

10 July 2009. Fictional date, irrelevant detail, nominal marker of time and intent. Location: funded mobility in perspective-providing new lands. Thoughts scrawled on unlined, unofficial (non-Moleskine) art worker's book. They fixate on a given architectural form: polished concrete floors; high stud; division into three exhibition spaces; fairly perfect white walls; traces and adaptations of prior (1970's), non-art deployment; discrete administrative offices at the rear. And on accompanying bald facts: an exhibition to curate, (with) a duration of six weeks, and the pressing singularity of that event within the confines of a short-term employment contract. Cultural capital, precarity as investment, self-management and branding existing alongside research, and an enjoyable engagement in the bounce back and forth between ideas and artists' practices.

"Are you being productive?"

It's 3.02pm. I said I would stop for a break at 3pm, but I won't, I knew I wouldn't.

But how to use the space? An earnest mobilisation of the gallery as a site of simultaneous production and consumption via the temporary installation of a business? One-time dedicated producer of forlorn consumer objects or abject 'bad art'? Any ideas? Or reaching out beyond the confines of the institution walls, making purposeful contact with radical frontline political groups? Working in tandem, collective action. Exodus perhaps, wilful evacuation of the site in recognition of its parallel complicity with global capitalism? "The only thing left for art to do is auto-dissolve".¹ Or a type of discursive abeyance that demurs to work within a framework that knows its own limitations, yet nonetheless puts forward a series of speculations or speculative ideas and structures. Giant hope.

Firmly ensconced in the 'What is to be done (with the world)?' conundrum.

The tenuous nature of that tightrope balance, offering an offering: sharing an indeterminate gesture to be activated by the viewer can feel like such impoverished nourishment. Even if the roots of such a well-known stance are based on an historically informed suspicion of overt political stridency and its proven limitations. Failed revolutionary moments and easy recuperation under cognitive capitalism. The eschewing of a definitive political statement as outside the purview of art is recognition of its oft redundancy and eclipse by other forms of media, and by the very aestheticisation of politics itself. Meanwhile in another camp the artists have vacated the gallery and linked up with the activists.

What is held in common regardless, is production, inescapable doing, labour: artistic or not; autonomous, subjugated or both. Such modes and practices of labour continue to change, or expand change locally and globally under late late late capitalism, with zones of heightened industry and zones tending towards a post-industrial knowledge economy. If some artists have left the building, the exodus of factories from their premises to 'off shore' locations is well documented. They go 'somewhere' of course, but depending on one's interest and investment in knowing, this destination can be vague.

In the context of documentary and political cinema, filmmaker and theorist Hito Steyerl contends that the factory has in a sense never left, but merely reoccupied (some of) the vacated spaces². Where once political cinema was squirreled into ('original') factories and by intent agitative, it now loops seemingly indefinitely, on white walls of art and cultural institution-factories. Idea and knowledge emporiums, experimental hubs, night schools, producers and consumers of meaning. The factory it would seem has not only exploded into society by way of the well theorised

fabbrica diffusa, the dispersal of ideas, tastes, values into every facet of life, but has taken up residence, at times, in the actual shells of industry.

The exhibition, '*post-Office*' takes place in what were once the first floor offices of the Newton Post Office. It wasn't quite a factory, but by title and intent is interested in drawing attention to the physical and conceptual presence of the site and the role of art, artists and art institutions in a present beset by the commodification of knowledge. It is interested in the potential of 'a different kind of world' heralded by proponents of non-factory based labour, of societies of artists, affective networks, yet is not seduced.

It includes four film works, by Harun Farocki (Germany), Tehching Hsieh (Taiwan/United States of America), Beatriz Santiago Muñoz (Puerto Rico) and Oussama Mohammad (Syria). Each focuses on labour practice as it relates to and impacts on individuals and communities.

Liam Gillick (United Kingdom) discusses the relationship of artists' work to neo-liberal capitalism in a small publication. Single sheets of A4 paper, folded and stored in Roman Mitch's (New Zealand) pockets, accumulating time and fabric dye, become art works created in an art-work-life continuum. Fiona Jack (New Zealand) works with a large reproduction of a photograph, taken in 1893 of the first New Zealand women voting, and a publication that opens up discussion of women, art, labour and the contemporary state of feminism. As part of her practice Kate Newby (New Zealand) takes issues of productivity, play and the built environment into Myers Park, Auckland.

Robyn Pickens

¹ Sylvere Lotringer interviewed by Nina Power, 'Intelligence Agency'. *Frieze*, Issue 125, September 2009, p 107 of 104-107.

² Hito Steyerl, 'Is a Museum a Factory?'. *e-flux Journal* #7, 06/2009, pp 1-11 (whole article).