracing a typical day of Hsieh's walk in 'Outdoor Piece', taken from the route he marked on his map, Heathfield describes: 'he cast a lasso route around the city: turned an undulating course through Soho, Little Italy, and China Town, heading down to the piers, where he threw a fat loop under the Brooklyn Bridge and out around the perimeter of the entire tip of Manhattan Island before heading back via

embodied movement, it is not defined by the same pedestrian tendency. What stands Hsieh's walking apart from normative movement around Manhattan's streets is the aesthetic aspect of its undertaking. Hsieh, dislocated from being indoors, now 'inhabits the street, he is not just moving through it' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 38). In his habitation of the street, and his subsequent inhabitation of walking the streets, the means of walking takes on a new role. Walking subjected to the endurance of a year's performance here encounters movement as a dis-identified action. His movement toward places and his movement away from places become inconsequential, as does the relation between travelling and travelling somewhere. What the aesthetic dimension of this performance crucially adds to the *praxis* of walking, and what therefore makes it gestural, is that Hsieh draws attention to his inhabitation of non-habitation: just as the gesture of walking is given visibility as itself dissociated from anything but the medium of human movement.

For the year Hsieh meticulously marks his routes around Manhattan on maps. The scant remarks that accompany each map – '10.30am: Wake up at park lot, 11am: Buy lunch. 3.20pm: defecate. 6pm: Buy dinner. 10.40pm: Sleep.' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 45) – do not mark places of intent or destinations as such, they mark a 'bio-graphology', or what Heathfield calls 'a faint trace of a bare life' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 45). Heathfield's use of the word 'bare' derives its meaning from Agamben's understanding of *zoē* and *bios*. In the introduction to *Homo Sacer* he defines these two terms of life as they were used by the Greeks: whereby *zoē* expresses life as it is common to all living beings, while *bios* designates life as it is qualified or particular to any individual or group (Agamben, 1998: 1). What Agamben calls bare life is life associated with *zoē*: it is life that can be separated from its form and thus rendered bare or naked. The distinction of life between *zoē* and *bios* for the Greeks also arises in production with *zoē* placed in

Tribeca, under the cover of night, in a lazy diagonal toward his earlier place of rest.' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 38)

connection with work (doing), rather than *poiesis* (production) or *praxis* (action). 'To work meant to submit to necessity, and submission to necessity ... made man the equal of the animal' (Agamben, 1999a: 69). Furthermore, the Greeks understood that 'the presupposition of work is ... bare biological existence, the cyclical processes of the human body, whose metabolism and whose energy depends on the basic products of labour.' What *zoē* connects is human activity and human necessity, which aligns the processes of the human body to its animalistic processes.

If Hsieh's performances are then said to expose 'a faint trace of a bare life', it means we should read his activity as 'bare biological existence'. Walking is hereby stripped of qualifying in any way a format of action or production unique and peculiar to Hsieh. 'To walk' no longer designates 'to walk' as this or that person, or 'to walk' for this or that reason. Walking becomes a bare biological movement. This 'faint trace of bare life', or rather bare activity, is therefore only possible because Hsieh makes us see walking as walking. This is to say that although we may acquaint his walking in 'Outdoor Piece' with the biological experience of walking, we are only able to do so because his gesture is not precisely bare, but rather aesthetic.

The bare-ness of the gesture (walking) comes into being open and exposed *only* as walking because Hsieh's labour is visible without being communicated. Hsieh's gesture in 'Outdoor Piece' describes time spent loitering and drifting without the certainty of a destination or end goal precisely because he does not communicate such ends. While we may refer to his movement as 'aimless whim' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 39), more correctly we should say that he loiters with purposiveness. Without the purpose of destination he loiters in the mediation of his own media. 'Hsieh takes the route of a responsive organism, each gesture in space, each turning of the way, each decision to move or stay, returned by his self imposing laws of action, to the barest negotiations.' (Heathfield &

Hsieh: 39) His self-imposition of restrictions began in this instance with his statement of 26th September that year, which clearly by design introduces a law of activity defined by negation. It negates the conscious negotiation of streets, the structure of a path from A to B, even his choice toward staying or going from any particular space as a being-here or being-there. His statements of intent reads like a list of negations that are intended to strip Hsieh down to being-in his own physicality. The rules of this *One Year Performance* forcibly bind Hsieh's gesture to privation, enforcing a format of suspension from action and production, which ensures that his gesture remains available as a means without an end.

From the notation of his movement through the space of Manhattan marked on maps we can read Hsieh's walk as a living relationship with its environment, reminiscent of improvised dance. Both consist of an aesthetic dimension aimed at the endurance and the exhibition of movement, the like of which we also see in Vito Acconci's exhibition of movement in performances such as *Step Piece* (1970) and *Broadjump* (1971), or the exhibition of endurance by Chris Burden's 'danger pieces' such as *Doomed* (1975).[80] What is important to Hsieh, as also to Burden and Acconci is that these activities are clearly staged as art and that they expose the gesture of the artist's activity, performativity, and the measure of time and life contained in the artistic act. But whereas Acconci uses his own movement as a catalogue of physiological measure, and Burden's 'danger pieces' express a relation between artistic labour, life and temporality as a gesture or catalogue of risk, the labour of Hsieh's movement has action, or catalogues action, only by having action as privation.

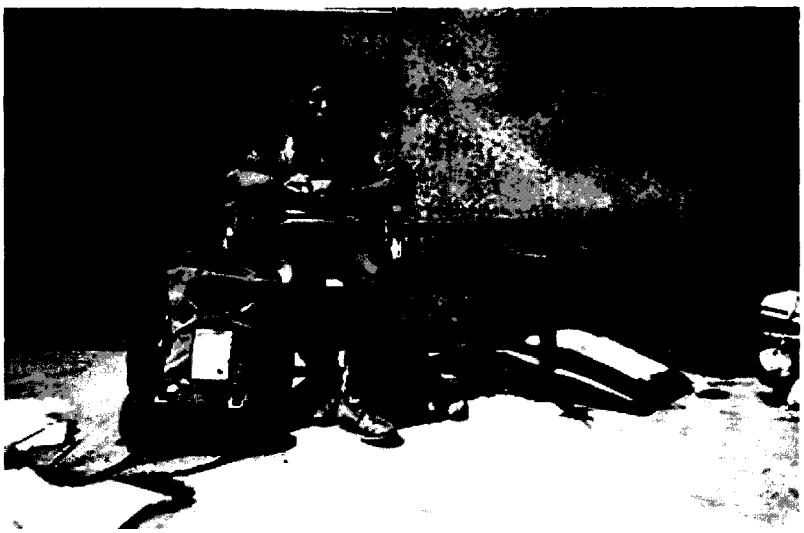
[80] *Doomed* is one of Burden's 'danger pieces', in which Burden lay motionless in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago under a slanted sheet of glass, with a clock running nearby. He did not say what he would do and, unbeknownst to the museum owners, Burden was prepared to remain in this position until one of the museum staff acted in some way on any one of the pieces three key elements: the clock, the glass, and himself. After forty-five hours, when a museum guard placed a pitcher of water in reaching distance of Burden, he got up and took a hammer to the clock, thus ending the piece.

More than *praxis*, more than a 'finality without means' (Agamben, 2007a: 155), what becomes gestural in Hsieh's performances does so because he crucially introduces *praxis* into aesthetic visibility. However, the definable space of exhibition and visibility is often ambiguous. In 'Outdoor Piece' visibility consists of both unknowing and knowing spectators: between those who saw him on the streets but were unaware of his aesthetic dimension and his knowing friends: including the filmmaker Robert Attanasio who shot a thirty-minute film of his encounter with Hsieh. In addition we are offered a trace of the gesture captured in the archive of just over one hundred photographs taken with Hsieh's camera during the course of the year (see *Fig.11* below). In order to 'read' these forms of visibility I propose we return to the idea of 'bio-graphology'. These encounters, including the documentation of photographs, film, and maps, each trace a bio-graphology of the performance and, in their own way, expose its gesture. Bio-graphology is not merely archival or a moment of an aesthetic event, but distinctly impressed moments of Hsieh's action captured from action. These are solitary moments that define the faint trace of a bare aesthetic gesture that has not been exhausted in communication or artistic production.

Gesture is how the human exists as being-in-language. But, more precisely, a gestic critique focuses on one's being-in-language by expressing being-in-the-medium of the articulation such as it is. In *The Coming Community* Agamben describes the term 'such as it is' as a relation to being that encompasses all of the singularity's properties without the obligation of entering into a discourse of choice between what is individual or universal. Something such as it is is not indifferent to its concept, but relates to it such as it is this or that thing. Artistic labour is not indifferent to labour generally, but relates to labour with all of its generic properties and those specific to it being artistic. Those individual properties that define a categorisation and division of things are hereby overcome, but not because of an absence of any particular belonging, rather

because 'for being-*such*' it denotes 'belonging itself' (Agamben, 1993b: 2). Through understanding belonging as being-such, we are therefore able to exposes a relation to desire that wants its object 'with all of its predicates': namely a desire of 'the *as* only insofar as it is *such'* (Agamben, 1993b: 2).

Fig.11 Tehching Hsieh 'Outdoor Piece' (1981-1982)



Gesture, such as it is, therefore 'has nothing to express and nothing to say other than what is said in language' (Agamben, 1999b: 78). More specifically, the format of the gestural that interests Agamben, as well as this present argument, is what is termed 'pure gesture'. In his essay 'Marginal Notes on Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle' Agamben posits that gesture is the means by which a connection between art and life is achieved through the operation of pure gestic action. What he elaborates is that gesture is 'the name of ... intersection between life and art, act and power, general and particular, text and execution' (Agamben, 2000: 80). In short, '[i]t is a moment of life subtracted from the context of individual biography as well as a moment of art

subtracted from the neutrality of aesthetics: it is pure *praxis*.' Pure gesture is therefore gesture that deals with an emptiness of language directly.

Everything hinges here on the adjective 'pure': the purity of gesture, purity of *praxis*, and specifically 'pure mediality' that corresponds to the application of its own gesture by ceasing to apply.[81] A 'pure' force of suspension takes place in gesture when the visualisation of *praxis* is captured, for example in film and photography, and becomes a new medium in itself. As such the actor is now suspended from their own mediation and from their own gesture, severing the link between *praxis* and its ability to be an end in itself. What is held in suspense is gesture as pure gesture without end, gesture as bare, or a means without end (Agamben, 2000: 57-8). It is here that we encounter the pure gesture of Hsieh in the bio-graphology of the 'Outdoor Piece'. Hsieh interrupts the production of labour according to the conventions of action or production because, by intentionally making visible the means of artistic labour and displaying labour as mediation as such, he suspends his own being-in-mediation.[82]

The dislocating power of Hsieh's gestic walk is applicable insofar as it can be called a pure gesture: mediation devoid of any end and also devoid of its own effective communication. Barbara Formis proposed in her essay 'Dismantling Theatricality: Aesthetics of Bare Life', writing on Agamben's idea of gesture in relation to art and theatre, that we can describe gestures in such circumstances as: 'gestures that are not completely free but which free themselves by their attachment to the ... body [that

[81] I will further elaborate on this concept of a force being applicable but not in application in Section 4.4 via Agamben's concept of *state of exception*.

[82] In his essay 'Notes On Gesture' Agamben uses the example of the person in a pornographic film being captured in the mediation of their gesture to demonstrate a correlate point. He says: 'as a person in a pornographic film is captured in the act of carrying out a gesture that is merely a means directed toward the end of procuring pleasure for others (or for him or herself), through the sole fact of being photographed and displayed in his or her own state of mediation this person is suspended from that mediation and can become, for the spectators, the medium of a new pleasure' (Agamben, 2007a: 155).

performs]' (Formis: 187).[83] What would be more correct, I would argue, is to say that artistic gesture is precisely free when it is both attached to and detached from the performing body. The gesture of artistic labour, the biological root of existence of human doing, needs to be suspended both from action (*praxis*), as the performing body, and production (doing), as the exterior end of production. Pure gesture indeed means we view gesture as precisely its own being-gesture distinct from this or that body, and at the same time the physical operation of a bio-graphology. The visibility of aesthetics also requires a certain suspension of the body in order to overcome the problem of validating *praxis* as more than merely an end in itself. I propose we think of this much in the same way as Rancière proposes we think of the two mute speeches discussed in the previous chapter: as the hieroglyph in whose traces we read a historiography (in this case the artist's body), but also as the voiceless-voice that speaks to no-one, of no-one, and to nothing. I therefore propose that the pure gesture of artistic labour can be summarised with the following points: *(a) pure gesture is both associated and dissociated with the figure of its performance, (b) pure gesture is negated from transcendence to an end, and (c) it denotes a pure mediality that only communicates the potentiality of its own means.*

The exposition of the pure artistic gesture therefore describes what Agamben defines as 'the communication of a potential to be communicated', and 'a pure potential for mediation' (Agamben, 2007a: 156). The reason why I propose a gestic critique to

[83] Formis refers for her argument to Anna Halprin's *Parades and Changes*: composed in 1965 and presented in New York in 1967 at the height of the Vietnam War: and then censored in the United States for twenty years. The choreographed performance involves a bare theatre stage on to which men and women dressed identically in black suits with white shirts and black shoes enter and proceed to walk in staccato fashion: 'They walk. Each in his or her direction, they create lines that interweave without ever encountering or colliding. There is no physical shock. The walking bodies belong to a chaotic mass whose volume is made of silent irritation. The gazes are hard, those of human beings who work, whose time is occupied by business ... The bodies *are* the walk, they are militarised. The walk is a parade.' (Formis: 181) The pure gesture of the walk, as well as the gaze of the actors that affronts the audience like the stare of a star in a pornographic film, is what Formis argues opens up a dialogue of knowing and makes us understand 'that the persons on the stage are not so much bodies or characters, but very much persons, anyones' (Formis: 183).

underpin the phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production is because through the gesture we don't seek the pre-signification of artistic labour as a pre-linguistic content, but 'the muteness inherent in humankind's very capacity for language, its *speechless* dwelling in language' (Agamben, 1999b: 78). It is this dwelling place of the speechless capacity of artistic labour, then, that is precisely highlighted by the arc of movement between *l*abour (praxis) and signification in *Fig.10.*

