

Art (...) Work

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Introduction

Under the conditions of high technology, Pallas, the goddess of art,
is a secretary

Friedrich Kittler

Art (...) *Work* deals with notions of art and work and the divergent positions of artist and worker. It shows (in a performative way) the different workings and subjectivities of both artist - someone who creates artworks, in general a practitioner in the visual arts - and worker, someone with a daily, money-earning job. It does so by showing their different, formative contexts and settings: Desk and Studio. The worker behind his desk and the artist in his studio are exemplifications of different roles and identities shaped by a complex of societal (mainly capitalist) constructions, myths and beliefs. The division of the individual in a worker or an artist, is a capitalist, Fordist way of assigning the individual its pre-described role and position within society. Being a worker meaning in general being subjugated to time and place regimes, whereas the artist - in contrast - is freed from these contraptions by being his own boss.

Since western society has become post-Fordist or neoliberal in its workings and outset, these strictly 'branded' roles and positions are being obscured and cross-faded: neoliberal regimes have placed us under the dictum of 'being one's

own boss'. The artist in being the epitome of this idea of self-reliance, has served neoliberalism in exemplifying this notion to us *all*. Art has become the example for the worker to become an 'entrepreneur', to become free and autonomous in making his own decisions, free in dealing with his own 'personal management' as far as income and (in)security is concerned.

This thesis however deals not so much with this cross-fading of the two positions of worker and artist (both being the 'entrepreneurs of the self'), but with the *differences* between the two. Between work and art. The reason for this is twofold: not only because the positions of 'worker' (being in service of a boss) and 'artist' (being one's own boss) both still deal with different subjectivations and mythologies, but also because situating myself in the gap between the two positions enables me to criticize both work *and* art.

Both work and art deal with 'subjectivation', the process of the 'construction of the individual subject', the being made into an individual by the given (capitalist) context and its inherent mechanisms.¹ Subjectivation not only assigns us an identity, a sex, a profession, a nationality etc., but also divides us into categories: leaving some in being 'bosses' and 'well-to-do' and others in being 'workers' or 'artists' and being 'less well of' (or even precariously poor). In case of this thesis, the categories of work and art produce the different subjectivations of worker and artist. The worker is subject to the characteristics of his own specific work-field but also to the more generic notion of 'work as a virtue' ('work is good *and* necessary'). Being 'in service of a boss' *assigns and inscribes* the individual with the worker's role, in this thesis exemplified in the role of the 'secretary'. The secretary mostly being a 'she' (99% is woman), this very feminine profession therefore is inscribed with the accordingly

¹ Subjectification is a philosophical concept coined by Michel Foucault and elaborated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. It refers to the construction of the individual subject.

feminine attributes of servitude, modesty, charm, precision, *and* (as the icing on the cake) sexual innuendo.

The artist (on the contrary), is inscribed with notions of autonomy, self-realisation and unruliness (*'I am an artist and therefore I can do whatever I want'*). But the being 'one's own boss' (the artist's distinctive and formative claim on autonomy) is just as much a given role as the one of 'secretary'. Contradictory to what one might think when thinking of the artist's autonomy, the role of being 'one owns boss' is *the* current neoliberal form of social subjectivation. The artist is currently his own 'human capital' in being the 'entrepreneur of the self'.

Both subjectivities of secretary and artist, however different in their characteristics and however different in their societal positioning (as far as hierarchy is concerned), both serve one and the same purpose, that of keeping the capitalist machinery going and underlining the social divisions of labour. The cutting up of different aspects of work finally leading to processes of alienation and the impoverishment of job content. As in case of the secretary:

'[...] incoming requests are being assessed on importance and urgency and are send on, deeper into the organization. Setting of a chain of actions that somehow and sometime will come back to them – broken-up in pieces and ultimately distilled to a shallow snippet of work.'²

Subjectivation, the social division of labour and capital are kept together in a never-ending loop: the divisions of labour stimulating and confirming the rise of capitalism and capitalism in its turn affirming the production of subjectivity (which again endorses the division of labour and so on and so forth).

² Art (...) Work, p.71

The production of subjectivity, the being made into a subject with its accordingly prescribed behaviour and ways of life (in the interest of capitalisms claim to efficiency), might spark a longing for a 'real me' and for 'real freedom'. This longing for authenticity and autonomy is nevertheless a tricky business, all too easily sliding off to the realms of human capital and entrepreneurship. Neoliberalism in fact has worked and further elaborated on the artist's myth of autonomy and self-actualisation to lure the worker into desiring the same: freeing oneself from the drudgeries and dulling routines of working life and the subjugation of working for a boss. Notions on individuation, or self-actualisation, are currently prevalent and even socially desirable *and* conditional. The artist is not only a role among roles, it has become the predominant one.

To prevent myself from falling in the trap of *converging* the roles of worker and artist, of letting the one be the model for the other and vice versa, I have willingly positioned myself in the *gap* between them. The dissolving of work *in* art and art *in* work, would confirm neo-capitalist's latest form of subjectivation (in becoming the entrepreneur and in advertising the notion of 'everybody an artist') and would thus not bring about any kind of rupture in its systematics. It wouldn't bring 'a real me' or 'real freedom' any closer. In order to analyse and criticize both positions of work and art, I have chosen the 'differentiating approach' by putting myself in the gap between them.

The longing for convergence, an idealized notion of art and life coming together that has been part of arts' discourse since the avant-garde of the 1920's, has been subsided to favour the questioning of prescribed positions and ways of life. The gap is the ultimate position to do so, revealing that the one is being led by subjection through precarity and the other is being concocted up in make-beliefs of autonomy and authenticity.

In the gap or difference between the positions, the struggles, shortcomings, myths and beliefs can be experienced to the fullest. The showing of their *experienced* differences (and maybe (or probably) their resemblances) might in the end enable *slash* incense a possible change.

Desk, Studio and Cabin in the Woods are the three major chapters of this thesis. This set-up is consciously constructed to show the workings of both art and work in an understandable, conceivable *and* imaginative way. The set up follows the form of an in-between of script and short story (being respectively: the language for film and tv-series and a piece of prose fiction that can be read in one sitting). It introduces different characters to mediate different themes: Subjection and Precarity, Autonomy and (other) Artists' myths.

Work in this set up is being exemplified by the secretarial position in the character of Nancy Paris. Nancy, working for a boss from nine to five, deals with subjection and being dictated too (also in the literal sense of writing down someone else's words - being a 'ventriloquist'). Secretarial work is a highly gendered, feminized profession and its job content heavily leans on service, support and secrecy.

Art in this thesis is exemplified by the photographer's position in the character of Vienna Parreno, photographing museum artefacts for 'a museum of high cultural esteem'. Vienna deals with the societal position of the artist and ruling artist's myths. Vienna who is (also) 'in service' instead of independent (as artistic myth and longing would have it), scrutinizes art in its social implications and incentives: the unseeable and unsayable within the arts. The production of belief, e.g. the keeping alive of the artists' myth in order to maintain the artists' position and its (profitable) artwork, is being unravelled in Studio. Vienna, the failed artist-photographer, realises that being an artist is a 'social fantasy'. A fantasy proposing (a desired but non-realistic) self-dependency and self-proclamation.

The 'in-between position' is worked through in *Cabin in the Woods*, the first, last and in-between chapter of this thesis. It could be regarded as the 'ellipsis-chapter', positioned as it is between *Studio* and *Desk*, and thus between work and art. It creates an elliptic moment in the thesis, a '(...)' where things fall short, being the precondition for anything new to occur - establishing a rupture that is pregnant with expectation.

Subjection and Precarity

The laid-out differences between work and art, between the subjugated position of the worker (its harsh but accepted reality) and the supposedly autonomous and self-actualising position of the artist (the social fantasy), are related to the broader context of the 'production of subjectivity'. The formation of the self, the 'what we want to be' or better: what we think (or actually need) to be, is the primary and perhaps most important work of capitalism.

Maurizio Lazzarato in his *Sign and Machines* gives us an idea of what the 'production of subjectivity' means and entails.³ Subjectivation not only prescribes us certain roles in accordance with the division of labor (being a worker or a boss, being unemployed or an entrepreneur, being a man or a woman etc.) but is also related to what Lazzarato calls 'machinic enslavement': '[...] machinisms have invaded our daily lives; they now 'assist' our ways of speaking, hearing, seeing, writing, and feeling by constituting what one might call 'constant social capital'.⁴

This process of combining humans and non-humans as component parts 'proceeds through *de*-subjectivation. Machinic enslavements dismantles the individuated subject', creating a completely different hold on

³ *Signs and Machines, Capitalism and the production of subjectivity*, Maurizio Lazzarato, Semiotext(e) 2014

⁴ *Idem*, p.13

subjectivity.⁵ Social subjection is not only maintained through individuation, but also through de-individualisation or ‘machinic enslavement’.

‘Capitalism reveals a twofold cynicism: the ‘humanist’ cynicism of assigning us individuality and pre-established roles in which individuals are necessarily alienated; and in the ‘dehumanizing’ cynicism of including us in an assemblage that no longer distinguishes between human and non-human, subject and object, or words and things.’⁶

In *Art (...) Work* the component of ‘machinic enslavement’ is represented in the workings of the typewriter (computer) and the camera. Both are medialities that are placed between body and object, and between body and reality: Nancy working on the computer behind her desk, dealing with (someone else’s) agenda and incoming mails, and Vienna working with a camera in her studio, photographing museum artefacts.