4.3 *Availability-toward-nothingness*

In separating an artist's labour from the communicability of action or production, we are effectively describing a zone of suspension wherein labour is distinctively ulterior to the norms of production. The status of artistic labour, as the output of the phantasmatic interrelation, is then put into production by way of a shadowed presence: by which I mean that it relates to the normal distinctions of human 'doing' only insofar as it affirms itself as non-doing. In defining the status of the work of art and artistic practices in *The Man Without Content*, Agamben employs two aspects of work's presence into being that help define this shadowed presence of labour. In the modern era, according to him, these two primary distinctions for categorising human production are being-at-work (the energetic status) and availability-for-work (the dynamic status) (Agamben, 1999a: 65).[84]

Being-at-work is work traditionally associated with human production under aesthetics, whereby human action 'enters into presence and lasts by gathering itself into its own shape as into its own end' (Agamben, 1999a: 65). Availability-for-work, on the other hand, is associated with the materiality of human production, which, like the

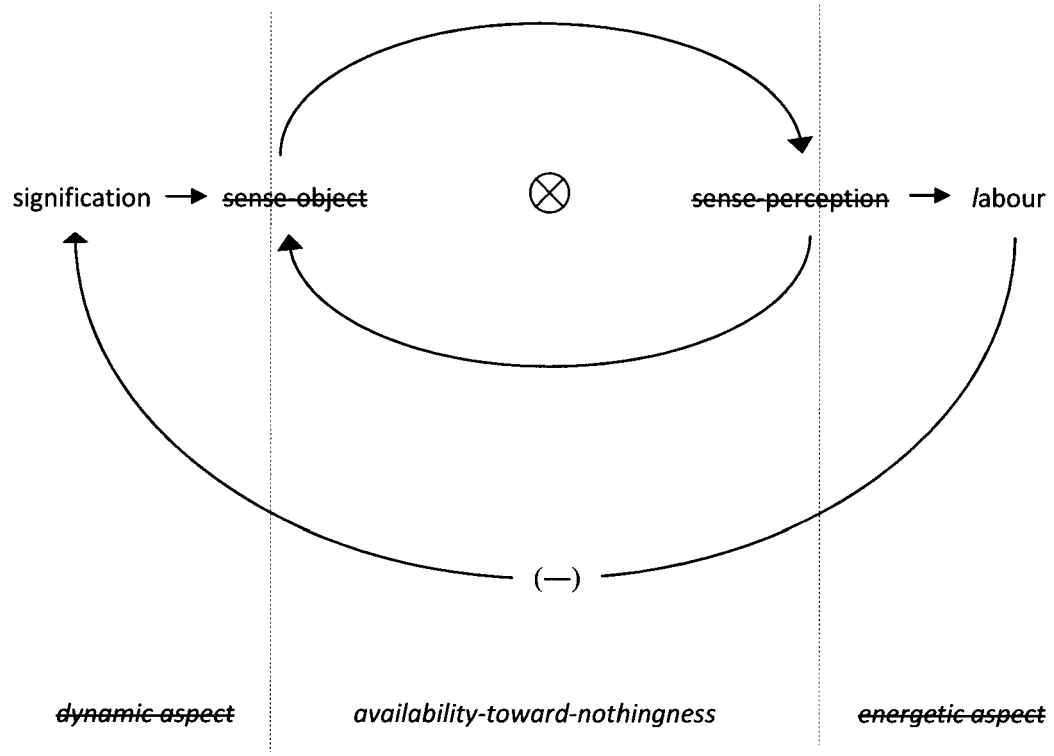
[84] In *The Man Without Content* the modern concept of man's 'doing', meaning *praxis* directed toward the process of production, is split between the 'work' of aesthetics (associated with originality and authenticity) and the 'product' of material life (that which is reproducible). It is from this conceptual division of *work* and *production*, which equates to the gestic distinction between *action* and *production* respectively, that Agamben finally sets the context for what he calls the shadow of work.

distinction of production we have already associated with gesture, is not itself at-work because it 'does not possess itself in its own shape as in its own end' (Agamben, 1999a: 65). In terms of artistic production we read that being-at-work is what we may think of as an artwork's '*energetic* aspect', denoting the artist's production into presence of art, whereby the artwork takes a shape that has as itself its own end. Art's availability, on the other hand, or what we may call its *dynamic* aspect, is defined by the availability of the artist's production, literally as a product in the strict sense of the word, for aesthetic enjoyment, judgement and consumption (Agamben, 1999a: 66). What being available-for-work means is that the shape the product takes is not its own end, but only forms itself as potential insofar as it is useful-for something else. The product is, of course, a moment of an end of production insofar as it reaches the resolution of being produced. But, as a product in that particular shape it does not for itself stand as its own end, but stands only as a potentiality for other ends.

In terms of the phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production, the energetic and dynamic aspects frame two alternative polemic positions that locate the artist's productive status. These positions orientate the phantasm's production-into-presence by identifying the alternation between its energetic expression of labour – the 'to do' of artistic *praxis* that defines the artist's being-at-work – and its dynamic expression, which resolves labour as signification. Labour according to its energetic aspect is what we have called *praxis* in the gestic critique. If we think of labour as a sign, however, labour attains a dynamic status insofar as it is available for ends other than itself: namely a signifying process available for re-transcription, translation, verification, and transmission. The energetic and dynamic aspects of labour therefore demarcate the movement of articulation in our diagram by structuring production with zones of statuses, which I have highlighted in *Fig.12*.

Fig.12 The phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production

(Identifying the zone of availability-toward-nothingness)



As illustrated in the diagram above (*Fig.12*) a third zone of production is situated between the dynamic and the energetic aspect, which are displayed as crossed through (the reason for which will become clear). This third zone is what Agamben calls 'availability-toward-nothingness' (Agamben, 1999a: 67). The zone of availability-toward-nothingness describes a zone of non-production that operates by negating the interchange of the other two productive aspects. In particular this third zone of production posits an alternative to the usual interaction between being-at-work and availability-for work. 'Wherever a work of art is pro-duced and exhibited today,' Agamben posits, 'its *energetic* aspect … is erased to make room for its character as a stimulant of the aesthetic sentiment' (Agamben, 1999a: 66). This process of erasing the energetic status in favour of the dynamic status describes a passage that leads from

artistic *action* to the potentiality of aesthetic *production*: whereby the latter obscures the former. We can also think of this in terms of defining art by its exhibition value as opposed to the traditional distinctions of use-value and exchange-value. Exhibition-value (*Ausstellungswert*), a term borrowed by Agamben from Benjamin, characterises the dominant transformation in the value of production since the era of technological reproducibility. This term is not reducible to Marxian use-value or exchange-value because what is exhibited is neither practicably useful nor a measure of labour-power (Agamben, 2007b: 90). Exhibition, or what is given over to spectacular exhibition, instead frames the current aesthetic relationship to spectatorship and the spectacle by defining the relationship between the spectator and the artist in a space contemporary to 'the extreme phase of capitalism in which we are now living, in which everything is exhibited in its separation from itself' (Agamben, 2007b: 82).[85]

If the artist then accepts the dynamic aspect of work as their own status, and seeks to find content in mere spectacle and availability, they risk what Agamben calls an exile of the work of art from its essence. An artist's conscious engagement with the aesthetic status of their own work, in this regard, is what he subsequently calls the production of art as 'open work' or 'work-in-progress' (Agamben, 1999a: 66). Being in-progress therefore denotes artistic production as mere potentiality: whereby the artwork no longer possesses its own end in itself, but requires the apparatus of exhibition in order to define its content and form. Accordingly, the work of art would be 'work that is never at work' and only ever available-for its dynamic aspect as a product. The problem with the 'open work' then is that it thinks of artistic activity only as the dynamic status exclusively.

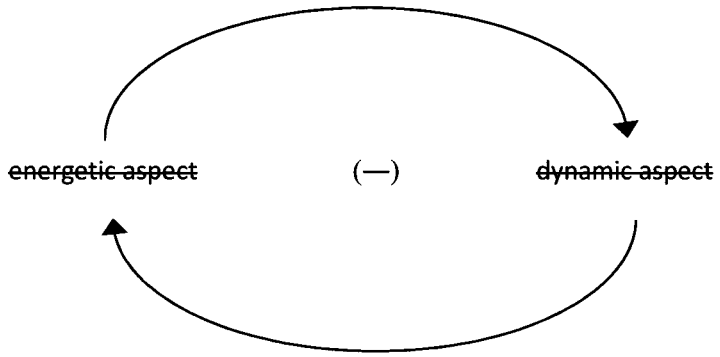
[85] The development of modern society in relation to spectacular exhibition should also be read here beside Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, where, he proposes, social life, the lived experience of life, 'has become mere representation' (Debord, 1994: 12). In Thesis 42 of this book Debord further posits that the spectacle, and the exhibition or representation of the spectacle, defines the advanced system of capitalism, mass media, and forms of government today that produce the conditions for the commodity to colonise social life – which we see also evidenced in the theory of immaterial labour as I detailed it in Chapter 1.

What is termed the shadow of artistic production aims to gets around this problem of the artist's interaction with the dual statuses of work and non-work through the introduction of a third aspect. This third aspect arises, in comparison, not from the artist elevating one specific status of their productive activity, nor by merely playing with the double status of artistic production[86] – by moving between the energetic and dynamic status – but instead through suspending both states. Rather than accepting the definition of either presence, Agamben proposes that availability-toward-nothingness is possible when the status of artistic work escapes belonging to both aspects simultaneously. The force of suspension is enacted in a similar manner to that of the gesture in relation to *praxis*. What is removed, we may say, from the energetic aspect of labour is its ability to posses itself in its own end (as the action of being-at-work), while the dynamic aspect is removed from consumption and strict availability. Instead what is textually displayed in *Fig.12* as the crossing through of the energetic and dynamic aspects highlights the space of production whereby labour is not-at-work and not-available-for aesthetic consumption: it is labour *at* and *available* precisely for nothing. 'Availability-toward-nothingness, although it is not yet work, is in some way a negative presence, a shadow of being-at-work: it is ... ~~work~~' (Agamben, 1999a: 67).

This relationship can itself also be formulated as a phantasmatic interrelation, whereby the double negation of the energetic and dynamic aspects opens up the negative presence of the space for availability-toward-nothingness: which I express diagrammatically in *Fig.13* below.

[86] Agamben refers to the example of Pop Art and the 'ready-made' at this point. In particular he identifies these two art forms as exemplary of contrary but mutually related forms of artistic production that play with the statuses of aesthetic authenticity and technical reproducibility, between being *work* and being *product*: '[w]hile the "ready-made" proceeds from the sphere of the technical product to the sphere of art, pop art moves in the opposite direction: from aesthetic status to the status of industrial product' (Agamben, 1999a: 63). However, the medial status attained here is only temporary. 'In both cases', we read, 'except for the instance of the alienation effect – the passages from one to the other status is impossible: that which is reproducible cannot become original, and that which is irreproducible cannot be reproduced' (Agamben, 1999a: 63-64).

Fig.13 Availability-toward-nothingness as a phantasmatic interrelation



By bringing together the two models that Agamben used in *Stanzas* to describe the phantasmatic interrelation in terms of melancholia (*Fig.3*) and the fetish disavowal (*Fig.4*), in *Fig.13* I describe the figure of the shadow (—) as arising in the place previously occupied by the lost object or the fetish. The use of the shadow (—) here describes 'the alienated essence of the work of art', namely the simultaneous alienation of labour from being-at-work and being available-for-work, or as work-in-progress. The division between work and production, the energetic and dynamic aspects of artistic production are not overcome by the shadow, but made extreme through reciprocal suspensions. It is this formula that, like the pure mediality of the gesture, indicates a space from which we may know artistic labour according to a status of non-being, of thinking art as non-art (~~art~~) and labour as both the ability to do and to not do (~~labour~~) (Agamben, 1999a: 49). The shadow tells us to think of the thing in question as what it is not, which reigns as a value over what it is. To form an effective measure of artistic labour, then, we must measure labour first against its own negation.

I concluded Chapter 2 by claiming a number of defining points about the phantasm in relation to artistic labour. In particular I proposed that the phantasm is a model of knowledge based on having privation. What I meant by this is that the

phantasm occurs neither through actuality nor potentiality, but through existing in privation, which is to say operating from a place of existence with non-actuality and non-potentiality. Having potentiality as a privation does not designate an absence as such, but the presence of un-substantiated negation. Previously, via Agamben who in turn draws on Freud, I have resolved this suspension in terms of disavowal (*Verleugnung*) in order to describe the phantasm's reciprocal negation of its sense-object and sense-perception (textually displayed in *Fig.9* as ~~sense-object~~ and ~~sense-perception~~). As a result of disavowal, we no longer identify with either the sense-object or sense-perception, except only insofar as they are represented as being removed. This process successfully elaborates the unconscious process of the phantasm and distinguishes the place from which potentiality operates as a place of denial (denoted by the symbol ⊗). However, now that we are trying to understand the phantasm as an external process of aesthetic production, we need to reconsider the mechanics of the unconscious movement of disavowal as a conscious process of force. The process described by availability-toward-nothingness, in respect of describing the removal of being-in-force of the energetic and dynamic aspects, is instead what we may call a force of suspension: a terminology more proper to Agamben's concept of the *state of exception*.

4.4 *The zone of suspension*

Suspension is most notably put to use by Agamben in the context of the state of exception by designating the opening of a space from where a force-of-law can only really be expressed as a state of law in suspension, or temporally removed from present application. While it is, nevertheless, not permanently removed from being, it no longer applies in the instance and duration of the state of exception. Developed from the

juridical theory of exception, which he notably outlines in *State of Exception*, the role of suspension here describes the peculiar presence in law when law itself requires its own release from the force of the law, or from the obligation of observing the law. The state of exception, so called, therefore does not propose a state of law that supersedes the original order of law with a new model, nor is it really a strict suspension of law. Rather, the exception arises as a release that takes place 'from the literal application of the norm' (Agamben, 2005: 25).

This peculiar situation occurs when, in normative states of necessity, the arrival of a problematic situation constructs the presence of a lacuna in the set order. The lacuna or gap produces a new necessity for exception to exist by breaching the capacity of the law to account for this peculiar situation in normative terms. In short, it defines a fractured space: 'in which application and norm reveal their separation,' whereby the norm can therefore only continue to apply 'by ceasing to apply' (Agamben, 2005: 40). It is this peculiarity whereby a force cannot be negated but also cannot apply that I propose is applicable to the relationship between artistic labour's energetic and dynamic statuses when availability-toward-nothingness comes into being. Here the normative states of an artist's being in presence as a productive individual, either as being-in-work or being available-for-work, encounter a lacuna in the logic of the pure gesture.

Because the gesture manifests itself without alternation to the normative ends of production, the energetic and dynamic statuses cannot be in-force. At the same time, however, these normative aspects of production still necessarily remain the standard predicates on which production is judged. Just as with law, artistic production is faced with the problem of accounting for a situation that is exterior to the norm, but must nevertheless be situated within the normal conditions of production, even though those conditions do not apply. Therefore, when I speak of the shadow (—) I am denoting a

space where the normative statuses of production are suspended from application. The 'zone' of suspension can, therefore, be understood to construct itself around the individual when, as Agamben says, 'wherein lies a human action without relation to the norm' (Agamben, 2005: 60). It is here that the term 'exception' comes back into the present discourse of artistic labour and specifically occurs in the phantasm of artistic labour.

Obviously a contradiction presents itself here between artistic ~~labour~~ as a state of exception and Rancière's belief that artistic practices – while they designate a process of reconfiguration with regard to other occupations – are not exceptions to other practices. As we saw in the previous chapter and also in section 2.4, the ~~event~~ of artistic labour is the point at which the artist distributes the sensorium of labour through the aesthetic rupture: that is, the artist engages with labour from a disjointed and dissensual position rather than any fixed idea of labour constrained to a representational regime of time and space. Artistic labour therefore falls under the regime of aesthetics and stands in isolation from other practices not because it forms a division, but because the ~~event~~ defines an absolute singularity dissociated from any sovereignty. As I said on the subject of the exception in relation to Rancière in section 1.8, where the representative regime of poetics defines a distribution of the sensible according to the barriers that stand between representations, the aesthetic regime destroys the very criterion of the barriers which would allow for the singularity to be isolated in the first place. Artistic labour – specifically insofar as it is distributed by the aesthetic space of the artistic ~~event~~ – is similarly identified only within the specificity of its own regime: and therefore free from the confinement of any exterior ruling of hierarchical placement. The state of exception I now propose does not undermine this position, *per se*, insofar as it arises more specifically in the movement to articulate labour such as it is.

The crisis facing art in our time, according to Agamben, is founded on the aesthetic reduction to exhibition and spectacle, which reduces all artistic production to availability (or to use his term, the reduction of art to work-in-progress). His aim, then, is to restore art from the present aesthetics of exhibition and availability and return to what he calls its original poetic status. The original status he refers to is art's 'gift of the original site of man': which is 'neither a cultural "value" nor a privileged object ... nor the absolute creative power of the formal principle', but instead, 'a more original dimension, because it allows man to attain his original status in history and time in his encounter with it' (Agamben, 1999a: 101). To these ends he sees the shadow of availability-toward-nothingness as the starting point of a process of gathering together the inherent scissions of production through mutually negating them. Until this happens the 'original measure of man on earth' is, in his eyes, condemned to a 'terra aesthetica' from which he is uncertain of a return (Agamben, 1999a: 103). This condemnation of the artistic position in aesthetics is what Claire Colebrook, in her essay 'Agamben: Aesthetics, Potentiality, and Life' (2008), sees as the portrayal of a sense of mourning in Agamben's mediations on art's potentiality. What he mourns, she argues, is a loss of connectedness between art and *poiesis* as a revelation of truth (Colebrook: 108). The aim of Agamben's reconciliation of artistic production therefore points back from the division of work and production in order to try and define a new original way of attaining artistic 'doing' according to the lost status of *poiesis*.

It is here, however, that my present enquiry ceases to follow the direction of *The Man Without Content*. While Agamben pursues a productive doing that aims to determine an artistic status that transcends the aesthetic dimension, I aim to define a status of artistic labour that transcends nothing, but exposes only its own operation. I do not aim to reconcile art with its split, but to know the lacuna such as it is. A lacuna, moreover, that contains the awareness of the artist's own phantasmal processes. Here I

make no attempt at reconciliation or to abolish the gap between the polemic positions of action and production, but to expose them as they are mediated by the third space of a phantasmatic shadow. It is here that I also pose a contradiction to Rancière regarding the question of art's exceptionality. Artistic practices in themselves are not presented by this thesis as exceptional, but I do propose that the aesthetic visibility that labour attains in artistic practices introduces a state of exception. From the starting point of the shadow, then, my intention is to expose the disjunctive processes of labour's gestures, to dismantle production according to the shadow and, in the shadow, see the dismantling force of non-action and non-production. The place to where the critique of nothingness in production directs our attention is not toward the interrogation of the artist's ability to produce into presence events or objects that contain their own essence in themselves. Rather, and on the contrary, I am interested in exposing artistic labour as the continuation of the imaginary 'to do'.

In order to continue the 'doing' of the imaginary, namely the continuation of the phantasmatic interrelation into 'reality,' means that the normal statuses of production are suspended. By reconfiguring the sensible distribution of labour and by valorising the process of disavowal in the interrelation of sense, indeed precisely by being an aesthetic mediation of labour that exposes labour as a pure gesture, artistic labour posits the exceptional ability of aesthetic practices to make visible the lacuna of nothingness between production and action. *The framework of the shadow is here not merely an escape from the false alternatives of labour as doing and potentiality, but the suspension that pushes our consciousness of labour into nothingness. And, here, exposed to the nothingness that comes into being from an availability-toward-nothingness, we come into possession (the having) of artistic labour as the 'to do' of thought.*

4.5 *(A) Time reforming*

When we talk about the zone of suspension, the place of shadow, or the pure mediality of the artistic gesture, it would be easy to assume that the space we are defining is contained in a brief temporal moment, like the voice just before it becomes auditory, or the tensing of muscles before exerting a movement. But, as I have defined the contemporaneity of the term phantasm previously, the relationship between the phantasm and time is disjunctive (see section 2.5). The phantasm, on one hand, approaches time insofar as it is contemporary and responsive to paradigmatic shifts that are temporally located, and, as such, it draws sense from time. But the phantasm is also the having of time as itself disjointed from time because it articulates a biographical present and a dissociated historical-past. The movement of the gesture and the space of shadow that I have described as processes of the external articulation of the phantasm maintains these properties in many respects. The being-in-medium or being-in-language of the artistic gesture represents a biographical present that locates the artist as present, localised in a specific moment of the event (labour). However, as we have seen, while the concept of a biographical and a linear time (for example time as a passage from means to an end of production) is applicable to artistic production, it cannot truly be in application if pure gesture is to make visible the solitary moment of mediality. The pure gesture's contemporariness – which I locate with Agamben following Foucault – means a belonging to one's time in a disconnected way: 'a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it' (Agamben, 2009a: 41). The singular relationship of the gesture is disruptive to the communication of time utilised in productive activity precisely because it captures that time in-its-own-time. In much the same way availability-toward-nothingness defines a concept of labour time in suspension. The peculiarity of being in time here defines (a) time dedicated to

negation and suspension that escapes the linear process of time dedicated to means and ends.

Consider, for instance, how Hsieh's *One Year Performances* suspend the spaces and time of production. In particular I am thinking of the various forms of daily documentation that Hsieh employs in his performances to catalogue his life over each one-year period. The photos documentation of 'Cage Piece', for example, collapses the space of a year into 365 frames, which singularly are motionless mug shots of Hsieh, but collectively summarise the passage of his life reforming. In what way, then, can Hsieh's performances be said to actually enforce a collapse of the isolating conditions that separate the stage of art from its surrounding world (life)? And, furthermore, in what way is this collapse or aesthetic rupture affected on the temporality of labour as well as the space of production?[87] Precisely what is 'untimely' about Hsieh is the manner in which he pushes at the boundaries of the artistic stage as a temporal event, realigning a

[87] Another question raised by 'Cage Piece' which I do not have time to expressly take up in this present investigation is that of the medial position of the spectator or witness. In 'Cage Piece' Hsieh's imprisonment is witnessed in various ways: through the legal framework of his attorney Robert Projansky, who signed the seals across every joint of the cage and produced a written witness statement to testify to the propriety of Hsieh's incarceration; through the audience members who were allowed to visit the performance on 19 separate dates throughout the year; and last but not least, Hsieh had a daily witness in the form of his friend Cheng Wei Kuong, who was responsible for bringing Hsieh his daily supply of food and clothes, and for removing his waste. Interestingly Heathfield refers to this last form of witness as a 'bare ... witnessing' (Heathfield & Hsieh, 2009: 24). What this raises is a question about the labour of the witness. This question is also raised in many respects by the work of Tino Sehgal. Consider, for instance, the series of three annual shows at the ICA in London between 2004 and 2007: consisting of *This objective of that object* (2004-2005), *This Progress* (2006), and *This Success or Failure* (2007). The first two performances involved performers engaging the spectator in conversation, while *This Success or Failure* involved a group of schoolchildren who spend each day of the exhibition playing in the gallery space without the aid of objects. Gesture, particularly in this last performance, has two forms: on one hand there is the movement of the children's bodies in the act of play, which transferred to conscious space of exhibition (including their invitation to visitors to 'play' with them) manifests the movement of play to pure gesture – in the same way dance as pure *praxis* denotes a means without end. On the other hand, we have the gesture of the visitor's inhabitation and non-habitation of witnessing. What is specifically given aesthetic visibility and value in Sehgal's work, in contrast to Hsieh, is the medial position of the spectator. That there is no (official) record of the work except what visitors experience in the gestures of the performers who interpret Sehgal's instructions and their own participation, defines Sehgal's attempt to make the (attentive) visitor aware of their own being-in-mediation of the artwork. As elaborated in the previous chapter through Rancière's equality of knowledge, the visitor is therefore both active and passive in witnessing the artwork. But I would also posit that the visitor is equally involved in a movement of visiting and escaping from one gestic terrain (one's 'average everydayness' [Heidegger, 1962: 79]) to another (the aesthetic). However, concerned as the present investigation is with artistic labour as the medial position of the artist, presently I will leave aside the role of the spectator's being-in-language or being-in-gesture (as a 'bare witnessing').

time of artistic production with the production of life. The year-long works are not only epic in scale but invoke a whole new approach to an aesthetics of duration that makes time itself into an artistic material or tool. Furthermore, the gesture of his artistic acts, including what we may call the experience, visibility, and distribution of these acts, has a tendency to collapse into immeasurable elements. For these reasons when referring to Hsieh's performances Heathfield uses the term 'lifeworks' rather than artworks. What 'lifeworks' encompasses is a real sense of how for large parts of Hsieh's life we cannot truly distinguished his life and his art apart. What we face in examining his lifeworks, then, concerns how he, the artist, comes to occupy what Formis might call a 'kind of frontline between art and life' (Formis: 185).

From this frontline position Hsieh aims at a beyond of two key definitions of art: 'art-as-process' and 'art-as-event' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 13). Considered in the terminology of art's energetic and dynamic status, we would say that Hsieh aims to elaborate the beyond of art's relation to activity and production in order to engage with its availability-toward-nothingness. His intention to create a sense of simultaneousness with life, for example, can be described as his 'being-in-duration' of the performances. This ultimately gives his performances their problematic theatrical space. The term that Heathfield uses to indicate Hsieh's being-in-duration is 'durational aesthetics' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 13). This term is employed to differentiate the temporal concept employed in Hsieh's performance from extant performance theory.[88] In particular Heathfield uses durational aesthetics to remove the linking of an artistic performance with the time and space of an 'event,' or with a presence of 'eventhood'. In contrast,

[88] In particular I am referring to the branch of performance theory that aims to overcome the divisiveness of the stage in order to merge the stage of performance and the spectator. Whether the method involves mobilising the 'passive' spectator into the 'active' participator, or, alternatively, by removing the distinctive physical boundaries of the stage and the auditorium, between the performance and life, by taking theatre out into life: as exemplified by the Situationists, but also Antonin Artaud's manifesto for a 'Theatre of Cruelty' (in *The Theatre and its Double*, 1938): whereby he proposes the spectator should be forced to abdicate any position and distance of the viewer.

Hsieh's performances negate the idea of being-an-event because the sheer duration and investiture of his own life with the performance forces us to think outside of the event as such. As a result we are forced to consider the artist as a subject no longer confined to being-in-the-event, but as having of the eventhood.

The time span of one calendar year is specifically crucial. A year, for instance, is not only an index of the artist's labour performed and marked with a temporal reception, but 'it *is* the lived duration itself' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 17). The performances are not instruments of time, given as a status of the event's ability to rupture one order of temporality into another. Rather time is an instrument of the performance. His year-long enactments purposely engage with the standard measure of a life – insofar as the quantity of a year is the basic index of human life – in order to engage with the potentiality of a life wholly given over to the aesthetic endeavour (Heathfield & Hsieh: 18). Durational aesthetics, as Heathfield situates it, arises then in the aesthetic perception as not only 'the sensate dynamics of temporality as they are manifested in human presence', but also 'the radical heterogeneity of durations' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 21). Duration then becomes the material index as well as the content of performance. As such Hsieh draws our attention to artistic activity and production by making us aware, through the visibility of his gestures, of 'the spacio-temporal limits of the artwork' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 22).

By drawing our attention to the peculiar state of the aesthetic spacio-temporality in his actions, Hsieh exposes the theatrical disjuncture of artistic time from normative time. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, the time and space of work defines the tendencies and framework that constructs and orders the meaning of how we occupy labour. This ordering can and is overcome to a degree by certain manipulations of the event of aesthetic performance. However, Heathfield argues that the success of most

aesthetic projects that aim to disrupt the normal time and space of production is limited because the interruption itself is temporally-limited. As a result he proposes that most artistic performances only manage to create a temporal-limited zone of suspension that is self-contained within, and bound to, the theatrical time of performance. The durational aesthetic of Hsieh, on the other hand, dismantles this limited temporality of the event through measuring the performance with the standard measure of life. In effect, denouncing the limitation of the artist's ability to expose the forces that govern artistic production.

What 'duration' denotes for Heathfield is the idea of persistence and 'of remaining through time', which is linked to the notion of endurance 'as a sustained living-through pain' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 22). But if this is the case then the notion of endurance, as something that is sustained-through, leads us only to a causal logic in relation to performances. It proposes a subject which triumphs and endures through time and, by living-through that time, moves toward a point of completion or a logical outcome: i.e. the endurance of hard labour that defines the 'good' capitalist work ethic, which tells us that labour leads to gain etc. In contrast, I propose it would be more useful to reflect on the term 'duration' by situating it within the context of Agamben's idea of experience. In *The Man Without Content*, a book that Heathfield is evidently familiar with and quotes from in his writings on Hsieh, the term experience is used to designate the idea of 'a *going through* of action and in the action' (Agamben, 1999a: 74). Duration as the experience therefore has an affinity with going through labour (to production) *and* being-in labour (as action).