Working on the computer, a major aspect of secretary’s work, is an alienating experience not only disciplining Nancy’s mind but even her body:

‘(...) the time and effort to render all my services (eight fucking hours a day) are completely occupying: they not only occupy my brain, but also my body. My brain because of all the information I need to process, my body because of being physically tied to the chair. So... I not only *have* an occupation, I also *am* occupied - time, space and physique-wise.’⁷

⁵ Idem, p.12

⁶ Idem, p.13

⁷ *Art (...) Work*, p.60

Working with the computer means working with a device that stands between the 'actual business' (of the boss) and the person operating it. Secretaries *distribute information*, by scanning, reading, answering, judging and acting upon incoming e-mail information. Through them incoming requests are being assessed on importance and urgency and are sent on, deeper into the organization.

'The secretary has become a medium *herself*, a transmitter of information, a communications device.'

The computer is a tool within a tool. Information flows through the secretary's body: from the machine, to the fingers, to the eye, to the brain, back to the fingers, back to the keyboard, back to the machine. The secretary is a transmitter, a medium using another medium for sending information - information that in the end never truly concerns *her*.⁸

Nancy not only takes on the *role* of secretary with all its prescribed notions of servitude and charm, but also and *at the same time* is thoroughly anonymous in her computer works, leaving her in the limbo lands of transmitting: generating output on receiving input.

Vienna, the photographer, uses the camera to photograph museum artefacts, a service to an institution of 'cultural production'. In photographing the artefacts, she doubles realities: the artefacts are (first and foremost) a reality in themselves, although de-contextualised, and the photographs taken of them, are a *recreated* reality (of this reality).

These 'reality-layered' photographs are finally placed back within the museum's context of website and catalogue - thus (re-)investing them with an authenticity that loops

⁸ Idem, p.71

them back to the creditability level of the artefact itself. In this process, Vienna takes on the role of mediator, operating the camera and the studio lights *in order* to deliver a product that not only enhances the artefact's and the photographs 'truth', but also the museum's legitimacy (in being a place of authenticity and truth).

Vienna is in service, not only of the museum but also (more elusive) of the photograph, the camera and the computer. The latter containing the program Photoshop that finalises the picture, covering 'it with the delusional gleam of reality'. The layering upon layering that occurs within Photoshop (putting layers of colour or light adjustments on the taken photo), is the apex of 'covering up'. Not only because of its software (being a text-written-programme that supposedly produces images), but also because it layers up the realities it portrays, covering them with a thick blanket of *hyper-reality*. But finally, and foremost, these processes leave out the photographer, the one producing these pictures in her studio. Vienna is visible only in the most ephemeral of features: the stroking of light on the artefacts - being dependant on the placing of reflectors and studio lights within the studio.

These alienating mediations or mechanic enslavements of both Nancy and Vienna, are 'not only part of a technical machine but foremost and primarily of the social or the 'megamachine' that produces subjectivity'.⁹ This megamachine not only assigns us our subjectivities and roles (the secretary, the photographer, the service-provider, the artist), it also *nullifies* them in their 'working reality' through machinic enslavement - leaving the individual, the author out of sight.

'We are thus subject to a dual regime. We are, on the one hand, enslaved to the machinic

⁹ Lazzarato, p.14

apparatuses of business, communications, the welfare state, and finance; on the other hand, we are subjected to a stratification of power that assigns us roles and social and productive functions as users, producers, television viewers, and so on.’¹⁰

Paradoxically this nullifying of the individual, the becoming of a ‘dividual’, is in sharp contrast to that other capitalist (or better neo-liberal) dictum of ‘self-reliance’. Self-reliance meaning the individual’s capacity of caring for himself. Whether as one’s own boss (the neo-liberal’s wet dream) or ‘the new working poor’ (the socialist’s nightmare), makes no difference in being left to one’s own in realizing ‘well-being’ (meaning income and security). The outcome of this situation for large groups within society (even in the rich regions of Europe) is what is called *precarisation*. Its literal meaning being: ‘uncertain’, ‘dependant on chance’ and ‘dangerously likely to fall or collapse’. Isabell Lorey in her *State of Insecurity, government of the precarious*, describes precarization as ‘a process that produces [...] ‘insecurity’ as the central pre-occupation of the subject’.¹¹

Although precarity is not a topic under much scrutiny in *Art (...) Work*, it still is *the* hidden driver for the positions of Nancy and Vienna. Working as a secretary or a photographer is basically given by the necessity to ‘earn a living’. Wearing of insecurity, taking care of oneself, forces us all to work, to devoting our precious time to working

¹⁰ Idem, p.38

¹¹ *State of Insecurity, government of the precarious*, Isabell Lorey, Verso Futures 2015, p.viii

hours. Under precarious conditions the individual is being propelled in an *immer* continuing survival-mode, with hardly time left to do or think anything else, other than doing the things that ‘need to be done’. A way to force us in doing so is to validate work as a virtue in itself. Working is good, working is necessary and working is a way to express and validate yourself. Socialist movements and socialist worker unions have played their part in this upgrading of work:

‘...the division between anarcho-sindicalist unions and socialist unions played an important role; the latter were always asking for higher wages, while the anarchists were asking for less hours. The socialists were essentially buying into the notion that work is a virtue and consumerism is good, as long as it’s managed democratically; while the anarchists were saying: ‘no, the whole deal that we work more and more for more and more products, is rotten from the get-go.’¹²

We are all forced to play our parts in a performance society where it is mandatory to work out of moral imperatives and consumerism. We no longer live in a welfare state but (as sociologists have it) a *workfare state*. Within that citizens are only conditionally free. If you’re able to discipline yourself, you’ll be left alone, but when you fail to do so, society or the government will step in, as in cases of time discipline: *thou shalt work*.

The production of subjectivity, of assigning us the role of ‘worker’ (whether secretary or boss) is paramount for the succeeding of the workfare state. If we believe in our roles and think them necessary and morally just (because working is good), we contribute not only to the upholding

¹² On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs, David Graeber, Strike! Magazine 2013, <http://strikemag.org/bullshit-jobs/>

of the performance society but also to the systematics of subjectivation in itself. In a never ending loop, both subjectivation and workfare state confirm us in our roles.

Being made a subject is thus directly related to the necessity of working - which in its turn is born directly out of fostered feelings of insecurity. Subjectivity and insecurity (or precarity) are directly interrelated: precarity is subjectivity's (pre)condition.

‘By way of insecurity and danger, precarization embraces the whole of existence, body, and modes of subjectivation.’¹³

Precarious conditions and subjectivations both constrain us in our personal space and freedom, binding us up in an entangled web of insecurities and role-models. In being ruled and governed through these ‘patterns of precarity’, we ultimately yearn for ways out of this confining labyrinth. The precarity and subjectivation-systematics in the end sparks off a longing for autonomy and ‘sovereign self-identification’,¹⁴ leading us into the terrain of the arts and its (supposed) *autonomy*.

Autonomy and (other) artists’ myths

Autonomy is one of the prevalent characteristics of the artist. The term opens up a whole terrain of ideas and feelings encircling notions of freedom, independence and self-actualisation. The logic of artistic autonomy has it that we only work for ourselves, for our own satisfaction and subject only to the demands of our own conscience and drives: the emblem of ‘the artist in his studio’. The studio, the (work)place that is shut off from daily practicalities and worries, is the apex of these notions. Placed at the other end

¹³ Lorey, p.1

¹⁴ The Truth of Art, Boris Groys, e-flux journal #71 2016, p.9

of society the studio is the place where the artist can reside in utter solitude and silence to work out his personal, (authentic) feelings and ideas.

But 'autonomy' being a tricky and complicated notion, this representation of the artist in his studio is but half the truth. Strict autonomy does not exist, the artist is related *and* subject to the workings of the world - just as anybody else. Autonomy exists only as a desire or illusion in being the utter dream of self-determination and independence; free from the hassles of everyday life and free to explore at will. But the illusion becomes 'delusional' in being unattainable – we are interrelated to and (in)formed by others.

Vienna Parreno, the photographer in her Studio, longs for autonomy. For the self-fulfilling promise of being an artist instead of being in service of a museum. Vienna, out of doubts on her own ambiguous position, starts to investigate the role of the museum and the artist, stumbling on issues of 'profanity versus sacrality' (of the museum as an institution), 'documentation versus reality or actualness of art(e)facts', and 'the being in service (of museums self-representation) versus being in service of the self (the autonomous artist)'.

Her investigating and wondering leads Vienna to ultimately researching the real mechanisms at play within the arts and art world: its conditions and its claims on authenticity, legitimacy, autonomy and self-determination. Questioning whether they are sustainable or even 'true' and whether the conditions of the art world are finally any different than the ones at play in the working world (in the *workfare state*).