In this way, I propose that the aesthetic duration of Hsieh can be thought of as undoing the causal logic of production by playing on the fringes of labour's potentiality to be and not be. He operates outside of the logical causality of durational *endurance*

and engages with the *experience* of duration, from which position he is able to 'disturb or suspend narrative resolutions and consolidated identities' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 22) of labour. If Hsieh is a disjunctive figure it is because he dismantles the aesthetic event from within aesthetics. The dismantling presence of the artist is here what Formis would call 'artistic dismantling'. This means that the artist 'works to dismantle the theatre as a place of exception, as a gestural terrain differentiated from the surrounding space' (Formis: 183). But dismantling occurs not as a breaking down of the divisions between exception and normality, but as the proposition of a new topology of the artist's gestural terrain from a position that interrupts the zone of suspension, exposes the fundamental formation of the differential statuses, and by doing so, exposing the conflicts inherent to its own exceptionality from the norm.

In summarising, aesthetic duration is described as 'a sense passage in which corporeal attention is drawn to (a) time reforming' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 22). Let us dwell on this definition for a moment. A sense passage refers to a movement drawn to 'time reforming' as a matter of attention given to or drawn to the reformation of time. But a reformation of time in general would have to incorporate universal and individual time. The reforming of one time, the individual's, onto the other, the universal, requires a mediation between these two polemic positions by presenting or absenting time as a corporeal moment.[89] What is crucial, what durational aesthetics draws to our attention, is an awareness of this mediation. Paraphrasing Mieke Bal, Heathfield goes on to describe durational aesthetics as 'conditioning a tactile attentiveness' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 22).

[89] Insofar as being-in-the-world understands itself in terms of the 'world' of its concern, Heidegger says that being may take its 'time' but 'it does *not* know this "time" *as its own*': instead, being 'concernfully *utilises* the time which "there is"' (Heidegger, 1962: 464). This leads to the question: has time being? (Heidegger, 1962: 472) The answer Heidegger develops through Hegel's understanding of the relation between time and spirit, is the proposition that '[t]he being of time is the "now"': but '[e]very "now", as not-being' (Heidegger, 1962: 483). Time here goes beyond the representational stream of time and understands time in an abstract sense; which finds its most appropriate expression in the Hegelian treatment of time as 'the negation of a negation': that is, time as 'abstract negativity' (Heidegger, 1962: 484-5). From this perspective, time is essentially the question that remains at the end of *Being and Time* (1927) as the potential manifestation of 'the horizon of *Being*' (Heidegger, 1962: 488).

The merit of this phrase is in describing what is peculiar about the temporal space of Hsieh's time, namely that it conditions the spectator to be attentive to time in a manner that is outside of the way one would normally approach it. What is at stake is not really the attainment of a physicality of time, but the process for grasping an idea of time specific to the artistic activity of Hsieh, in particular, and artistic labour, in general.

In order to express this reforming idea of temporality in artistic practices I would like to draw a correlation between two of Hsieh's performances, 'Time Clock Piece' and 'Cage Piece', and Darren Almond's video installations *A Real Time Piece* (1996) and *HMP Pentonville* (1997) respectively. In 'Time Clock Piece' Hsieh wastes labour time. His time is effectively bound to the action of 'clocking time', on the hour, every hour, for a year, as he punches in a time card in his studio. The mechanical apparatus of the time-clock that is normally used for measuring time dedicated to labour, a machine that is supposed to enforce time and reduce time wasted from labour, therefore becomes the very apparatus of an inverse effect. 'Hsieh makes a sacrifice', writes Heathfield, 'he gives excessively' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 32). Yet what he gives in excess is time dedicated to an artistic labour that measures only the time of its own non-production. By contrast in Almond's *A Real Time Piece* non-productive time is clocked not by an apparatus of enforced measure, but by the real-time capture of time.

A Real Time Piece actually stars an empty space, but Almond refers to this as a performance because the protagonists are precisely time and space. Presented over 24 hours in a small gallery in east central London, a large video projection presents an image of a corner in Almond's studio. Furnished with a draughtsman's table, a desk fan, a light, a telephone, a swivel chair, and a digital clock, the interior functions as a clean and functional place for intellectual effort (as opposed to the traditional artist studio with its detritus of materials). The artist is absent and nothing much happens. With each

passing minute the clock flips over with a resounding crash, all captured by a live broadcast bounced, courtesy of the BBC, from Almond's studio on one side of London to the other. The medium's peculiar spatio-temporal characteristics are then registered by the gallery's visitors, who become witness to the passage of time reforming in the artist's vacant workplace. The technological mechanism of real-time capture in *A Real Time Piece* achieves one important consequence that Hsieh's 'Time Clock Piece' does not. By making the artist's labour (or vacancy of labour) visible to an audience in real-time, it is not only the artistic gesture that is captured but also the spectator's gesture of viewing. While the mechanism of live broadcast is not in itself new, what Almond does is focus on the medium itself, on the live image as a mediation of life made conspicuous of the predicament of the artist's and spectator's spatial distance and temporal presence. Time is here (a) time reforming, captured in the mediation of the instance of its happening.

HMP Pentonville is a similar live broadcast where a television camera relays the interior of a deserted cell from Her Majesty's Prison Pentonville live to London's Institute of Contemporary Arts. Analogous to 'Cage Piece' where Hsieh traps himself in a cage with no stimulus but the passage of time (not allowed to talk, to read, or to write), *HMP Pentonville* traps the spectator in a relationship with entrapped time. The difference of duration, Almond's performance being limited to two hours, while Hsieh's is a calendar year, means that Almond's endurance does not escape the temporality of the event in the same way that Hsieh employs durational aesthetics. Nevertheless, the entrapment of time in both is measured by self-imposition. For Hsieh by his own adherence to the highly restrictive rules of each performance, in *HMP Pentonville* through the spectator subjecting themselves to the real-time aesthetics of the tiny cell: which is blown up to an enormous scale on the walls of the gallery accompanied by the video's digital counter rattling through seconds and the incidental acoustics of the

prison. Both Almond's and Hsieh's installations mark the capture and loss of privative (unproductive) space-time by the public recording of time. But whereas Hsieh marks this presence and loss by capturing his own constriction to the rules of time and place, Almond does so through his vacancy from his studio, the space of the cell, or the gallery. Even though it is not Almond who is present in the 'cell' but the spectator, the gestic time remains crucially aesthetic.

Similarly, by pursuing the phantasm of artistic labour we seek unreality in the time of labour in order to shape our grasp of reality. On this subject Heathfield writes:

> In their attention to and playful subversion of the orders of time, durational aesthetics give access to other temporalities: to time that will not submit to Western culture's linear, progressive meta-narratives, its orders of commodification; to the times of excluded or marginalised identities and lives; to times as they are felt in diverse bodies. Time, then, as plenitude: heterogeneous, informal and multi-faceted.
>
> (Heathfield & Hsieh, 2009: 23)

Durational aesthetics proposes an alternative attention to time because it reforms time constantly within the mediality of a pure gesture. Unlike the Parisian workers of nineteenth-century France who, as we saw in the previous chapter had to steal time away from the capitalist time of production because the time of labour would not wait, here time is described as plenitude: time as *(a) time reforming*. The pure gesture captures time in the space of a means without end, or time without progression to a causal conclusion. Like 'the watched doing the watching' (Formis: 190), time is reconfigured by the visible time of performance that draws corporeal attention to its own passage of (a) time. *Gestic time therefore reforms temporality, negates the distinction of staged time and real time, and, as a consequence, the time of artistic labour is available-toward-nothing.*

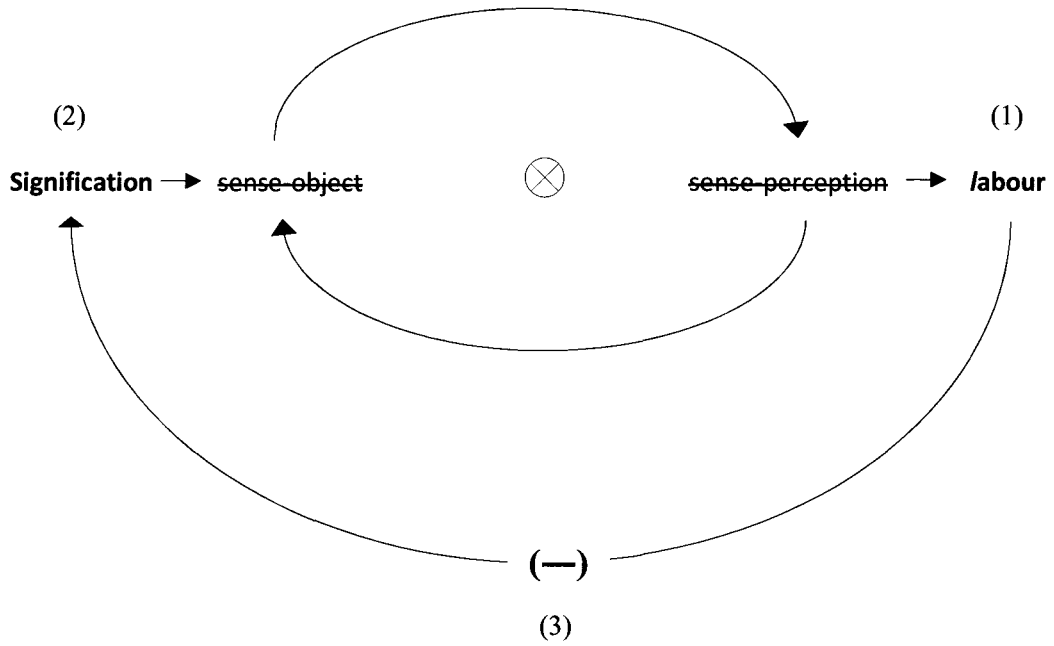
What Almond achieves with modern broadcast technology is the capture and mediation of living time as it happens.[90] He also reminds us that for aesthetics to register and capture the mediality of artistic labour, the point of visibility still depends on the presence of the other in order to distribute (artistic) time reforming: most especially in moments of the artist's vacancy. But for Hsieh, while the passage of a year might become reducible to a record of solitary moments (filmed, photographed and documented), these solitary moments yet exist beyond their exhausted instant of being, for instance, punched onto a piece of card ('Time Clock Piece'). The same holds true of the series of images captured of Hsieh during 'Time Clock Piece' on a 16mm film camera. His action at every occurrence of the 'event' of punching-in was recorded as a single frame of film on a camera installed in his studio. Running at twenty-four frames a second the resulting movie reduces a year to a little more than six minutes. But what the film crucially shows is a dissolved relation between time and duration. The filmic moments of labour connect one to the next as non-productive labour: labour that has been evacuated from the time of its employment in performance (Heathfield & Hsieh: 33). Furthermore, the private time of Hsieh's action is here dissolved from itself, captured, made visible, and then reproduced as a gesture caught in the mediation of its own mediality. *The pure mediality of the artistic gesture therefore reforms (a) time and space of labour as itself (a) time and space reforming. In an attempt to disclose the indistinct space of artistic production, the force of its governance and the state of its exception, the artist exposes their own encounter with suspension as a principle of forming and reforming labour.*

[90] Arguably this can be seen to be taken further with the rise of internet technologies in artist practices. Probably the most well known, and still problematic, capture by art of 'digital' time is Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno's project *No Ghost Just a Shell*. In 1999 the two Paris-based artists acquired the rights to a Manga character for 46,000 yen. The character, AnnLee, was then used as a shell for invited artists and other cultural producers (17 people in total) to occupy, manipulate, and exhibit. The capture of 'living' time here plays on the very threshold of the presence of identity, drawing on an intersection of sensibilities promoted by immaterial labour, post-1968 social movements, and technological reproducibility. What the vacancy of AnnLee also points toward, in being filled with the time and labour of artists and given visibility (when normally such peripheral characters are destined to simply disappear in whatever story they are placed in), marks also the inherent vacancy of the sign.

4.6 *The gag, death & memory*

Because pure gesture designates a means without end, it can effectively express only what is said in-language or done in-action through the means of language and action respectively. But pure gesture cannot strictly speaking express anything other than its own being-in-language because it does not carry anything through to the end of communication (i.e. communicating this or that meaning in particular). In this way the language of gesture is always a being-in-language that is at a loss. Gesture, we should say, is the mediation of language – including non-linguist forms of gestures – such as it is. What is therefore expressed is negation itself. Agamben calls this empty space of a means without the end of articulation a process of language subjected to a 'gag'.

Fig.14 The phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production
(highlighting the process of the gag, memory & death)



In my model for the phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production I have highlighted this space of the gag in *Fig.14* above. The gag is what is here situated between the points marked (1) '*l*abour' and (2) 'signification', as arising at the apex of the gestic movement as (3) the presence of the shadow (—). The position of the gag in gestic critique, we read in 'Notes on Gesture', is formulated in the following way:

> In itself it [gesture] has nothing to say, because what it shows is the being-in-language of human beings as pure potential for mediation. But since being-in-language is not something that can be spoken of in propositions, in its essence gesture is always a gesture of non-making of sense in language, it is always a gag in the strict meaning of the term, indicating in the first instance something that is put in the mouth to hinder speech, and subsequently the actor's improvisation to make up for a memory lapse or some impossibility of speech.
>
> (Agamben, 2007a: 156)

What the speechlessness of the gag exhibits is the lapse of the alternation between means and ends, action and production. By making the means of human activity visible as the media of its own communication, the gesture works by hindering communication itself. What is performed in the act 'to see', 'to hear', or 'to do' is hereby disconnected from the production into presence of 'doing', 'seeing' and 'hearing', as the resolution of something made sense of by sensible communication. Two further comments by Agamben on the subject of art, gesture and criticism help to formulate the role of the gag further. First, he says '[c]riticism is the reduction of works to the sphere of pure gesture' (Agamben, 1999b: 80), and secondly, '[i]f ... it is true that the critic leads art to its negation, it is only in this shadow and this death that art (our aesthetic idea of art) sustains itself and finds its reality' (Agamben, 1999a: 48). Gesture and criticism here share a common ground of procedure insofar as each opens their subject to negation and sustains it in negation. Criticism reduces its subject to the sphere of pure gesture, and gesture, in reducing communication to the mediality of language, finds reality in what

itself 'has nothing to say'. The role of negation is here a role of exposure. It interrogates a definition of its subject only by making visible what the subject is not. As a result criticism invests the 'shadow' of its subject with reality.