When art is being placed under 'social scrutiny', as is being done by Vienna in 'Studio', its unseeable and unsayable conditions are being explicated. These social conditions are mostly accepted as being part of the conditions under which the art world operates:

'Explicating these reasons would reveal the social, economic and symbolic capital that is actually the

true basis for artistic legitimacy. It would reveal the principles upon which one's success actually depends: the safeguarding of the investments made in the production of belief in the value of a given position, because the status of our artistic activity depends on the belief in *The Artist and his Artwork*, both concocted up in self-declared autonomy: the artist in his studio.'¹⁵

According to *Andrea Fraser*, whose scrupulous analysis of the art world is leading Vienna's ideas, the 'artistic field can only be understood as the product or prize of a permanent conflict: as a field of forces that is always also a field of struggles.'¹⁶

These struggles determine the boundaries and membership in the field, the 'can I be part of this exclusive club?', and determine the positions within it according to certain hierarchies of artistry. The value of the artist and his artwork actually depends upon its rarity, 'the sacrosanct mysteries of the cult of the artwork', and so all art professionals have an interest in maintaining, not to say, *increasing* their monopoly on certain (or so-called) competences of artistry. The omnipresent (but covered up) competition among artists leads them to constantly accumulating as much authority, legitimacy and recognition as they can in order to *safeguard their own position*, because in the end, 'positions are scarce, money is lacking and there is no ideological coherence as far as the judging of art is concerned'.¹⁷ Maintaining their professional status in comparison to their colleagues is a never ending and self-strengthening loop.

¹⁵ Art (...) Work, p.41

¹⁶ Museum Highlights, The writings of Andrea Fraser, Andrea Fraser, MIT Press 2015, p.42

¹⁷ Art (...) Work, p.41

‘The cynical version of this kind of analysis is that the artistic field is no different from any other market in luxury goods. They all serve social competition for status and prestige.’¹⁸

Being a field of competition and permanent conflict, the artistic field resembles the uncertainties and struggles (the precarities) of the working world. Indeed, the conditions of the artist (working under own conditions), inspired neoliberalism in propagating new terms of working: free, self-determining, autonomous. The notion of ‘being a freelancer’ is *propagated* by alluding to the ‘freedom of the artist’, but is *actualized* at the expense of certainty, by paying the price of precarity:

‘I was wondering: am I really serving my own interests? Because in the end what freedom does this form of autonomy grant me? Nothing much as far as income is concerned, hence my services to the museum (a guaranteed income at the expense of time and autonomy). The autonomy supposedly gained in artistic practices is nothing more than a basis for self-exploitation.’¹⁹

Working in the studio is a longed for position and the artist (supposedly) needs it to dream of ‘something else’: a time-out zone that is conditional for making work. But the studio is also an artistic myth, one that needs to be kept alive in being the basis for artistic credibility. At the same time, the studio-myth also prevents artists to regulate their own economic conditions (because: ‘artists will be poor’). By keeping the myth alive artists secure their own precarity.

¹⁸ Fraser, p.158

¹⁹ Art (...) Work, p.44

Art making is a profession of social fantasy. A fantasy of self-determination and recognition (*I was haunted by the narcissistically gratifying idea of professional recognition*²⁰), a fantasy of being part of an exclusive club (the art world) that fosters huge aspirations as far as autonomy, legitimacy and authenticity is concerned. Aspirations that represent freedom from subjection but also (and mainly) freedom from necessity. The art world, nonetheless, is unable to fulfil these aspirations because it is governed by the same workings as the 'working world', that is: through mechanisms of precarity and subjectivation.

Subjectivation within the arts is effectuated by make- and wanna-beliefs: the confirmation of one's identity with 'an image of that which I should hope to become'²¹ (*an artist*), is given by the systematics of subjectivation. Subjectivation provides us with a diversity of roles and when there are subjects that are subjected to the confinements of daily routine work (like the secretary), then by contrast there should also be subjects that are supposedly free from these contraptions (like the artist), subjects that are free and unruly. The artist is as much a created role as any other, with the additional characteristic of being a role that (in its exception) serves the purpose of confirming 'normality', confirming the norm.

So, if the mechanisms in both working as art world are the same, then *what to do?*

²⁰ Idem, p.40

²¹ Fraser, p.25

Art (...) Work

If the mechanisms of working-world and art-world are the same in producing different subjectivities (in order to affirm and actualise the division of labour *and* the myths of art), then the prevailing question would be:

*'what are the conditions for a political and existential rupture at a time when the production of subjectivity constitutes the most fundamental of capitalist concerns?'*²²

Instigating an 'existential rupture' would provide us with the opportunity to invent new forms of subjectivity 'independent and autonomous of capitalism and its modalities of production and forms of life.'²³ Neoliberalism (the current form of capitalism) has been unable to foster us with any other subjectivity than the one of 'entrepreneur of the self', leaving us in precarious conditions. This undesired condition of uncertainty might instigate a longing for 'something else', it might even give us the opportunity to think of 'somebody else'. Precarity might be the condition for breaking the established conventions, habits, and values at play. It might be the blessing in disguise to break open the ruling subjectivities of (for instance) secretary and artist. It might be the elliptic moment (the rupture) that is the pre-condition for subverting given roles and contexts.

The rupturing 'ellipsis' is the ideal non-place or state of mind for investigating and criticizing the subjectivities of both work and art. In this 'point of suspension' or *caesura* we are not only able to understand the mechanisms at play but we're also capable of creating something new. To propose *an other* subject and an *other* life.

The ellipsis (indicating 'a slight pause' or a '(...)') literally

²² Lazzarato, p.14

²³ Ibidem

means ‘the omission from writing or speech of words that are able to be understood from *contextual clues*’.²⁴ Meaning that the word that has been left out, can be understood or ‘clued’ through its given ‘word-ly’ context, the before and after of the omitted word. The ellipsis is set in a surrounding context of ‘two sides’ along its interruption. The ‘(...)’ is enclosed by something ‘before’ and something ‘after’. This doesn’t however mean or indicate a chronological or hierarchic setup; there is not something yielding beyond the ‘(...)’ that is better or more (which might leave the ‘before’ in the lesser compartment). The ellipsis only and foremost indicates a ‘possibility’, a rupture that might indicate or clue us to something *different*. It could indicate the creation of something new out of suspension *through* its relation to the given context. The ‘(...)’ is the clue to *becoming* something or somebody else:

art (...) work, work (...) art, Vienna (...) Nancy, Nancy (...) an unknown scriptwriter, an unknown scriptwriter (...) I.

In the thesis, the rupture of the ‘(...)’ is given in the chapters of Cabin in the Woods. Encapsulating the chapters ‘Studio’ and ‘Desk’, it is best positioned to comment and investigate the given positions of art and work. The intermittent position of ‘Cabin’ signifies the moment where things fall short and silent – also literally in being set in wooded, snowy and ‘far off’ surroundings. The two unknown scriptwriters inhabiting (the) Cabin, are writing a script based on *Leviathan*, Paul Auster’s novel. Just as the novel’s main character (Benjamin Sachs), the unknown scriptwriters are struggling with notions of autonomy and engagement, the question of what the meaning or impact of art or writing could be within a societal context. Being tucked away in wooded surroundings, both ask themselves if this is the ‘right’ or appropriate context for procuring impact. What can they in their forsaken position

²⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellipsis>

contribute to the real world 'out there'? Can they still write (fiction)? Or have words become empty husks? In feeling isolated and doubting their writerly efforts, one of the two leaves, leaving the other to finally finish the script. At the end of the '(...)' chapter (the end of the limbo-position), one of the two unknown scriptwriters becomes an 'I' instead of the former 'we':

'Still, no script.

I threw another piece of wood in the flames.'²⁵

The cabin (or Cabin) has ultimately proofed to be *the* context for 'I' to write. Not only because it is a setting of seclusion (a cabin in the woods), but also because it constitutes a rupture in time and space in being the chapter in between Studio and Desk (the chapter of 'Cabin in the Woods'). Thus, constituting the appropriate place and moment to distance and comment both positions of art and work. Cabin in the Woods (or a cabin in the woods) is both an abstract and a concrete space. It is (within the reality of the fictional thesis) a 'real' cabin in the woods just as it is an abstract 'in-between', between Studio and Desk. The abstract 'in-between', rupturing time and space, has nonetheless been concretely effectuated in the actual chapters of 'Cabin in the Woods'. They are placed before, in-between, and after the chapters on art and work. The '(...)' between Art and Work is therefore a factual *and* a conceptual space: it is a cabin in the woods *and* it is 'Cabin in the Woods' – both producing time and space, tangible and intangible.

The characters inhabiting Cabin (and cabin) are two unknown scriptwriters, anonymous in their writerly efforts and thus equivalent to the invisible writers of sitcoms and movies that most scriptwriters are. Finally, one of them turns into the more personal 'I' and is being unveiled as the

²⁵ Work (to) Art, p.52

former secretary Nancy Paris. Being freed from her former subjugated position as a secretary, working for a boss eight hours a day, Nancy *slash* I is now able to write, affirming the notion that secretaries turn into writers themselves:

Many novels written by recent female writers are endless feedback loops making secretaries into writers. Gertrude Stein became an author after working in an office at Harvard [...] and (u)p until Hélène Cixous, women will write that only writing makes women into women.

Finally, Nancy *slash* I re-directs herself to 'Another Desk', the writerly one. Leaving the secretarial desk behind (placing herself outside of work and time regimes), Nancy *slash* I retreats to a cabin in the woods. This not only enables her *slash* I to write but also to become somebody else: Nancy *slash* I has become a scriptwriter. The ellipsis of a cabin in the woods has not only given birth to a script but also to a scriptwriter: Nancy *slash* I.