What the gag denotes in *Fig.9* and what is highlighted at point (3) in *Fig.14* is this position of exposed negation. How the gag attains its power is by exposing the point at which we cannot bring action or language into communication. If the pure gesture of artistic labour can be textually displayed as labour in shadow (~~labour~~) because it is suspended from action and production, its energetic and dynamic aspect, then the gag denotes the force of the shadow itself: simply the space (—). Faced with the shadow of artistic ~~labour~~, what I propose is that we seek only to expose labour without any desire to transcend its own state of mediation. As a result our measure of reality and authenticity would henceforth be based only on our potentiality to communicate the gesture of labour without labour itself communicating anything as such. Gesture, and more specifically the gag of gesture, is what then communicates this non-communicability to us. The gag's 'lapse' of communication, or the impossibility of speech and action to resolve itself in making sense as language, is what Agamben calls the 'essential "mutism"' of articulation (Agamben, 2007a: 156). The gestic gag mutes action, it does not denote a presence or absence of the action, but like the state of exception defines the presence of a force that does not apply but still exists.

Agamben's treatise in *Language and Death*, which examines the role of the shifter in language – specifically with regard to Heidegger's *da* (the there) of *Da-sein* and Hegel's *diese* (this) – can assist here with our attempt to localise negativity at the point that it is introduced into human communication. As Justin Clemens comments on Agamben's use of the shifter, notably in 'The role of the Shifter and the Problem of Reference in Giorgio Agamben' (2008), he states that: '[c]rucially, this emergence is

not itself simply due to the performative aspect of utterance; it is rather the "place" at which the performative opens onto something quite other' (Clemens: 45). It is precisely the potentiality of Agamben's discourse to open our understanding of the gesture of artistic labour to 'something quite other', in particular the 'quite other' of the phantasm, for which this enquiry pursues his notion of gesture and the gag. *Language and Death* now further leads us toward this exposition not by way of an engagement with the performative aspect of the linguistic and non-linguistic utterance (as Austin defines the term), but by highlighting the place of negativity and suspension that is opened up in action, yet points us to somewhere other than action.

Where I take up the argument in *Language and Death* is where Agamben asks: '[w]hat, in the instance of discourse, permits that it be indicated, permits that before and beyond what is signified in it, it *shows* its own taking place?' (Agamben, 1991: 32) His conclusion is that taking place '*shows* its own taking place', such as it is, by not-taking-place. The relevance of both this question and his subsequent theses is that in showing 'its own taking place' Agamben posits a correspondence between three key points: the instant of discourse (the articulation of labour), the meaning or what is indicated by that articulation (what it signifies), and a time-space that accounts for a presence 'before and beyond what is signified' (Agamben, 1991: 32). The points marked (1), (2) and (3) in *Fig.14* correspond to these three points respectively. The instant of the gag, I argue, refers us to the last of these points, to a time-space that has a presence neither in the instant of discourse nor in meaning, but grounds artistic labour at the specific (and solitary) point of its own taking place between the 'before' and the 'beyond'. This point of time-space is what shows action or language to itself as its own taking place.

The showing of labour's taking place therefore grounds the pure gesture not only according to how, following an example in the parlance of *Language and Death*, the

voice speaks or to whom, but also as belonging to a particular point of articulation. A distinction can be made here between voice (lower case) as it corresponds to the animal *phoné* or mere sound, and Voice (capitalised to distinguish it from the former) as articulation. The Voice, as articulation, is what we understand as '[t]he taking place of language between the removal of the voice and the event of meaning' (Agamben, 1991: 35). The specific distinction between voice and Voice, then, needs to be made because voice (*phoné*), while it clearly operates as an index of the one who speaks, does not indicate discourse itself. What is meant by voice is the 'mere sonorous flux emitted by the phonic apparatus'. In the same way we would say that an animal has a voice but does not articulate language. Likewise, the mere expression of labour as the 'to do' of *praxis* corresponds to the bodily emission of labour through muscles flexing and the brain thinking, but does not itself elaborate a process of labour discourse. On the other hand, Voice is what arises between emitting a voice and the subsequent sound signifying meaning, which, Agamben posits, 'constitutes the originary articulation ... of human language' (Agamben, 1991: 35).

To put this in the context for our present enquiry, I propose we align the following terms: voice equates to *l*abour (lower case, and in this instance italicised to distinguish it from a general use of the term labour), insofar as they respectively designate *phoné* and labour as the bare expression of *praxis*. The term Voice equates to *L*abour (capitalised and italicised, again to distinguish it from a general use of the term labour when written capitalised), then, insofar as both terms designate the intermediate point of *articulation* between the bare 'animalistic' expression of *phoné* and *praxis* respectively, and their signification as meaning. The use of Voice and *L*abour hereby also correspond to what I have previously called pure gesture as a means without an end. On the other hand, voice and *l*abour identify the status of language insofar as it is action that potentially has its own end in itself. The terms '*l*abour' and 'signification' that I have used in *Fig.9* and

have highlighted in *Fig.14* follow these definitions. The space that articulation opens up between what is no-longer *l*abour/voice while not-yet becoming meaning/signification is what I have marked as the space of the gag (—).

Articulation (*L*abour) refers to a space of no-longer *praxis* and not-yet signified meaning. The specific function of this space, so Agamben proposes, is that it 'contains within itself the power of the negative and of memory' (Agamben, 1991: 45). Negation occurs because the expression of *l*abour and the animal voice is instantly also its own death. The voice/*l*abour can only exist in an instant that is already gone, past and dead by the time our ears hear it or senses feel its exertion. What remains is a memory of the death of *l*abour. Articulation, *L*abour, therefore sustains the death of *l*abour as this memory, but what is remembered and suspended is the negative as a solitary moment of negation. *L*abour cannot say anything itself about *l*abour, because in itself it is not-yet meaningful communication. Its power, then, is found only in the preservation of negation, not in its communication.

The ground of *L*abour therefore acquires a negative dimension in keeping with what Agamben goes on to describe as the ground of negation: '[i]t is *ground*, but in the sense that it goes to the *ground* and disappears in order for being and language to take place' (Agamben, 1991: 35). Hsieh's 'No Art Piece' can be seen to exemplify what I mean by disappearance in this context. Beginning on July 1st 1985, Hsieh embarked on his fifth and final *One Year Performance* which involved him effectively vanishing as an artist just at a point when he was achieving a significant profile on the downtown Manhattan art scene. For the duration of *One Year Performance 1985-1986*, also known as 'No Art Piece', Hsieh conformed to his own simple yet constrictive rule: he would 'not do ART, not talk ART, not see ART, not read ART' (Heathfield & Hsieh: 55). His withdrawal from the society of artists and art, and the self imposition of his negation,

performs the contradictions of a 'not doing' art that is itself art (a one year performance), which hereby brings into dispute what comprises artistic visibility and invisibility, activity and passivity, and specifically how negation reforms the time and space of labour. The going-to-ground of the one who expresses themselves – performed here by the example of Hsieh's going 'to ground' – is not really a process of removal in the way we think of subtraction, but an expression of oneself as removed (Agamben, 1991: 45). The subject is therefore manifest precisely as a movement of disappearance.[91] But disappearance nevertheless still draws attention to its own mediality through the aesthetic act of, for instance, Hsieh making disappearance his own purposiveness. *In the gag of articulating artistic labour, the artist therefore makes manifest/visible the subject of labour for signification. But the articulation of labour functions here as the signifier (of praxis) only insofar as it reduces labour to no more than a signifier of ~~labour~~: in which the death of the subject occurs in the same movement that calls it to function (and speak) as subject.*

The artist therefore has no ground other than in the violence of articulation. Through making labour visible, the aesthetic gesture suspends the artist's action in its own mediality, and here gesture succumbs to the violence of a gag. And even though the gag sustains labour insofar as it identifies the solitary moment of its own negation (death) and memory, the violence of articulating labour nevertheless constitutes the only semblance of ground that is possible in a space of ungroundedness. If we seek the truth of artistic labour in *l*abour then we will only be capable of defining a singularity based upon raw biological expression. If, on the other hand, we seek the artist in the

[91] Jacques Lacan calls this movement of disappearance an *aphanisis* or *fading* of the subject. *Aphanisis*, we understand according to Lacan, 'is to be situated ... at the level at which the subject manifests himself in [the] movement of disappearance that [can be] described as lethal': Lacan called this movement 'the *fading* of the subject' (Lacan, 1987: 207-8). The lethal factor of disappearance is here identified by Lacan in the mechanisms of alienation as a translation of Freud's term *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* as 'representative of the representation' (Lacan, 1987: 218). Simply put, this means that 'when the subject appears somewhere as meaning, he is manifested elsewhere as "fading", as disappearance'.

signification of labour, we find truth constantly mediated by a system of communication that always separates and divides the signifier and the signified into a generic belonging to language. In the case of my labour in this thesis, for example, if I try to find truth in my *praxis* (the act of writing) then I define myself as nothing more than a singularity constrained to the bodily movement of fingers across a keyboard, the raw expression of biological movement in response to the mechanics of an alphabet. If I seek my labour in the signification of output, in the language of words, sentences, and paragraphs, then I am divided from my living labour by the very system of communication with which I make myself communicable. The words always already belong to a generic language: as Derrida has said, 'there is always already deconstruction, at work *in* works' (Derrida, 1986: 123), to which Agamben would add that man is 'always already entered into language', and, furthermore, is held there in its ban (Agamben, 1998: 50). What is performed in my act 'to write' or 'to do' is hereby disconnected from the production into presence of 'doing' and 'writing' as the resolution of something made sense of by sensible communication. But there remains a speechlessness that goes beyond the alternatives of action and production, which points toward the simultaneous death of action and suspension of meaning. This is the point at which we cannot bring action or language into communication.

Agamben's summary of the artist as precisely 'the man without content' aptly expresses the position we find ourselves in here: whereby the artist is the one 'who has no other identity than a perpetual emerging out of the nothingness of expression and no other ground than this incomprehensible station on this side of himself' (Agamben, 1999a: 55). What is incomprehensible about artistic labour comes about through its own aesthetic dimension. But in making labour visible as *L*abour, the gestic expression of artistic labour no longer makes sense to labour as norm because it does not act or produce according to any clear indication of productive aspects. Corresponding to the

voiceless voice of Rancière's soliloquy, artistic *L*abour here speaks to no-one and says nothing itself. Or, perhaps more precisely in the words of Agamben, *L*abour is 'the *showing* of what cannot be spoken of' (Agamben, 2007a: 156).[92]

To clear up some of the terminology: insofar as the gag of articulation (*L*abour) is concurrent in artistic production with the space of labour's availability-toward-nothingness (i.e. the shadow of labour), we can now simplify our terminology by expressing the two terms by the one term ~~labour~~. I retain the term *l*abour (with an italicised lowercase 'l'), however, in order to maintain a distinction between labour in general and *l*abour as bare *praxis* (in the same way that voice designates the animal *phoné*). Therefore, the inessence of artistic labour defined by an interrelation of phantasmatic production occurs because it exists in the empty space between *l*abour and signification. ~~Labour~~ is what remains always already a solitary moment on the threshold of meaning, that once performed on the aesthetic stage remains in a zone of suspension. But the transformation of artistic labour into the space of the shadow/gag (—) only opens itself to gestic critique when the shadow is exposed such as it is. In being exposed, the artist then has to face labour in the groundless territory of the artist's own violence of negation and memory. *And so, behind the gestic shadow of labour the truth of the phantasm is found only in the moment of labour's negation. The truth of ~~labour~~ is the death of the phantasm.*

4.7 *Artistic ~~labour~~*

Let us now summarise these arguments within the phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production (*Fig.9*). Progressing from the phantasmatic movement at the heart of the diagram, the imaginary of labour I have said becomes the exterior expression of *l*abour.

[92] My emphasis added.

Then, *l*abour is the manifestation of labour-power, which denotes the bare exertion of action (*praxis*) capable of being itself an end without means. The movement that marks a transition from *l*abour to signification, which is marked on the diagram by the process of the shadow (—), denotes the gag of articulation. It is here that the passage to signification is interrupted and suspended, allowing *l*abour to exist as ~~labour~~. But this lapse in the artist's distribution remains incomprehensible unless it assumes an aesthetic dimension. As described by our understanding of gesture according to Agamben, action only assumes the status of pure gesture insofar it functions as the '*display of mediation*' (Agamben, 2007a: 155). The critical role of the artist, then, is to introduce the aesthetic dimension that makes the mediation of labour visible as such, thereby anchoring *praxis* in the gesture as the being-in-medium (a means without end). Once visible as a means without end, artistic labour is suspended from its energetic and dynamic status and is finally freed from the obligation to communicate anything other than its own availability-toward-nothingness. As previously mentioned, I use the term ~~labour~~ here to show the localisation of availability-toward-nothingness within the gestic space of the gag.

The point of signification is still reached in this diagram, but now it only expresses the moment when articulation attains meaning: i.e. when language is placed in the signifier/signified relationship, and *l*abour is carried through to the 'doing' of production. As such, signification designates the reinstatement of the sign 'labour' back into the distribution of the sensible as potentiality for future translation and transmission. But what has been exposed is also that element of the process that cannot be confined to a dynamic aspect. The purpose of exposing the role of the phantasmatic mediator is not to withhold or stall the process of signification, but to capture solitary moments of labour from the entirety of production and allow them to express what otherwise cannot be spoken about in signification. Artistic labour as pure gesture is not

merely an escape from the alternation of means and ends, *praxis* and production, it also defines the space of artistic activity suspended from the constraint of statuses that conceal its truth behind false alternatives. Just as the phantasm opens the process of signification to critique by disclosing the fold of sense and sense, so too does the gestic expose the fold between *l*abour and meaning. As such, what is exposed is not only the meaning of artistic labour, but the mediality of labour outside of signification.

Moreover, we can say that the movement in each case is descriptive of a phantasmatic interrelation. The making visible of artistic labour's mediation is also, to some extent, the making visible of the illusive space I term a phantasmagorical vacuousness.[93] This space, contained at the centre of the diagram and designated by the symbol ⊗, identifies the vacuous space produced by the mediating movement of the phantasm. Because the process of affirmation and denial (disavowal) opens up an empty space without connection to the precepts of the interrelation's polemic points, I call this space the point of belonging-to-nothingness. This space is not to be confused with the phantasm itself, which always remains the mediating *movement* of the interrelation and not the designation of a space proper. Rather, I call this space a phantasmagorical vacuousness because it is created by the never-substantiated negation of the phantasm. In *Fig.9* this space is echoed, I argue, in the shadow (—) of the external articulation of ~~labour~~ that I highlighted in *Fig.14* as point (3).

Because the movement of gestic articulation has a similar mediating force to the movement of the phantasm, insofar as it negates (or suspends) the application of action and production, I propose that it creates a vacuous space that can be called phantasmagorical in its formation. The difference between the two spaces, namely the

[93] I outlined the term *phantasmagorical vacuousness* in section 2.3. It defines a space of nullity through exposure, where the process of nullity is itself a process that both destroys and preserves. I adapt my understanding of the term from Agamben's single mention of the phrase in *The Coming Community* (Agamben, 1993b: 64).

space created by the internal phantasm and the shadow created by the external gesture, is that the former is constantly renewable according to its own logic, while the latter is dependent on sustaining a zone of suspension between *l*abour and meaning. Both the space at the centre of the internal phantasmatic movement and the shadowed space of articulation therefore share the characteristic of a vacuous substantiation. Furthermore, what is substantiated by both spaces is negation, but only insofar as this negation is never-substantiated. The force of negation in the internal vacuous space is not-substantiated because, being imaginary, it exists without the obligation to external verification through signification: hence the ability of the fetishist to maintain the object of their fetishistic desire indefinitely in the imagination. The external vacuous space, on the other hand, created by the 'pure' gesture is dependent on violently enforcing a gag that suspends what we consider the normative productive aspects. This second space defines not-substantiated *l*abour and not-substantiated meaning, whose vacuous space constitutes a site of *not yet* signification. Therefore, the internal vacuous space maintained in the imaginary indefinitely defines a *never*-substantiated negation, while the space of the shadow (—) in gesture is negation *not-yet*-substantiated.[94]

The vacuous space of phantasmatic potentiality (—) can therefore only be maintained so long as it remains a pure mediality without end.[95] What is at stake in artistic production, then, is the ability of the artist to sustain their own mediality of

[94] One might call this an example of Critchley's *infinite thought.* In *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (2007) Critchley considers the concept of infinity in the thought of Levinas from the late 1950s onwards, particularly with reference to how 'the human subject has an idea of infinity, and that this idea, by definition, is a thought that contains more than can be thought' (Critchley, 2007: 58). Where the concept of infinite thought and the never-substantiated negation of phantasmagorical vacuousness coincide (although I do not aim to explicitly situate it within that context) is in what I have called the *creative negation* of artistic production: namely a space of conceived surplus (potentiality) that is in excess of (concrete) signification; which Critchley's infinite thought describes as the 'formal structure of a thought that ... has a surplus within itself, that ... sketches the contours of a relation to something that is always in excess of whatever idea I have of it, that always escapes me' (Critchley, 2007: 58). See also my notes on Critchley's term 'anarchic creation' at Footnote 71.

[95] The problem that Agamben identifies with Pop Art and the 'ready-made' is precisely that they could not attain a substantive presence between being and non-being, between their energetic and dynamic statuses. While each capably perverts the double statuses of production, 'except for the instant of the alienation effect', he surmises that 'the passage from the one to the other status is impossible' (Agamben, 1999a: 63).

artistic labour: which is to say, the maintenance of one's availability-toward-nothingness. The point at which ~~labour~~ is then held in suspense is what, quoting Mallarmé, Agamben might call 'a pure milieu' (a *milieu pur*) (Agamben, 2007a: 155). The pure milieu is the *social environment* of the expression substantiated as pure: i.e. what is non-substantiated by its predicates but substantiates itself as devoid of connection to its normal predicates of communicability (or what Rancière refers to as tearing the ordinary from the obviousness of its context in order to become a 'phantasmagoric figure' (Rancière, 2006: 34)). In short, this is the space of the phantasm as theatre: which arises between the surfaces of action and production, and where it assumes meaning without intimating itself through communication (such as the word in language), but as the non-transcendence of the gag. Hsieh's performances sustain their own social environment on the border between art and life because he manages to expose his own threshold of mediation. In questioning how he himself produces, perceives, moves, and apprehends time and the world as an artist, Hsieh employs the visibility (and invisibility) of himself to understand what otherwise cannot be spoken about except through the mediator. As Heathfield summarised:

> Hsieh asks how a subject constitutes its sense of self, its freedom to act and speak; how it relates to its environmental outsides, its senses of estrangement and belonging; how it experiences and makes itself in relation to another; how it defines and lives out the limits of creativity.
>
> (Heathfield & Hsieh: 57)

The space in which the artist experiences labour as articulation, indeed where artistic labour 'makes itself' is only exposed when it becomes pure gesture. Although this third space is almost impossible to pinpoint specifically as the factor in this or that artistic performance, without the force of its phantasmagorical vacuousness we would not be able to see Hsieh's endurance walk in 'Outdoor Piece' or his disappearance in

'No Art Piece' as dissensual. The pure artistic gesture of labour in these performances does not put art and life merely in relation to one another, but operates from a point of that relation undone, suspended, and not-yet-substantiated. By being exposed to the artist's labour as pure mediation, we therefore engage with art and life dislocated from their proper places and maintained un-substantiated in the phantasmagorical vacuousness of artistic production. From this non-space the artist is able to actualise the potential to-not-be as well as to-be. Furthermore, potentiality's complexity, as stated previously, is identified as a process of destruction that exhausts impotentiality and, at the same time, preserves impotentiality in actuality: it '*gives itself to itself*' (Agamben, 1999b: 184). The impotentiality of artistic labour similarly need not be annulled by activation and reality, but is carried through and preserved in reality as the articulation of ~~labour~~. It is this giving of labour to itself in artistic production by way of a phantasmatic negation and preservation that I posit opens up the specific modality of critique peculiar to the gestic phantasm. The space of giving itself to itself, the point of simultaneous exhaustion and preservation of labour's impotentiality is a place of nullity: critically expressing nothing other than itself such as it is.

Negation calls mediation to function as subject. While artistic labour functions as neither *l*abour (as an end in itself) nor signification (as a means produced toward a specific end, i.e. signification), but as the point of articulation called ~~labour~~ that we have come to identify as the memory or presence of negation: whereby the absence of *l*abour is preserved in potentiality. Artistic labour at this point is neither a being-in-labour nor a labour available-for 'doing', but a space that suspends both of these polemic positions and communicates only a conscious availability of labour toward nothingness. Here we expose the extension of a phantasmatic space of thought by engaging with labour aesthetically and, as such, with a process of having labour. This critical mediation is based on having affirmation and negation, potency and activity, and furthermore, a

having of these positions made visible. The critical faculty of the phantasm gives itself to itself, then, only through the visible dimension of aesthetics. But we should be cautious to assume that this diagrammatic overview of the phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production allows us, at last, to see the full and originary presence of the phantasmatic process. The idea of signifying the totality of the phantasmatic movement is an illusion in as much as the embodiment of things in signs is illusory. What the phantasmatic movement, both as a process of internal sense and external articulation mediates is only ever our absence from sense-objects and sense-perception. What it establishes instead is the general possibility of appearance and signification on the ground of negation and death. We must remain aware that the phantasmatic is always and already a fold that enforces itself as the barrier. It mediates between the artist and the world, between sense and sense, labour and labour, and between artistic action and artistic production. *Artistic ~~labour~~ signifies nothing, but the nothingness of its expression exposes the mediality of its own availability-toward-nothingness.*

Conclusion

The man without labour

> 'And please don't think now,' he [Ulrich] said, turning to her [Clarisse] perfectly seriously, 'that all I mean is that everyone is allured by what is difficult to put into practice and scorns what he can really have. What I do mean is that reality has in itself a nonsensical yearning for unreality.'
>
> (Musil, 1966: 342)

In seeking to answer the question 'is artistic labour a phantasm', the task of this investigation has been to understand the relationship between the artist and labour, and, furthermore, understand this relationship through the phantasmatic gesture of artistic labour. Over the course of the previous pages I have pursued a model of knowledge in operations such as the disavowal of the fetish, intellectual emancipation, the state of exception, gestic critique, and dissensus: operations in which polemic positions of strife, opposition, and negation have simultaneously affirmed and denied our subject. These discourses of polemic tension have provided the frame both for an examination of the interior movement of the artist's imaginary of labour mediated by the phantasm, and for the attempt to analyse the emblematic forms that distribute the artist's imaginary into the real of aesthetic practices. Here I have pursued a theory that assumes something of the logic of Musil's task in *The Man Without Qualities*: namely to shape the aesthetic distribution of reality (production) by grasping the truth of unreality (the imaginary).

From this perspective one can grasp the proper meaning of the central project of the present inquiry – the reconstruction of the theory of the phantasm that subtends the valorisation of aesthetic production based on movements of disavowal, which, through the interrelation of labour, desire and the phantasm, exposes the authority of the shadow in artistic ~~labour~~. Arising in the division between work and production, the energetic and dynamic aspects of artistic production, it is the shadow's formula of availability-toward-nothingness that suspends the aesthetic expression of immaterial labour in the pure mediality of articulation: indicating a space of vacuousness from which we can effectively valorise artistic labour specifically, and immaterial labour in general, against their own negation.

I began this enquiry in Chapter 1 from the problematic perspective of defining the points of distinction, transference, commonality, and antagonism between the specificity of artistic labour (as a specific occupation) and the general distribution of labour in (bio)political economy. The first problem of valorising artistic labour was how to do so without recourse to the notions of genius and exceptionality extant in traditional political economies, such as those of Smith, Ruskin, Morris, and to some extent Marx. But through the paradigmatic shift toward immaterial labour practices, the problem of external validation has shifted to the problem of internal virtuality in processes of labour. By investing subjectivity into the mechanisms of biopolitical production, the role of the virtual (creative imaginary) in labour has provoked not only a need for a theory of the internal *modus operandi* – so that capital can valorise living labour – but, more importantly, to identify how postmodern biopolitical life can be asserted independently of capital's control. What became paramount to the identification of artistic labour, then, was to identify the specificity of its processes within the general process of translating (and communicating) the movement from the virtual to the real. Between the territories of biopolitical economy and aesthetics, the

search for artistic labour was transformed into a search for the artist's own labouring identity in relation to its proper and improper signification.

The aesthetic space of production that I have therefore aimed to define is one formulated and defined by the gaps between *praxis* and production, being-at-work and being available-for-work. Not constrained to defining the occupational space and time of artistic labour, this enquiry has sought a way to define the artist's occupancy of an immaterial and internalised space and time of labour, including, but not limited to, the transference between labour's virtuality (i.e. human living labour as a general possibility) through to the reality of production (as an autonomous ideological product). Artistic labour is hereby expanded to include the tension of its interior mediation. This interiority, I proposed, located the tendencies of artistic labour on two fronts: first, as the dissensual re-distribution of labouring time and space, and, second, as a process of creative negation. These are tendencies that I have specifically identified with Rancière's notion of dissensus and Agamben's use of the shadow to describe the alienated presence of art. The genesis of the artist's relation to labour is thereon developed according to a thematic of possession and non-possession, potentiality and impotentiality of labour.

Rather than try to circumvent the problematic distribution of time and space from a position of interiority, I instead seek its encounter in the theory of the phantasm. What this theory outlines is a mode of thinking that allows artistic labour to be viewed as a function of the artist's subjective engagement with labour as an internal mode of sense. This analysis starts in Chapter 2 by investigating how the space of the sensible in biopolitical production properly begins with Marx's proposition that all human labour is determined by a pre-figuration in the imaginary. In order to disclose the tendency of this operation I have modelled the imaginary as the ossification between the extremes of

internal and external sense, the virtual and the real, being and non-being: which find their key tendencies in the operations of the melancholic, the Freudian disavowal of the fetishist, and the theatre of the simulacrum. The crucial feature in these operations, I argue (following Agamben), is the movement that commutes between each polemic position and conjoins the sense-object with its sense-perception: this is the movement of the phantasm.

What I ground in the ungrounded space of the phantasm is a theory that substantively follows Agamben's definition, which, pursuing a path of psychoanalysis that substantively grounds the phantasmatic movement in the negative presence of disavowal (*Verleugnung*), attempts to expose the image or sign to the disjuncture and strife of its own movement. Like the fetishist who appropriates the object of desire by attracting its phantasm into themselves and assuming a position between reality and fiction, the signifier is that which operates a mode of speaking that repels the dilemma of the split (between signifier and signified) by assuming it as its own paradox of possession. The phantasm is what exposes this paradox of possession by operating as the medium of bringing the opposition S/s into connection in one site: which, in signification is designated by the barrier (/) or really the fold of movement. However, because the theory of the artistic phantasm must deal with aesthetic discourses of visibility, I propose that in order to see the phantasm of artistic labour we need to see it performed. What must be contended with here is that, beginning from metaphysics, the phantasmatic discourse of Agamben primarily deals with the materiality of incorporeal things, including phantasms. In contrast, because the intention of this present enquiry is to define a structure of artistic labour as an expression of the artistic imaginary within biopolitical structures of production, I present a case to invest Agamben's theory of the phantasm, following the path of psychoanalysis, with its other side, namely the theatre.

What Foucault introduces is the phantasmatic event. The phantasm, as simulacrum, refers to the external application of the phantasm in the theatre of signs and images. The simulacrum in this respect designates the point at which the multiplicity of the image or sign becomes its own referent: effectively presenting itself as the meaning-event, as an event that does not refer to a 'state of things' but an interrelation of what it designates, expresses, signifies, and how it has meaning. As meaning, the event is not restricted to what is knowable about what happens, as a proposition about labour attributed to this or that labourer, but also refers to 'the eternal repetition of the infinitive' fastened to the verb 'to labour' (Foucault, 1977: 174). The meaning-event therefore revolves around the two asymmetrical poles of the present and the infinitive, which are always both displaced in its logic. How his model subsequently allows for the phantasm/simulacrum to recur and resound in a theatre of the multiple then proves useful for orientating how the artist might 'play' with and in the space of the phantasm – or what I call the phantasmagorical vacuousness of signification – from which I derive the term ~~event~~.

Foucault's theatrical counter-theory to the psychological path that Agamben pursues therefore proves crucial in explaining why I do not simply assume the position of Agamben's theory, but, instead, identify a theory of the phantasm (of artistic labour) that properly situates itself between Agamben and Foucault. Nevertheless, saying this, Agamben still forms the dominant role in this conjuncture. I do not aim to reconcile the theory of Agamben with the theory of Foucault, between the two stages of the liberated phantasm as theatre and psychology, but rather I incorporate each in its place in the artist's phantasmatic interrelation of sense. This theory is what I come to call the phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production.