Script, Short story and Sitcom

As the creation of something 'new' or 'different' ought to do more than follow 'the chain of causes, aims, and interests that are *already in play*'²⁶, this thesis proposes to do so by introducing an alternative setup. The setup of this thesis is not the traditional one with its demands for logic implementation of arguments in favour of a hypothesis, focussing on facts and postponing fiction (in the interest of objectivity). The thrust of *Art (...)* *Work* is, on the contrary, the *interweaving* of both fictional and theoretical parts. The storylines of Nancy, Vienna and the unknown scriptwriters, are interlaced with relevant theory on work and art: on the working as a secretary, on the mediation and in-forming of

²⁶ Lazzarato, p.21

the typewriter (or the computer); on art and its institutional critique, and on the artist and his myths.

This interweaving of theory in fiction is done in the form of an in-between of script and short story and is meant to show the workings of art and work in an understandable, conceivable *and* imaginative way. This alternative way of composing tries to circumvent the formats 'already in play' by integrating it in another form than the traditional thesis one. This form of 'script and short story', embraces fiction to radicalise understanding.

The different way of mediating through putting emphasis on *understanding* and *affect*, constitutes a rupture: this thesis can be understood as 'the proposing of an alternative'. The product of all the investigations done, (and of all the residues of personal experiences, being a secretary and artist myself), is in the end *a story*, 'because that is the best way to recount a layered argumentation in an understandable manner.'²⁷ The 'voices and experiences of subjected individuals are put to the front with the intention of changing our perspective on certain societal events.'²⁸

The 'wrapping up' of theory in fictional narrative (narratives that are based on daily life experiences), is also being alluded to *within* the thesis itself. In Desk, Nancy repeatedly watches sitcoms in the evenings after her daily working hours. The sitcom, in this case *Ally McBeal* (an American 'legal comedy-drama with surreal aspects') is a way for Nancy to 'heal her inflicted working wounds'. Working eight hours a day behind a demanding and dictating computer, leaves her nullified and de-sensualized. By way of drowning herself in sitcom, Nancy soothes herself:

²⁷ Ik besta, echt waar, Adriaan van Veldhuisen en Dirk van Weelden, De Gids 6/2016, jaargang 179, p.5

²⁸ Idem, p.4

‘feeling completely comfortable in this warm, wonderful sitcom world’.²⁹

Sitcom, or more specifically *Ally McBeal*, is a ‘longed-for world where only the interpersonal, bodily *slash* love interactions are worth mentioning.’³⁰ The main focus of *Ally McBeal*, although being a legal drama, are the romantic and personal lives of the main characters. The fictional law firm Cage & Fish, where most of the characters work, is depicted as a highly sexualized environment, symbolized in the unisex restroom. Nancy realizes that longing for this romantically charged environment contrasts her own office setting in its stiffening and de-sensualizing capacities (being glued to her seat ‘eight fucking hours a day’). Yet, at the same time Nancy’s body is also sexualized in this ‘being a secretary’. In its performance or role modeling (as a secretary), the body is confirming the accordingly given connotations of this highly gendered profession: charm and (confusingly enough) sexual innuendo. The sitcom, the situational comedy representing a fictionalized reality, is not only a sensualized and a longed for reality, but also a highly deluding one. Because in the end ‘*do we actually ever see Ally working?*’ The (eight) working hours, being romantically *un*-charged, have been cut out. ‘An episode never lasts longer than 50 minutes.’³¹

In the end watching sitcom might ‘soothe’ the body, it doesn’t ‘solve’ the body. Sitcom might soothe the body in sensualizing it, it doesn’t solve the body from its problematics of subjectivation, of being made into a subject that is at the same time a highly gendered *sexual secretary*, and a de-sensualized one in being a *working subject*. The

²⁹ Work (...) Art, p.58

³⁰ Idem, p.72

³¹ Idem, p.72

secretary is both subjectivated and machinically enslaved, she is a sexy individual and a working individual. Instead of confronting this reality and rupturing it, watching sitcom continues the problematics in 'soothing' us, in soothing the problematics at its core.

Work out of work

*'Through language subjectivation creates a signifying and representational web from which no one escapes'*³²

Escaping the web of subjectivation can only be done if the 'mechanisms at play' are being experienced, investigated and felt through, from the interrupted or elliptic position. The awareness, and maybe even anger arising from it (in contrast to the nullifying character of the sitcom), might lead us into thinking and creating something new, to proposing another subject and another life. The language that supposedly holds us confined within the 'representational web', might just as well give us the opportunity to *create* something that enables us to escape it: storytelling and writing, both capacities of language, give us the chance to create new subjectivities and new forms of life. Writing is after all an act of creation. And,

*'as in all creation, the suspension of the ordinary course of things first of all affects subjectivity and its forms of expression, by creating the conditions for new subjectivities.'*³³

In creation, in the writing of a story that is not fantasy (being mostly myths), we can understand occurrences as true, even if we don't know if they really happened. The writer (of this thesis) brings order in facts but also uses imagination, for

³² Lazzarato, p.24

³³ Lazzarato, p.20

the writing (this thesis) is not only about the describing of lives, but *is the writing or creating of lives*.

The statement on the artist (that emblem and apex of creation): *'I am an artist and therefore I can do whatever I want'*, should be changed to: *'I am an artist and therefore I can be whatever I want'*. Reversing the subjectivities at play, the choosing of one's own identity (an act of sovereign self-identification), is an *existential rupture* in the all-pervading and overruling subjectivations under capitalist rule.

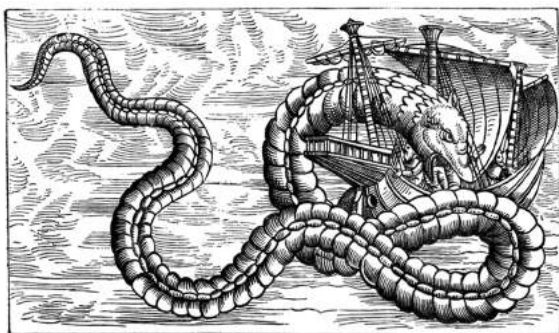
The proposing of a solution to the problem of subjectivation, of proposing a way out of the web, is however not given in the search for a real or 'authentic me' (as is so often done, deceitfully) but in the possibility of *becoming* a me; a me in all its multiplicities and dynamic capacities. The 'I' is not something given but is something continuously gained, it is something that is worked upon, constantly and ever-changing. The self is a (...) work.

Art (...) Work, written by the combined efforts of a Nancy, a Vienna and an unknown scriptwriter, is a work born out of the rupture between art and work. From the given subjectivities of artist and secretary something new has grown: a thesis in the form of a 'theoretical story' that in *and through* its writing brings forth new characters and new lives. Both thesis-form and its 'written lives', try to circumvent prescribed formats and roles, in short: they try to circumvent subjectivity and subjection. Out of the '(...)' between art and work a new work and a new character has arisen, like a phoenix out of its ashes: out of the secretary and the artist -in being *de*-subjected and *de*-mythologised, in having been 'burned to their grounds' - has arisen an unknown scriptwriter: the writer of this thesis. She, the (former) secretary, is happy to serve you this work:

Art (...) Work

A work born out of work

Cabin in the woods



November

Morning mist, we saw nobody.

We were writing on the script. As ever. The silence was deep. Everything was silent and as ever we struggled to find the right words. We lost ourselves in sidetracks and loopholes, fulfilling us both with fear and joy. We roamed our thoughts but, as ever, found ourselves back at a long-lost beginning. There were moments we felt trapped in a no-man's-land between feeling and articulation. No matter how hard we tried to express ourselves, we rarely came up with more than a confused stammer. Yet, we continued. Sometimes we would read the words we had found so far. Then our voices reverberated in the cabin, a strange and rare occasion. At nights, after long days of meandering and caverning, we stared into the flames. We warmed our bodies, rigid from hours of silent study. Then, finally, we dozed off in all-embracing sleeps. The next morning, we put ourselves back at our desks and started writing again.

One of us wrote:

Leviathan could be our basic material, we could use it to enlighten the problematics at hand.

topic

Leviathan was published in 1992. The novel follows the life and crimes of Benjamin Sachs, a writer who decides to take action over words to deliver his message to the world. The novel captures an extreme example of the resulting despair of a writer in a postmodern age in which texts have become empty husks, no longer conveying power and meaning.

If we were dealing with this schism between work and art, then why not insert the topic of *Leviathan* and the personal struggles of Benjamin Sachs? Both enlightening something that is relevant: Sachs struggling with the autonomous position of the writer, exposing him to feelings of 'irrelevance' and the ultimate question: 'what is the impact of the writer on the bigger (under)currents of society and

politics?’ But also, the topic of *Leviathan*, not only as the sea monster it supposedly is, but foremost as the problematic issue of the state, its societal structure and (questionable) legitimate government.

Shouldn’t these be our topics: the supposed immanent clashes between writing (or in general the arts) and the working realities of daily life *slash* the systematics and conditions under which we are currently living? Between the writer (or artist) having meaning and power or being an ‘empty husk’?

The other wrote:

Should we reveal all this (and what it might entail) in this ‘revealing’ script of ours? *Should* it be about commitment and autonomy?