Maintaining the precepts of Agamben, in particular the crucial double-turn of disavowal (*Verleugnung*) that is central to his theses, I similarly situate the phantasm as the fold in the signification of artistic labour. This theory does not identify itself in particular with affirmation or negation, but both movements in a conjunctive space of vacuousness. It is this unique process that testifies to signification beyond the relation of signifier to the signified, and exposes the essential function of their relation through the barrier (/). The phantasm's encounter with the sign, then, requires we engage forces of production outside of interior psychology and express also those forces of visibility composed according to a critique of theatre and multiplicity. The process by which phantasms mediate the interior imaginary and the materiality of the (artistic) body therefore coincide as processes of dissociation, which re-transmit something of each other insofar as the exterior is forced to speak of the interior and the interior the exterior. The psychological model of the phantasm here conjoins with the theatrical simulacrum in a common moment of referral that takes place between positions that are divided and co-dependent. This connected movement is what then prepares for the manifestation and articulation, but also the destruction of artistic labour as sign.

The phantasmatic event, where the artist encounters the phantasm in the theatre of aesthetic labour, is where Chapter 3 takes up the enquiry. Here what I propose is that the encounter between the interior phantasm and the aesthetic stage defines, and is defined by, how the artist fastens to the event of labour as a meaning-event: which is to say how the phantasmatic movement of the imaginary translates to an event of labour that is visible and translatable to the aesthetic community. Furthermore, I propose that this transmission is defined by a break away from the consensus of fixed signifiers and, circuitously and paradoxically, forges the image and discourse of the artist's labouring identity by way of a break or rupture.

What this chapter presents is an argument that the artist assumes a role of aesthetic visibility as a translator of the subject of labour, but also as a subject for translation themselves. This defines a passageway that moves between visibility and its loss, identity and dis-identification. Furthermore, I propose this passageway is demarcated by two modes of signifying that present themselves for translation as mute speeches. The hieroglyph, on one hand, testifies to the linked movement of visiting and escaping signifiers of times and place, history and fiction, as they coincide in the equality of hieroglyphic traces: whereby, in the discourse of aesthetics *everything speaks*. In making the hieroglyph speak the aesthetic regime separates functions and destinations by placing them outside of anything but the aesthetic experience. On the other hand, the second mute speech presents only what is unsaid and un-signified in the soliloquy of artistic practices, which belies any figurative or historical placement and speaks beyond the artist. Here it is not a matter of translating labour as artistic labour, but translating labour as the ~~event~~: from which the artist is cast only as a subject for their own dissensual translation.

Rancière's *The Nights of Labour* sets the foundations of this separation, whereby non-representative individuals disrupt the times and spaces of work in order to relate to an interchange of positions and oppositions in a time and space that is not normally appropriate and not proper, but rather an improper placement of labour. I argue that Nauman and Sierra express this same process in aesthetics by declassifying the perceptual links that orientate our thought of labour practices and labour occupations. But I also propose they achieve a dissensual status by dislocating any thought of *their* (Nauman's or Sierra's) artistic labour corresponding to any pre-established precepts: whereby the process of dis-identifying precepts in signification is extended to Sierra and Nauman from their own labour. I explain this process of fracturing presence between an artist and his or her labour as essentially a phantasmatic trope, which, in effect, recasts

the lines of connection drawn by representation around the causality of labour. Our understanding the aesthetic performance of labour is therefore based not on 'what happens' in the act, but on what can happen and what new possible passageways of modifiable interconnections can be thought and known from that potentiality. What was fixed is hereby given free-play over the space-time of signification.

What I conclude is that the mark of truth we seek in both the visibility of artistic labour and the disappearance or disavowal of the artist is a phantasmagoric dimension of the true. Furthermore, what is true in the signification of artistic labour is inarticulatable, or mute, because labour is here already an ~~event~~. What I therefore propose is that the transmission of artistic labour does not properly belong to anyone, including the artist, but subsists as both a visiting to the improper and an escape from the proper. This is what the term ~~event~~ defines: the disavowal of an artist's sovereignty over his or her artistic labour. The new 'body' of artistic labour is therefore not a body as something we can ascribe to a human person – whether it be the actor or spectator, the visitor or the poor, or any hybridised figure – but the body of labour in shadow: the phantasmatic ~~event~~ of labour as it subsists in its own (mute) speech. The sensory fabric of the ~~event~~ therefore describes how a distribution of sense in the aesthetic community is formed not only by dissensus, but a dissensual alternation between thought and non-thought, which come together in their difference and between different actors and spectators, manifesting a conjoined movement of visiting and escaping in the theatre of labour.

The aesthetic community, we can assert at this point, comes into focus built on the maintenance of phantasmatic tension. How this tension is produced, maintained, and exposed in the totality of artistic production is the subject of the phantasmatic interrelation in Chapter 4. The phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production (see *Fig.9*) structures the internal phantasmatic movement within sense with the external

phantasmatic ~~event~~ of aesthetic performance. The progression of movement in the sensible begins with the imaginary of labour, which I have construed as an alternation of sense-object and sense-perception. The alternation here is one of disavowal, where the two polemic positions of sense really interrelate in the equation ~~sense-object/sense-perception~~: affirming and negating the presence of each in order to open up a place of dissociated precepts (the phantasmagorical vacuousness). How interior phantasms then become exterior expressions is what I focus on through an investigation of three key terms I borrow from Agamben: the critique of *pure gesture*, labour as the shadow (—) of *availability-toward-nothingness*, and the *articulation* of memory and death.

In particular I locate the external manifestation of the phantasm as a trope that exerts itself in the movement between *l*abour (*praxis*) and signification (production). The point of disjuncture that interrupts or suspends – according to the terminology of the state of exception in which I couch my explanation of this process – this transition is the shadow (—). What the shadow denotes is really the gag of articulation. It is here that the passage to signification is interrupted and labour suspended in neither an energetic or dynamic aspect, but as availability-toward-nothingness. My proposition, though, is that the suspension of labour in the place of the shadow is incomprehensible unless it assumes an aesthetic dimension. I locate this proposition in Hsieh's *One Year Performances* by demonstrating how his relation to an aesthetics of duration sustains his social environment of art and life as a bordering: or really (a) time reforming between art and life where he manages to expose his own threshold of mediation. It is this durational aesthetic dimension of Hsieh that allows us to see the mediation of labour as precisely what Agamben terms, in relation to the gestic, the 'display of mediation' (Agamben, 2007a: 155). The artist's critical role in distributing labour in the sensible is to introduce this aesthetic dimension of suspension and to expose the medial position of the shadow itself. In questioning how Hsieh himself produces, perceives, moves, and apprehends

time and the world as an artist, we can say that he employs the visibility (and invisibility) of himself to understand what otherwise cannot be spoken about except through the phantasmatic mediator. Labour, finally freed from the obligation to communicate anything other than its own availability-toward-nothingness, is therefore exposed such as it is: i.e. such as it is the gestic space of the gag.

The purpose of exposing the role of the phantasmatic mediator is not to withhold or stall the process of signification, but to capture solitary moments of labour from the entirety of production and allow them to express what otherwise cannot be spoken about in signification. Artistic labour as pure gesture is not merely an escape from the alternative application of means and ends, *praxis* and production, doing and not doing, but defines a space of artistic activity in suspension of these constraints. What is furthermore exposed is the artist's existence in a space of phantasmagorical vacuousness: an empty space without connection, a point of belonging-to-nothingness. The distinction between substantiating negation in the vacuous space of production produced by the phantasm in its internal and external movement, then, is that the former defines a space where negation is *never*-substantiated (as with the fetish), while in the latter negation is *not-yet*-substantiated (insofar as it denotes what is not yet meaning). The space of the phantasm as theatre therefore arises between the surfaces of action and production, where it assumes meaning without intimating itself through communication (such as the word in language), but also as the non-transcendence of the shadow (or gag).

At the point of concluding this current investigation of the phantasm, but not the overarching project that extends (at least) back to Musil, I can say that aesthetic production and meaning in the condition of the phantasm is based on the existence and deferral, although not the resolution, of tension. The theory of the phantasm allows us to

approach the conflicts in artistic labour between signifier and signified, sense and sense, and, furthermore, engage with all of the living complexities of these conflicts as they occur in artistic production without any false alternation to ends, only mediality. Central to understanding this position of mediality has been the thought and discourse of Rancière's dissensual figure and Agamben's use of the shadow. Although they follow different trajectories, both Agamben and Rancière demarcate paths that lead us in pursuit of knowing the speechlessness of aesthetic production and, furthermore, knowing it as phantasmal. While the phantasm has not precisely been an unacknowledged theory in the aesthetic regime (as Agamben, Rancière, and Foucault testify), the phantasmatic movement has all too often been obscured by the signs of artistic practices instead of exposing the essential format of the barrier (/). Where my contribution to knowing the phantasm occurs is in utilising the specificity of the phantasm's movement to give visibility to the artist's relation to labour. The distinction here between visibility and signification, between the visibility given to labour by the phantasm and its visualisation (or communicability) in signification, is that while signification brings labour into meaning (making *l*abour speak), the phantasm brings to our attention only the display of labour's mediality (the voiceless-voice sustained in the memory of the death of *l*abour). What the phantasm makes visible are interrelations of labour, but it does not signify labour: only a moment of labour not yet signified, not yet an end, but pure potentiality. The aim of this project, then, is precisely to comprehend the vacuous space of the artist's labouring imaginary and how it extends into the regime of aesthetic production as ~~labour~~: where artistic labour is suspended and dissociated from *praxis* and production.

What is at stake in artistic production, I argue, is the ability of the artist to sustain their own being-in-mediality of artistic ~~labour~~. How each of the artists, Nauman, Sierra and Hsieh, maintain themselves in shadow is what is thus exposed as a vacuous point

(or a state of exception) in each of their work. For Nauman it is his duplicitous setting, crossing, and dislocating of causal logic and the boundaries between history and fiction in *Setting a Good Corner*. For Sierra it is the (dis)inhabitation of the free-play of occupations that comes of visiting and escaping the 'poor': whose disappearance and visibility of labour form an aesthetic stage that mediates social relations between the spectator and the worker. While for Hsieh the shadow occurs in his occupancy of an un-delimited time-space (between art and life) that constantly reforms his identity with both (life and labour). What is common between all of these examples, though, is that each depends on the artist's aesthetic ability to make their own being-in-labour visible such as it is. The artistic gesture of labour in these performances does not put art and life merely in relation to one another, or tell us anything about this life or that work of art, but each operates from a point of that relation undone, suspended, and not-yet substantiated. The critical point of mediation is here based on having affirmation and negation, potency and activity, as visible positions. But this position is not conferred upon these artists, and they do not inoculate themselves with aesthetic labour. The critical faculty of the phantasm is rather what they give to themselves.

The not-yet substantiated negation of phantasmatic labour, like living labour, is not itself in any way a value of meaning. It is, we should say, in absolute poverty of meaning. But this exposure to the absolute poverty of meaning is what is exposed to the individual such as it is the potentiality of all meaning. The phantasmagorical vacuousness that the movement of the phantasm creates, and which the shadow of artistic ~~labour~~ exposes, maintains a space of dissensual meaning. I propose it is this space that forms the creative nucleus of artistic labour, from where the pure potentiality of labour is prefigured in the imaginary, and from where it is able to operate not as a space that proposes a new frame, but from a space of unframed free-play: not by the phantasm making connections, but by making a space without connections. What the

having of this space means is that the artist moves in a vacuous ground that is really ungrounded, caught in the fold between signifier and signified. In order to answer the question 'is artistic labour a phantasm?' therefore requires a twofold response. On one side, the imaginary of artistic labour is phantasmatic. Construed in the artist's sense as a relation between sense-object and sense-perception, external and internal, real and unreal, the artist's pre-figuration of labour in the imaginary is defined by a movement of affirmation and denial. In the vacuous phantasmagorical space of production the artist therefore engages with the living creative negation of labour. On the other side, the external articulation of labour (the production into meaning) by the artist is more correctly aligned with what I have defined as the space of a phantasmatic shadow. It is not itself a phantasmatic movement but is defined by phantasmatic tendencies in forming a dissensual interrelation between *l*abour (*praxis*) and signification: namely the simultaneous alienation of labour from the energetic (being-at-work) and dynamic (available-for-work) aspects of production. The shadow tells us to think of labour as what it is not, which reigns as a value over what it is.

Returning to the title of this thesis, 'The man without labour' is not really a description of the artist *without* labour, but the artist who in having labour occupies its shadow. The artist without labour is therefore the artist with ~~labour~~: critically expressive of *nothing* other than one's pure mediality of living, acting, producing, and meaning in the world through labour.

Glossary

This glossary sets out the key terms of this thesis, their theoretical points of origin, and the specific application of them within the theory of the phantasm. The intention is that this glossary will help orientate and clarify for the reader the specific theoretical terrain of this thesis and its language, as well as define a set of terms that are applicable to understanding and articulating artistic labour within a wider aesthetic discourse.

Availability-towards-nothingness

This space of production is defined by its suspension from the present application of labour toward both its energetic and dynamic aspects. For Agamben this space arises when the artwork presents itself as neither properly at-work (energetic), insofar it does not possess itself in its own end, nor available-for work (dynamic), in the sense of being available for aesthetic enjoyment. Available toward neither of these aspects of production, Agamben posits a third space of production whose availability-toward-nothingness defines the alienated present of art. In the context of **labour**, this thesis positions the space of availability-toward-nothingness as arising from the suspension, on one hand, of the 'to do' of artistic *praxis*, and on the other, labour produced as signification. This space is specifically formulated by a phantasmatic movement insofar as the double negation of the energetic and dynamic aspects does not mean that these positions are overcome, rather that they are made extreme through reciprocal suspensions. What opens up between them is the negative presence, or shadow, of artistic labour.

Gag

For Agamben the gag indicates in the first instance something that hinders speech or where language is at a loss. Defined linguistically, it occurs between the phonic expression of one's voice and its production into meaning. In the **gestic** the gag is that which hinders the movement between the 'to do' of *praxis* and the production into presence of 'doing'. It accounts for a presence of human activity both before and in excess of what is signified, being no longer *praxis* and not yet meaning. Specifically it is developed here in terms of artistic **labour** to define the point at which labour is caught in a solitary moment that is in excess of its communicability, because it articulates nothing other than its own **mediality**. Located in the phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production between ***l*abour** and signification, the gag denotes a lapse in the communication of labour, which is expressed at the point where labour confronts the impossibility to resolve itself in signification.

Gestic

Neither a form of human action (the 'to do' of acting) nor production (which locates means with a view to an end), the gestic defines the aesthetic dimension of *praxis*. For Agamben the gestic operates as processes of undertaking, which in aesthetics means that the gestic addresses the display of mediation. Rather than focus on the **labour** of artists by way of interpreting the artwork, or by situating or giving historical place to the artwork or artist, the gestic resolves the works' intention by reducing communication to the **mediality** of its language in general, and the mediality of artistic labour in particular. A critique of gestures is posited as important to the phantasm because the suspension of labour in the place of shadow, or one's **availability-toward-nothingness**, is incomprehensible until it assumes an aesthetic (gestic) dimension.

Immaterial (labour)

Production is immaterial when it results in no material and durable goods, examples of immaterial labour being a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication. With the shift toward economic postmodernisation – the transition primarily in Western economies from secondary industries to tertiary industries – an immateriality of labour

coincides with a shift toward manual labour increasingly involving procedures that are intellectual or require a certain knowledge orientation in the subject of the worker. In its classic definition immaterial labour is associated with the shift from Fordism and the production line to post-Fordism and the network, a collective flow that emphasises interaction, responsibility and creativity. What is particularly relevant to the study of artistic practices today, aside from the application of informatisation and computerisation as artistic apparatus, is the valorisation of affective labour (Hardt & Negri) and ideological production (Lazzarato). These aspects define **labour** according to its ability to produce human relations and social life, and specifically follows an aesthetic model of production that frames the formation of social relationships and the production of subjectivities around three key points of intersection: author, reproduction, and reception. As such the value of artistic labour is based on the direct, whether virtual or actual, human interaction through immaterial contact. The theory of the **phantasm** operates in the movement between these points of intersection – author, reproduction, reception – by giving precedence to the virtual power of human action: namely the pre-productive force of the imaginary over the re-productive force elevated by theories of postproduction (Bourriaud).

Labour/labour

While work defines those artificial activities that produce our world of things, and action designates the direct activities that pass unmediated by things or matter between men in their plurality, labour refers to the biological existence of man. Labour, as the living quality of the human ability to produce, always exceeds what is consumed in the exertion of labour-power (the direction of labour as a means). Here, manual and intellectual labours do not express different divides of labour, but coincide in Marx's concept of living labour as a person's general potentiality. Furthermore, what marks labour as exclusively human is that before it produces anything in reality it is first raised in the imagination.

*l*abour

The term *l*abour (with an italicised lowercase 'l') is used to maintain a distinction between **labour** in general and labour as it refers to the expression of bare *praxis*. The

distinction here corresponds to distinction raised by Agamben in *Language and Death* when describing the presence of the animal voice (lowercase 'v') as distinct from its articulation as Voice (uppercase 'V'). The indication of voice is described as the mere emission of phonic apparatus, which while an index of the one who emits it, does not in itself refer to the instance of discourse. Similarly in this thesis *l*abour is posited as the bodily emission of labour. It does not itself express signification or meaning, simply the projection of human labour through the mere exertion of muscles and brain.

*L*abour

Between the point of exerting ***l*abour** and its resolution into signification, there arises a point of articulation whose status is one of being no-longer *l*abour and not-yet meaning. This articulation is described by the term *L*abour (with an italicised uppercase 'L' to distinguish it from a general use of the word **Labour**), which draws on Agamben's uses of the distinction between voice (lowercase 'v') and Voice (uppercase 'V') in *Language and Death*, whereby Voice indicates the point at which language falls between, on one hand, speech formed on the lips of the speaker, and, on the other hand, its resolution into meaningful language. In the context of the **phantasm** of artistic labour, *L*abour articulates the intermediate point between *praxis* and its production into presence. It designates the memory of the death of *l*abour as it is maintained or suspended prior to being signified. Like the **gag**, it refers to a lapse in communication that cannot say anything itself about labour, but expresses the alienated presence of labour described by the shadow in the term **~~labour~~**.

~~labour~~

For Agamben use of the shadow (—) describes the work of art's **availability-toward-nothingness**, alienated from artistic activity and technical production. In the context of artistic labour posited by this thesis, the shadow denotes a space where the normative statuses of production, being-at-work (the energetic aspect) and being available-for work (the dynamic aspect), are alienated in labour through suspension. However labour's availability-toward-nothingness only becomes comprehensible when it assumes an aesthetic dimension. In exposing the **mediality** of artistic labour, what aesthetics exposes is the truth that labour signifies nothing. But precisely in the nothingness of its

expression the shadow discloses labour as a **phantasmagorical vacuousness** that subsists freely in sense as pure potentiality. The shadow therefore positions labour's existence in a space of privation where normal predicates are not-yet substantiated.

Mediality

In terms of the **gestic**, mediality addresses a position of labour dissociated from all other considerations except expressing its own medium. Labour is here suspended from the application of means and ends and expresses only the suspended context of itself. A critique of the artist's medial position therefore focuses on how the artist is situated in **labour** between the polemic positions of *praxis* and production, and specifically how this position, in obtaining an aesthetic dimension, frees labour from the obligation to communicate anything other than its **availability-toward-nothingness**.

Model

As a model of knowledge the **phantasm** does not present a simplified abstract view of artistic production formalised around a set of principles that order reality. Although it describes processes by a set of polemic variables, such as the sense-object and sense-perception, or ***l*abour** and signification, this model is not intended as a framework of concrete predicates but presents an interrelation of movement where variables are open to change. Presenting theory as a model therefore aims to make the not easily observable empirical phenomena of the phantasm perceivable.

Non-work

Defined as work liberated from work by Antonio Negri, non-work presents an ideal refusal for abstract labour as a rule of unmediated production, specifically in **immaterial labour**. Closely aligned with immateriality, non-work arises with **labour** being no longer defined by the same rules that previously imposed disciplinary control on it under the factory regime. Non-work therefore places labour in relation to the potentiality of the non-existence of our bond to the alienated surplus of labour, which it achieves through realigning labour with Marx's conception of the autonomy of living

labour. In particular, non-work corresponds with the **phantasm** by relating the potentiality of work and labour with their non-being. To enter into relation with non-work means to become capable of one's own privation.

Phantasm

The phantasm describes a movement of mediation between oneself and the sensible world (both real and imaginary) enacted with a force of negation and affirmation. In present discourses the phantasm has two key trajectories that are useful to orientating a theory in relation to **labour**: psychology and theatre. The former is expressed by Agamben as a model of knowledge that interrogates the relationship between the signifier and the signified in language by exposing the role of the barrier in the equation Signifier/signified. Specifically the phantasm is expressed by a movement of disavowal, which relates polemic positions (of reality and the imagination) by simultaneously affirming and negating each precept. In comparison, the theatre of the phantasm is identified with reference to Foucault according to its event. Referring to the external application of the phantasm in signs and images, the phantasmatic event is the point at which the multiplicity of the image or sign becomes its own referent. The **model** of the phantasm developed in this thesis conjoins both theories in order to define an interrelation of production between the artist's imaginary and the external application or articulation of labour: from the imaginary processes that generate desire, through desire's transference to the sign, and in its (re)performance as an event. Notably the phantasm is always only a movement in production and not a space of production. However, in forming di-polarities the phantasm is present in labour insofar as its role in displacing distributions creates a space of **phantasmagorical vacuousness**.

Phantasmagorical vacuousness

This is the space of vacuous identification that is created between polemic positions when mediated by the movement of the **phantasm**. The term is specifically adapted from Agamben's single mention of the phrase in *The Coming Community* and defines a space of belonging in existence where precepts are dissolved and yet not removed. As a result of precepts being both destroyed and preserved, negated and affirmed, the third space that opens up between them is vacuous insofar as it offers a space of free-play:

created not by the phantasm creating connections in sense, but a space without connections. In the phantasmatic interrelation of artistic production, however, this point of vacuousness occurs twice. First, it occurs internally in the imagination between the external sense-object and the internal sense-perception where it is denoted graphically by the symbol ⊗. Secondly, externally, a vacuous space occurs in **labour** production when the aesthetic dimension of an artistic gesture violently enforces itself as a **gag** that suspends the normative aspects of being-at-work and being available-for work. This external vacuous space is denoted by the shadow (—), or more specifically ~~**labour**~~. The difference between these two occurrences is in how each substantiates its force of negation. The internal phantasmagorical vacuousness defines a space where negation is never-substantiated (as with the fetish), while the external shadow maintains a space of negation that is not-yet substantiated (insofar as ***L*abour** is not-yet meaning). What is substantiated by both spaces is negation, but only insofar as this negation is never-substantiated (internally) and not-yet substantiated (externally).

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Conclusion

The man without labour

> 'And please don't think now,' he [Ulrich] said, turning to her [Clarisse] perfectly seriously, 'that all I mean is that everyone is allured by what is difficult to put into practice and scorns what he can really have. What I do mean is that reality has in itself a nonsensical yearning for unreality.'
>
> (Musil, 1966: 342)

In seeking to answer the question 'is artistic labour a phantasm', the task of this investigation has been to understand the relationship between the artist and labour, and, furthermore, understand this relationship through the phantasmatic gesture of artistic labour. Over the course of the previous pages I have pursued a model of knowledge in operations such as the disavowal of the fetish, intellectual emancipation, the state of exception, gestic critique, and dissensus: operations in which polemic positions of strife, opposition, and negation have simultaneously affirmed and denied our subject. These discourses of polemic tension have provided the frame both for an examination of the interior movement of the artist's imaginary of labour mediated by the phantasm, and for the attempt to analyse the emblematic forms that distribute the artist's imaginary into the real of aesthetic practices. Here I have pursued a theory that assumes something of the logic of Musil's task in *The Man Without Qualities*: namely to shape the aesthetic distribution of reality (production) by grasping the truth of unreality (the imaginary).

From this perspective one can grasp the proper meaning of the central project of the present inquiry – the reconstruction of the theory of the phantasm that subtends the valorisation of aesthetic production based on movements of disavowal, which, through the interrelation of labour, desire and the phantasm, exposes the authority of the shadow in artistic ~~labour~~. Arising in the division between work and production, the energetic and dynamic aspects of artistic production, it is the shadow's formula of availability-toward-nothingness that suspends the aesthetic expression of immaterial labour in the pure mediality of articulation: indicating a space of vacuousness from which we can effectively valorise artistic labour specifically, and immaterial labour in general, against their own negation.

I began this enquiry in Chapter 1 from the problematic perspective of defining the points of distinction, transference, commonality, and antagonism between the specificity of artistic labour (as a specific occupation) and the general distribution of labour in (bio)political economy. The first problem of valorising artistic labour was how to do so without recourse to the notions of genius and exceptionality extant in traditional political economies, such as those of Smith, Ruskin, Morris, and to some extent Marx. But through the paradigmatic shift toward immaterial labour practices, the problem of external validation has shifted to the problem of internal virtuality in processes of labour. By investing subjectivity into the mechanisms of biopolitical production, the role of the virtual (creative imaginary) in labour has provoked not only a need for a theory of the internal *modus operandi* – so that capital can valorise living labour – but, more importantly, to identify how postmodern biopolitical life can be asserted independently of capital's control. What became paramount to the identification of artistic labour, then, was to identify the specificity of its processes within the general process of translating (and communicating) the movement from the virtual to the real. Between the territories of biopolitical economy and aesthetics, the

search for artistic labour was transformed into a search for the artist's own labouring identity in relation to its proper and improper signification.

The aesthetic space of production that I have therefore aimed to define is one formulated and defined by the gaps between *praxis* and production, being-at-work and being available-for-work. Not constrained to defining the occupational space and time of artistic labour, this enquiry has sought a way to define the artist's occupancy of an immaterial and internalised space and time of labour, including, but not limited to, the transference between labour's virtuality (i.e. human living labour as a general possibility) through to the reality of production (as an autonomous ideological product). Artistic labour is hereby expanded to include the tension of its interior mediation. This interiority, I proposed, located the tendencies of artistic labour on two fronts: first, as the dissensual re-distribution of labouring time and space, and, second, as a process of creative negation. These are tendencies that I have specifically identified with Rancière's notion of dissensus and Agamben's use of the shadow to describe the alienated presence of art. The genesis of the artist's relation to labour is thereon developed according to a thematic of possession and non-possession, potentiality and impotentiality of labour.

Rather than try to circumvent the problematic distribution of time and space from a position of interiority, I instead seek its encounter in the theory of the phantasm. What this theory outlines is a mode of thinking that allows artistic labour to be viewed as a function of the artist's subjective engagement with labour as an internal mode of sense. This analysis starts in Chapter 2 by investigating how the space of the sensible in biopolitical production properly begins with Marx's proposition that all human labour is determined by a pre-figuration in the imaginary. In order to disclose the tendency of this operation I have modelled the imaginary as the ossification between the extremes of

internal and external sense, the virtual and the real, being and non-being: which find their key tendencies in the operations of the melancholic, the Freudian disavowal of the fetishist, and the theatre of the simulacrum. The crucial feature in these operations, I argue (following Agamben), is the movement that commutes between each polemic position and conjoins the sense-object with its sense-perception: this is the movement of the phantasm.

What I ground in the ungrounded space of the phantasm is a theory that substantively follows Agamben's definition, which, pursuing a path of psychoanalysis that substantively grounds the phantasmatic movement in the negative presence of disavowal (*Verleugnung*), attempts to expose the image or sign to the disjuncture and strife of its own movement. Like the fetishist who appropriates the object of desire by attracting its phantasm into themselves and assuming a position between reality and fiction, the signifier is that which operates a mode of speaking that repels the dilemma of the split (between signifier and signified) by assuming it as its own paradox of possession. The phantasm is what exposes this paradox of possession by operating as the medium of bringing the opposition S/s into connection in one site: which, in signification is designated by the barrier (/) or really the fold of movement. However, because the theory of the artistic phantasm must deal with aesthetic discourses of visibility, I propose that in order to see the phantasm of artistic labour we need to see it performed. What must be contended with here is that, beginning from metaphysics, the phantasmatic discourse of Agamben primarily deals with the materiality of incorporeal things, including phantasms. In contrast, because the intention of this present enquiry is to define a structure of artistic labour as an expression of the artistic imaginary within biopolitical structures of production, I present a case to invest Agamben's theory of the phantasm, following the path of psychoanalysis, with its other side, namely the theatre.