The other wrote:

Yes. We should be writing about the writer’s position and his uncertain impact. In its trail laying bare the frameworks of a system of belief, in art’s so-called *mythical capacities*. Let’s write about the ‘myth of the artist’ *and* the supposed reality check by the avant-garde. Speaking of which: on a more abstract level this seems to be dealing with the classical clash between ideal and reality - the desired versus the actualities of daily life.

The other wrote:

Yes, but that’s the same ritual dance performed over and over again: reality wanting to outdo the ideal and the ideal wanting to outdo reality; the one wanting to show the naivety of the other and the truth of the self (and vice versa). But that’s actually not the real problem - being too big an issue to handle anyway.

(do you want some more wine?)

Benjamin Sachs, our main character for the script, deals

with the dead-end of writing by putting down his pen and deciding to take action over words. In the end (after some traumatizing events in his personal life) becoming a bomber of Statues of Liberty throughout the US. Peter Aaron, Sachs's best friend and 'another struggling novelist', wrote:

'After the success of his first novel, he [Sachs] immediately started to write another, but once he was a hundred pages into it, he tore up the manuscript and burned it. Inventing stories was a sham, he said, and just like that he decided to give up fiction writing.'

Didn't Sachs in the end take the wrong turn?

The other wrote:

Sachs's turnaround in thinking and acting is something we need to ponder, as it actualises, dramatizes, radicalises even, our own efforts of writing, in writing this script.

(yes, please, I'd like some more)

The other wrote:

Should we doubt our own writerly efforts? Is that what

The other wrote:

Yes. Can we still write?

The other wrote:

We wrote somewhere: *'The embracing of fiction leads to a radicalising of understanding'*. Isn't it all about understanding the issues at hand and *conveying* them in an engaged or 'appropriate' manner? Fiction could reveal something that other attempts couldn't. Didn't Sachs in turning away from fiction take the wrong turn?

Despite given circumstances and surroundings (dark spine woods and the commencements of winter with its light sprinkles of snow), we still heard birds. Mornings and

evenings, they twittered through the spruces, infecting us with the airy feelings of spring. Yet, we never saw them, no blackbirds, robins, chickadees or even crows. It left us mesmerized, confused, in the limbo lands of a somewhat off-season. The same state as our minds were in, wheeling in an in-between of indecisiveness and doubt. We wanted to write on the workings of work, and the workings of art, but were drowned in an ever-expanding swamp of preconceptions, struggles, and make beliefs. We were troubled by notions of autonomy and engagement, subjugation and precarity. Our writing hours now matched our former working hours (the 'eight f... hours a day'). We read, searched, wrote at a relentless pace, hour after hour. Once we even made a map, trying to shortcut time and effort. It showed all the points of interest and their interconnected or diverging lines. In the end, it showed us more than we could handle, the immensity dared us. We gave it up and threw it in the flames.

§

One of us wrote:

(could you stir up the fire? it's getting cold)

Always this questioning of the position of the artist and its desired and at the same time resented place of autonomy within society: the artist, retreated in his own bubble of creation, at the other end of society, giving comments but not actively participating. Does the artist care about us and *slash* or do we care about him?

The other wrote:

The autonomy of the artist, his supposedly free position (as time and conditions are concerned), feels as the promised land for anyone working under precarious conditions: eight hours a day, five days a week in the hope of gaining a living. Maybe the autonomy of the arts (of writing) is something to

be cherished as ‘a last resort’. Maybe the arts (like most ‘useless’, non-profitable affairs) are under attack by given economic and political regimes – in danger of being ruled and governed under same (subjectivating) conditions.

(I'll chop some wood)

The other wrote:

Apparently, there's a contradiction between the free position of the artist, and the need for a societal responsibility or usefulness. Not only by society at large but also by the artist himself, struggling with the marginal position he is placed in. Motives for this longing for ‘societal responsibility’ are nonetheless completely different for both: the artist desires impact, society at large wants (economic) profit and subjugation to the prevalent context of the workfare state.

(that will take too long, throw in what we have left)

The other wrote:

Well, maybe envy plays its part: a position of autonomy that is not given to the masses, is not conceded to the minority. This envying of positions is symptomatic of discontent. It shows that the worker (being the majority), is discontented with his own position, being ruled by time and place regimes. But it also shows that the position of the artist should be scrutinized: why is the artist placed at the brim of society (sparking of this longing for impact), why is he being ‘front-lined’ since the ages of Romanticism?

(will do, but still we need to chop)

The other wrote:

The myths surrounding the artist since the late 18th century (the ages of Romanticism) might actually be indicating a societal benefit or interest. Because if the artist is

unsatisfied with his own marginal position (working alone in his studio), then he could have taken (or maybe ought to have taken) a different course. For instance, in cancelling himself - or even the arts in general - out. But in not having done so... what interest could there be: what function does the mythical discourse on artists and art perform?

(later. first warmth)

The other wrote:

Since the 19th century the discipline of art history, stemming from Romanticism, has built a common picture of artistry as a purely subjective truth, a picture from which all traces of social conflict and socio-economic imperatives have been carefully erased. The artists' life was and is represented as an uninterrupted string of signifiers of artist-ness, a seamless unity of life and work, production and personality (*off course being a complete travesty*). It fed the notion of the arts as an autonomous domain with its own rules - being considered a liberation by the Romantics but an expulsion (from daily life) by the Modernists.

The other wrote:

So, the art historians and the romantics proclaimed the autonomy of the arts, whereas the modernists (or avant-garde) issued the absorption of the arts (within daily life). Still, this historical exposé does not explain what *the interests in maintaining* the artistic myths are (regardless of being spurred on by the romantics or detested by the modernists). Could we say that the artist is *content with his own mythical conditions* because they suite his purposes (*which ones exactly*)? And could we say that the worker is, in contrast, justly *discontent with his own conditioning conditions*? And from this discontent is being impelled to long for different circumstances, like the ones of the artist? Does the worker long for conditions that are in the end mythical (*and delusional*)?

(short-sightedness. we need to sustain the warmth, considering given circumstances)

The other wrote:

Maybe we are trapped in a no-man's-land between reality and myths. Leaving us with the awkward question of sustaining or exposing the myths at hand. Sustaining the myth would still grant us the 'artistic option' (yet delusional), exposing the myth would leave us bare handed.

(priorities. warmth is warmth. at least for now)

The other wrote:

Yes, we're in between reality and myths, between the daily realities of work and the myths of the arts. But instead of leaving us with the awkward option of choosing (the 'or-or' situation), maybe we should postpone an answer and investigate the positions at hand. Because so far, we have hardly come up with more than a confused stammer.

The other wrote:

(mist thick as ever)

The other wrote:

(let's make fire)

Studio

Cardboard Cut-outs
Portrait in absentia



off course being completely dismissed. I have a lot of experience in non-succeeding. Maybe I should capitalize on that.

This morning I remembered the book I read as an adolescent (another incident of *a-sides* that just keep on distracting me): *The Coming of the Fairies* by Arthur Conan Doyle. Dealing with the (in)famous photographs of fairies taken by two Scottish girls at the beginning of the 20th century, it is an illustration to the question of images being genuine or not. The pictures came to the attention of Conan Doyle to illustrate an article on fairies he'd been commissioned to write for the Christmas edition of *The Strand Magazine* in 1920. Doyle, being a spiritualist, was enthusiastic about the photographs, and interpreted them as clear and visible evidence of psychic phenomena. Public reaction was mixed, some accepted the images as genuine, others believed them to be faked.

I remember two things (among others): I was fond of the detective style of writing, the exiting build-up of the story and maybe even therefore being convinced that elves *did* exist (growing up in the vicinity of woods must have contributed to this). But most important I remember the conversations on the topic with my best friend in fifth year of high school. We discussed the technique of the camera: how could the photographs *not* be true (e.g. being a true representation of reality with elves and all) given the fact that the camera was such an objective device. The mind boggling thing was that other people, e.g. the girl's relatives *and* Doyle, could not see the elves. In going to the spot where the elves were photographed, the girls saw them flying and playing around but the others didn't. How then could the camera register these events if they were not to be seen by the blind eye? Could the camera see something that wasn't there? Or, in reverse: could the camera see things how they *really* were and were we as spectators the visually impaired? Were we unable to see reality as it is, was there a veil that needed to be shed? The camera couldn't lie.

All this made me and the boyfriend conclude that the elves *must* have been there, that elves *do* exist. This conclusion

being affirmed by the 'extensive research' performed on the photographs by Doyle; they were scrutinized by well-known photographers and chemists of the time and all of them concluded that the photographs were not forged or tampered with.

§

Years later I read on the internet (which had not been there in the mid-eighties):

In the early 1980s the two Scottish girls, Elsie and Frances, admitted that the photographs were faked, using cardboard cutouts of fairies copied from a popular children's book of the time. Frances nonetheless maintained that the fifth and final photograph was genuine. In a 1985 interview on Yorkshire Television Elsie said that she and Frances were too embarrassed to admit the truth after fooling Doyle, the author of Sherlock Holmes: 'Two village kids and a brilliant man like Conan Doyle – well, we could only keep quiet.' In the same interview Frances said: 'I never even thought of it as being a fraud – it was just Elsie and I having a bit of fun and I can't understand to this day why they were taken in – they wanted to be taken in.'

So, in the end the camera *did* see it right, it registered what was actually there, the only thing being: it was faked, faked reality.

What we have here is a strange loop of an illusion (*the fairies*) being made physical (*the cardboard cutouts*), being recorded by a machine (*the camera*) that supposedly shows reality. The girls made a-make-believe (an improvised scene of fairy-puppets in wooded surroundings), but were flustered by all the attention given to it and as a result kept quiet. They were overwhelmed and numbed by the authority of one person (Conan Doyle), who saw something he *wanted to believe* because it suited his purposes.

Concluding: a reality, although a reality based on make-belief, came into being based on the beliefs of one person. That makes make-believe upon make-believe.

§

George came in. He wanted to discuss my progress on the latest objects, two Ming vases and a Dutch 17th century painting. He was satisfied with the vases, but the painting still lacked in detail and color. We checked the pictures on the computer - he sitting close to me. Now and then our fingers touched as we both alternately used the keyboard or slightly stroked the mousepad (we decided upon meeting at five).

I continued working on the painting, adjusting lights and replacing reflectors, all to get the right balance between clarity and depth. The painting was set on its easel, silent as ever.

Thinking on faked realities I was mesmerized by the doubling of it all. I myself was playing a double game here: taking pictures of pictures, that in themselves supposedly reflect real life situations. In fact (*in reality*) they were *all* fictionalized realities, the pictures and the pictures of the pictures; all captured by the camera's lens to be on view in catalogues and internet, showing the museum's collections to a broader audience - in order to lure them to the idea of arts' (*and* the museums) authenticity, to enhance the museums role as an institution of esteemed cultural importance.

Am I building a reality here that needs to be believed in because of museum policies? Do we want to be taken in, because it so well suits our purposes?

§

At five I met up with George. We seated ourselves in the furthest corner of our favorite bar, enjoying the comfort of being tucked away in shadows and anonymity. Once again we were wound up in a conversation that comes to life when people are flirting with each other, a series of mad elliptical exchanges of riddles and innuendos. The trick was to say

nothing about oneself in as elegant a manner as possible. I was, as always, intrigued by his amused and ironic smile, and had no objection to being led into a little game of cat and mouse. George being Head of Design, and so in museum service, rattled on about being turned into a functionary, his independence being compromised by given compensations; the museums role in maintaining the mechanisms of the system of belief through which all artists are being kept hostage in a bubble of myth. I said that we were always already serving. Studio practices might conceal this by separating production from the interests it meets in the long run. But in the end, we serve and I was happy to serve him and ready to believe in our myths as long as - I couldn't hear myself any longer, my words being drowned in music: *Vienna by Ultravox*. I squeezed George, somewhere in a functional and mythical part.

Late last night (I couldn't sleep) I thought of the 17th century painting residing in the studio and decided to look up the story of the painter, Emanuel de Witte. I was struck by the unexpected drama:

Following the arrest of his second wife and child (both being arrested for theft from a neighbor), Emanuel de Witte was forced to indenture himself to the Amsterdam notary and art dealer Joris de Wijs, surrendering all his work in exchange for room, board and 800 guilders annually. De Witte broke the contract, was sued by the dealer, and forced to indenture himself further as a result. Several patrons provided de Witte with support, but these relations did not work out well, for he tended to shout at his clients and at people watching him at work in churches. Records tell of his gambling habit and a fight with Gerard de Laresse. Around 1688 he moved in with Hendrick van Streeck, in exchange for training him as a painter of church interiors. According to Arnold Houbraken, after an argument about the rent, de Witte hanged himself from a canal bridge in 1692. The rope broke and de Witte

drowned. Because the canal froze that night, his corpse was not found until eleven weeks later.

§

Next morning I was wary of entering the studio, knowing that De Witte's painting was right here, standing on its easel, being exposed to the camera and its inescapable lights - in full-fledged, naked sight.

Upon entering I cautiously walked over to the painting and examined it; gentle, gingerly. I couldn't find any sign, anything. I felt utterly impaired, both in grasping the whole notion of De Witte's hands once painting this image, his hands brushing the strokes of paint in what finally became a bourgeois interior with a woman sitting behind a virginal, specks of light leaving their traces on the checkered floor, a bed in the corner. But most of all, what impaired me the most, was the prospect of photographing the painting. How was I to register something that was so unportrayable in all its historical layers and implications? I could only think of it as a portrait in absentia, an outline drawn around an empty space.

De Witte's excellent sense of composition combined with his use of light created atmospheres which seem honest and real. His theme may have been light and how it creates live-able space.

'Live-able space', the unbearable irony of it all.

I concentrated on some other objects. A gun, a set of 18th century gloves and a small still-life painting.

In the afternoon, I returned to the painting. I decided to leave my inhibitions and started working on the lights and reflectors once again. I took comfort in the idea of making an image, nothing more, nothing less. For all it mattered: De Witte himself played tricks on reality, he occasionally combined aspects of different churches to depict his *ideal* interior, populating it with the occasional dog. In this vein, I tried to

photograph the painting, *ideally*. I worked on it for the rest of the afternoon. At five I left the studio.

Services to Art



The gun needed sharpening. It still lacked a certain crispness, some solid distinction. In looking at it closely, zooming in as far as I could, I saw the studio lights reflected on its shiny surfaces. Small white squares. I put layer on layer on the photo, covering it with the delusional gleam of reality - particularly brutal for a gun once deployed in action. I was working at home, in my own studio; obviously not as grand as the museums, but still workable, comforting. I had a stack of work in front of me. All the shootings of the last couple of days needed to be reviewed, edited and prepared for publication on the museums website. I worked all morning, relentlessly. At lunchtime, I decided to go to the deli next door for some distraction. After ordering (cappuccino, pastrami bagel), I took out my notebook to write down some lingering thoughts. The discussion with George last night had made an impact, it triggered something that needed clarification. In writing it down I hoped to explicate some of its uncertainties.

The museum and the artworks it contains, are more profane than the museum visitor realizes; he or she sees artworks as isolated from practical life. Museum staff, on the contrary, hardly ever experiences this sacralised way of contemplating art works. They regulate temperature and humidity levels in museum spaces, they restore artworks and remove dust and dirt - the perspective of the cleaning lady, so to speak. The technology of conservation, restoration, and exhibition is a profane technology, even if it produces objects of aesthetic contemplation.

Normally this profane side is shielded off from public view by museum walls. There have been avant-garde movements trying to reveal the factual, material and profane dimensions of art, but they never fully succeeded in their quest for 'the real'. The material side of art was permanently re-aestheticized, it was put under the standard conditions of art representation. The same can be said of Institutional Critique, also trying to thematise the profane sides of the art *institution*. But also here, Institutional Critique was institutionalized.

Being a photographer to the museum I provide a service that is as much profane (e.g. practical and paid for) as it is sacralising - enhancing notions of authenticity by photographing artefacts in an optimized manner; showing their splendour (regardless of their factualness) to the fullest. Lights are being regulated, softened or sharpened, all in all to create a hyper-reality of singularity and legitimacy.

My role as photographer is to document art. Art documentation refers to art but is not (the) art (object) itself. Artworks can be emotionally and physically experienced in a setting that is explicitly created for them. Art documentation on the other hand refers to art objects that are placed *out of context*, or more accurately: out of the *supposed* context, that of the physical museum. You could, indeed, argue that the museum is just as well a surrogate, a fiction, an artificial setting. What we have here is a doubling of missing contexts. The documentation is a surrogate for the real, the museum a replacement for daily life, fictionalizing its status as 'temple of art'. The art objects, the vases, paintings and guns, used to be part of daily life; but in documentation neither daily life, nor the museum is commemorated. The objects are suspended in limbo.

Maybe this situation has changed in recent years due to the internet. Artworks (as art documentation) are shown on the internet in the context of (a whole lot of) other information. They are both integrated in one and the same internet space, which is potentially accessible to all. The artworks in this setting become 'real and profane' because the information about art is used and treated in the same way as information about all 'other things in the world'.

Art works in the guise of art documentation can now be *reformatted, rewritten, extended, shortened*. They can be used and worked upon just as any other piece of information. You could even say that the internet has given art documentation it's legitimate place.

By displaying their collections online, art institutions have begun to use the internet as a primary space for *self-representation*. Digital depositories of art images are much more compact and much cheaper to maintain than the

museum itself, moreover museums are now able to present parts of their collections that were usually kept in storage. And this is where my part as a photographer comes in. I provide the museum *services of self-representation*. This profane part of the servicing - being the museums photographer - has however been guarded of, it is being kept a secret. I'm almost like the secretary, that prototype and apex of service, the one being able to keep a secret. The secretary and the photographer are both confidants *and* spokespersons to 'powerful figures' - in my case: an institution of esteemed cultural importance. *The product* that my service provides, the (online) photograph, is nonetheless very clear in its message: enhancing the museums role as a legitimate place of art's high culture.

I, the photographer provide a service that is invisible, my name is never mentioned, *I am the confidant*. My product, the photo, provides a service in enhancing the museums own reputation and status as temple of the arts; it is not a work in itself, *it is the spokesperson*.

The museum is denying its profanities but proclaiming its legitimacy.

I left at 3 p.m. When I entered the studio, I saw the gun save-screened on my computer, turning around its axis over and over again.

§

We met at Lin Fa. I had dressed up for the occasion, wearing my corporate looking, yet very feminine designer suit; being the deepest of blue it suited my hair but contrasted my skin. Night sky with chestnut and a touch of cream. Contradictions are the best aphrodisiac.

Upon entering (George was seated at the window table, a beer in hand) I saw a shimmer of timidity crossing his face, a veil pulled up and immediately let down again. It had an empowering effect on me, realizing once again that male-female relations are the most subtle yet vicious of battlefields.

I was set on talking my way through the evening. I wanted to sharp my thoughts on that other battlefield occupying my brain: that of the arts. Being unsuccessful as an artist - having relentlessly tried to be part of the inner circles of the art world - I was haunted by the narcissistically gratifying idea of professional recognition.

I paraphrased Fraser:

I would have liked to be invited to participate in Documenta IX because the invitation would have constituted a moment of professional recognition that I would have found narcissistically stabilizing. It would have confirmed my identity with an image of that which I should hope to become.

Art making is a profession of social fantasy. The representative function of art as a class culture, is partly based on the enormity of the aspirations fostered by producers. Those aspirations represent freedom from necessity for one dominant class fraction, individualism for another, entrepreneurial spirit for another, intellectual autonomy and integrity of conscience for another.

George was quite uncompetitive. He was writing a novel but would, nonetheless, never introduce himself as a writer. He rarely talked about himself in the way other writers do, and he had little or no interest in pursuing what people refer to as a 'literary career'. Once he stated that inventing stories was a sham and being a hundred pages into writing his second novel, he tore up the manuscript and burned it. That was a kind of rigor that puzzled me, both as it excited me.

His un-competitiveness made it hard for me to convince him, being (off course) the intention of it all: accumulating authority, legitimacy, recognition. I told him this, while slicing up my noodles (as always, I was unable to handle chopsticks). He looked at my 'brutal slashing of a delicate dish'. I said that at the deepest level there is the simple certainty that my professional status as an artist depends on my ability to influence others, that is, the degree to which my work or my position becomes a model, a kind of norm. The

art world is after all a world of competitive struggles, more even so than the corporate world. Positions are scarce, money is lacking and there is no ideological coherence as far as the judging of art is concerned. Every judgement becomes a referendum, maybe not on the artwork itself, but on the dominance and the authority of the judge, whose 'declarations' or dictums must be defended to actually conceal the fundamental arbitrariness of 'it's art when I say it's art'.

This being an incentive for struggle among artists, curators and gallerists, it compels them to maintain their professional status in comparison to their colleagues, in a never ending and self-strengthening loop. The cynical version of this kind of analysis is that the artistic field is no different from any other market in luxury goods. They all serve social competition for status and prestige.

George said this was art under social scrutiny. The conditions that are revealed, the unseeable and unsayable in that social universe (although felt by most artists) are hardly ever explicated. They are accepted as being part of the conditions under which the art world operates. Explicating these reasons would reveal the social, economic and symbolic capital that is actually the true basis for artistic legitimacy. It would reveal the principles upon which one's success actually depends: the safeguarding of the investments made in the production of belief in the value of a given position, because the status of our artistic activity depends on the belief in *The Artist* and *his Artwork*, both concocted up in self-declared autonomy: the artist in his studio. The value of the artist and his artwork depends upon its rarity, 'the sacrosanct mysteries of the cult of the artwork', and so all art professionals have an interest in maintaining, not to say, *increasing* their monopoly on certain (or so-called) competences of artistry. Leaving us to only producing prestige value, symbolic value, according to a principle of autonomy, which in the end bars us from pursuing the production of specific 'social use value'. The artist making artworks in isolation, recreating myths of autonomy, the gallerist buying and selling, not only artworks but foremost

myths -enhancing in that same instance the status of the artist - art being a self-fulfilling prophecy. Art making is a profession of social fantasy. Yes, indeed.

According to Pierre Bourdieu, the artistic field can only be understood as 'the product or prize of a permanent conflict': as a field of forces that is always also a field of struggles. Struggles to determine the boundaries and membership in the field, struggles to define the form of capital according to which positions within it will be hierarchized, and struggles to determine the distribution of this form of capital. All variants of fundamentally competitive struggles among members to maintain or improve their positions relative to other producers.

In this protecting of the social conditions of the artistic field - and who wouldn't do that as long as it's one of insecurity, precarity and struggle, of permanent conflict - I was reminded of Conan Doyle. Elsie and Francis perceived Doyle as a brilliant man, his stature and the myths that had evolved around him, prevented them from telling the truth. Although there were no (economic) insecurities for the girls which urged them to protect 'their conditions', it still shows how belief, prestige and status works.

Reality, the real occurrence of events, was covered up in favour of Doyle's *make* belief.

§

Again, I couldn't sleep. I wondered why it had taken me so long to become aware of the conditions under which art operates. Why hadn't I seen the hidden truth of social reality, why hadn't I exposed underlying power relations or confronted others with an unblinking view of what they were actually doing or why hadn't I de-mystified the artwork? What did this mean and what was I to do, being enlightened with something that could just as well break down something (*what exactly?*) that might be important. What to do in a de-mystified context? Was there anything left?

My feet were cold. I looked at George lying next to me, sleeping on his belly, face turned. I curled up. I thought of us

sleeping together in one bed. I still couldn't get used to it. I longed for George's body but it had to be postponed every time, over and over again. In its availability, it lost its appeal. The long discussions we had in bars and restaurants were nothing more than the postponing of sexual encounters. The building up of tension through a delicate alternation of wit, intellect and (flimsy) bodily contacts, was paramount. I needed the fiction, the make-belief.

Double Game
Portraits in presentia



The gun was in my bag. I was wary of it all the time: leaving the museum, doing my groceries, getting a coffee on the go, taking the subway. I guarded my bag more than usual, being conscious of the gun's presence every time I grabbed for something, my purse, a handkerchief, my keys.

Once home, I put on my white gloves, took out the gun (all black and shiny) and placed it on my bedside table. I looked at it for a while and took in the surroundings, the gun's new setting: unmade bed, dimmed lights, a floor of abandoned clothes. All Hollywood fiction, Tarantino kitsch.

In the studio, I worked for a couple of hours on some new pictures of Asian statues and ceramics. At four I quit and left for the kitchen to pour myself a glass of wine. I admired, once again, the Ming vase and the yellow berried twig it contained. Set against the dark blue wall it created its own depth of field. I sat myself at the table, placing the glass of wine next to the vase. I read a book. With the remote control I unleashed the delayed action shutter.

I was reading Museum Highlights: 'If we are always already serving, artistic freedom can only consist in determining for ourselves whom and how we serve.' The logic of artistic autonomy has it that we only work for ourselves, for our own satisfaction and subject only to the demands of our own conscience and drives: the artist in his studio. I was wondering: am I really serving my own interests? Because in the end what freedom does this form of autonomy grant me? Nothing much as far as income is concerned, hence my services to the museum (a guaranteed income at the expense of time and autonomy).

The autonomy supposedly gained in artistic practices is nothing more than a basis for self-exploitation. My (and other artist's) labor is supposed to be its own compensation because we are working for own satisfaction – and working for our own satisfaction is a luxury position in itself, not granted to most of us, being tied up to the drudgeries of daily working life. A position that is not granted to the masses is not conceded to the minority.

'It often seems to me that our professional relations are organized as if the entire art apparatus was established to generously provide us with the opportunity to fulfil our exhibitionistic desires in a public display.'

Working in the studio is a longed for position and the artist (supposedly) needs it to dream of 'something else': a time-out zone that is conditional for making work. But the studio is also an artistic myth, one that needs to be kept alive in being the basis for our credibility. And this same studio-myth also keeps us from regulating our own economic conditions, because: 'Artists will be poor'. By keeping the myth alive we secure our own precarity.

I thought of Emanuel de Witte. Unable to regulate *his* social and economic conditions (which led to his gruesome death). Indentured to an Amsterdam notary and art dealer, De Witte was *forced to service*. Service in exchange for room and boarding. What has changed ever since?

I wondered what to do with De Witte's painting. '*Woman playing the Virginal*' was placed on the living room floor, opposite the couch. The painting had by now transformed into a magical object, a storehouse of obscure passions and inescapable fate. The painting was De Witte's portrait in absentia. I myself headed in the opposite direction: *portraits in presentia*. I climbed out of the basement of anonymity, dragging the museum objects with me, giving us both a context that suited us: personal, daily, intimate. Not only the profanity of the objects was shown, but also my own, the photographer's: in every picture you see me pressing the delayed action shutter.

I didn't care so much about showing myself though. I couldn't care about 'personality' or the showing of a so called 'true self'.

'Artistic practice is usually understood as being individual and personal. But what does the individual or personal actually mean? The individual

is often understood as being different from the others.'

However, I might be more interested in 'one's difference from oneself' - the refusal to be identified according to the general criteria of identification, indicating how others see us. I would like to proclaim the right to sovereign self-identification. I no longer want to have identities which are imposed on me by others – society, state, university, Academy, parents. Let's clear away with the national and cultural identities that are ascribed to artists, let's get rid of the myths of modern art, understanding itself as a search for the 'true self.'

The question is not whether the true self is real or merely a metaphysical fiction; the question of identity is not a question of truth but a question of power: who has the power over my own identity - I myself or society?

§

I discussed the options with George, being the internet specialist. He wasn't hesitant: *'this means nothing to me, Vienna'*.

The internet as an archive provided exactly what I needed: decontextualization and recontextualization. It gave me the chance to follow and understand the artistic strategy of nonidentity, in a much better way than the traditional archive or institution did. George placed my pictures on the website and secured the redirection. Clicking on the gun's picture on the museum's site would normally give information on the history and cultural importance of the object (in this case the killing of a politician). Now it redirected straight to my bedroom.

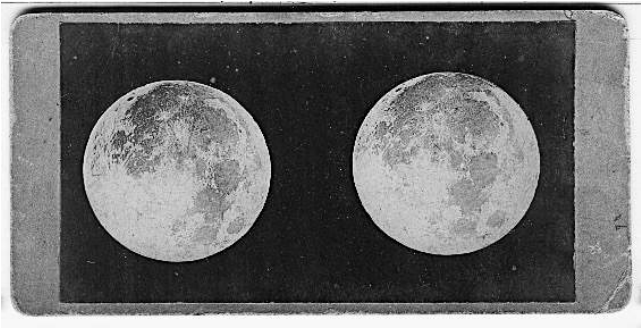
I was lying in bed, naked under the sheets, face turned towards the camera (to you, my viewer), the gun next to me on the bedside table, glistening in its' own pool of light. Above me *Woman playing the virginal*, De Witte's painting, showing a man (De Witte?) in a four-poster bed, hardly

visible, tucked away behind heavy curtains, looking at me,
his viewer.

I started all over again, virginal.

*The image has gone
Only you and I
It means nothing to me*

(...)



December

Snow was everywhere. It fell steadily and continuously, hour after hour, fluttering silently from the grey sky to the earth. No winds to distract it from its straight course until it accumulated on the ground, thick and airy as a duvet. Our footsteps, imprinted in the flaky morning snow, had disappeared within the hour. There were no traces of our existence left. Only the smoke coming from the roof top gave us away - which was ephemeral just the same.

Sometimes we heard thick patches of snow falling from the nearest trees' branches. The muffled sound of nature's abundance. No other sounds were to be heard, not even birds. Everything was silent.

Once again we were writing at our desk. For convenience sake, we had placed it as close to the fire as we could. One side of our bodies was warmed, while the other stayed cold. We had to switch places after an hour.

One of us wrote:

'Sachs's best ideas always seemed to come to him when he was away from his desk.'

That being the case, what are we doing here? Aren't we trapped in a swamp of inwardness, confronted as we are with the austerities of retreating?

The other wrote:

Let's just write a script. That is our main objective. To be clear, decisive, communicative. Also, as far as Sachs is concerned, he didn't just work *away* from his desk, but also *at* his desk. He hadn't any extraneous preoccupations to bog him down. Life had been reduced to its bare-bones essentials, and he no longer had to question how he spent his time. Every day was more or less a repetition of the day before. The element of surprise had been eliminated, and that made him feel sharper, better able to concentrate on his work. In all its banalities it's about plain, ordinary

routine. In addition, as an extra bonus, Sachs had the luxury of time and space. His conditions were optimal.

The other wrote:

Still (bringing back a former remark) ‘where does the demand for engagement converge with the desire for autonomy?’ In other words: can we have impact, and show our concerns with the other and the world, yet still maintain a free and autonomous position? Our present situation of solitude doesn’t seem to enable anything. No script, no impact, no freedom (in being contained within the inner swamps of doubt).

(could you please turn on the light? the snow is covering the sky)

The other wrote:

The engagement you are referring to, is taking on mythical proportions in its conception of art being able to do something; in representing undogmatic thinking and being the conscience of society, thus being able to redirect other people’s thinking. Anyone implying that art can *do* something (directing people’s gaze, or improving social cohesion), implicitly implies that it *ought* to do something.

(open the curtains. the snow might reflect the light)

The other wrote:

Sachs, wanting to be engaged and have impact, left his writerly life (and his beloved wife) to live a life of action. What can our script *en-act*?

(the snow darkens the sky. All is grey, there is no light)

The other wrote:

You are asking the wrong question. The myths evolving around the artist are confusing, they pollute our minds.

They urge us into thinking that the artist *is* special and is thus capable of *doing* something special, which *makes* him special, and so on and so forth - in an ever-ongoing loop of self-fulfilling prophecy. The artist is a stereotype, full of commonplaces and convictions that are being sustained out of demands of self-interest. In the end the artist believes in art because he wants to believe in art. Sachs did not only leave his writerly life but also (and foremost) its inherent mythical proportions. You think of gaining impact by leaving our position of solitude, of leaving our writerly efforts, just as Sachs did. But you are simply re-installing another myth (of messiah-like impact) by discarding the other (the myth of the artist).

(I'll open the curtains and turn on the light. we'll have best of both worlds)

The other wrote:

Yes, but disputing the myth is futile because there is no alternative. Complete de-mystification would lead to the end of... all.

(the weather is changing)

The other wrote:

Forget about the myths. Not only are they inescapable - in being kept alive over and over again - but also superfluous. The myths nourish the dynamics of repetitive renewal in contemporary art: behind the rejection of the old, superseded myth lies a re-introduction in a new, customized form that makes it *zeitgemäss* - for a short time span. On the other hand the myths we supposedly cannot escape, are being corroded. The mainstreaming of avant-garde norms and values has hollowed out the mark of the artist. Media, corporate culture and even politics have discovered the appeal of ground-breaking behaviour,

uncompromised self-expression, the breaking of taboos, anti-framing and disrespect for tradition and authority.

The other wrote:

So, all is gone?

We changed positions.

The other wrote:

Instead of the myths we should focus on conditions. As I said before, Sachs' conditions were optimal, he was given the luxury of time and space. Was he ever worried about the necessities of 'earning a living'? Was he ever pre-occupied with wearing of insecurity and taking care of himself in given precarious circumstances? Was he ever forced to work, to devoting his precious time to working hours – instead of (his beloved) writing? Under precarious conditions the individual is being propelled in an *immer* continuing survival-mode, with hardly time left to do or think anything else, other than doing the things that supposedly 'need to be done'.

(yes, the winds are becoming fierce, shaking up the trees)

The other wrote:

The luxury of time and space is granted to us in being here, in our cabin in the woods. We have, although for a short time span, been able to postpone work, working hours and precarious conditions. So yes, a luxury. But still, it has left us where we are now – empty handed.

(leaving them naked in discarding their white duvets)

The other wrote:

Not empty handed, just in limbo. We need the silence to be able to think of something else. Leave the myths and their intoxicating properties. Let us not re-direct our lives to the

social and cultural reality of the artistic myth, which is delusional in the end, letting us believe in alleged autonomy and fashionable roles and places. Serving the cultural and symbolic capital upon which institutions have been founded. Let us enjoy the time at hand, the fact that we are free from working and it's time consuming characteristics.

(you could also say: the world is turning to colour)

One of us wrote:

The mythical substance of art is a dreamed of little corner within collective conscience. Don't we need this little corner because otherwise everything would be radical, obscene and redundant positive, in a suffocating triumph of reality? Don't we need the myth, the make-belief?

(colour or not, the trees are scratching the cabins roof, a sound worse than the shrieking of crows)

One of us wrote:

We are in a corner, yet not mythical. This is real. Let's make the best of it. While we can.

(still, birds)

One of us wrote:

(...)

(it makes me shiver to the bone)

One of us wrote:

Yes, our best point of departure.

§

Still, no script.
I threw another piece of wood in the flames.

Desk

Supporting Character



Week 37

Monday – office

This morning I remembered why I'm here in the first place. It was 1999, the setting being an employment agency: one woman sitting in front of the other (desk and computer in between). Woman one typing: 'First impression: she has a nice face. Could be ok for receptionist work.'

I wasn't supposed to see that, but I did. Being offended (*and let's be honest: flattered*) I managed to squeeze myself into a slightly better position: that of the secretary. Now there is a desk between me and my boss. To soften up life's brutalities I lure myself into the thought that his status and importance might be flowing back to me (me being his extension after all).

Telephone rings.

Need to take this. Reception: guest for boss. Need to go down and take him up to the seventh floor.

Right... they're comfortably settled in his office, coffee, tea, everything under control. Continue: e-mail. 35 left to read, scan, answer, act upon. All important, all for him.

12.30 hours. Lunch, 30 minutes in cafeteria. Talk, laughter with colleagues (boss in office). Thank god, G. was here. Gives a little spunk to the day. We, again, had the smallest, tiniest of eye contact. Lovely.

Right. Desk again. Mail down to 10, still lots to do. Last week's minutes are breathing down my neck. Can't seem to find the right moment for it: telephone rings, guests are waiting to be welcomed, meetings to be scheduled, etc.

Ah... G. came in. A distraction I can handle (*looking great, nice suit, great hair, little shabby, great contradiction, love it*). Anyway. He wants the minutes today. Great.

To distract myself (in complete stress-denial), lets read what friend E. send me over the weekend. *Mechanical Brides*:

...cultural expectations about the behaviour of female employee's parallel expectations about communications devices: both are asked to serve as passive hosts to a drama played out by others.

'...passive hosts, drama played out by others'. Not quite the motivational thing to read right now.

Women regulate the flow of information by taking messages, transferring calls, receiving orders, dialling for the boss, etc. Such jobs make the female worker a human extension of a technological system, charged with mediating – rather than *producing* - messages.

Fuck, telephone.

Interesting stuff though:

Mechanical devices, from the washing machine to the typewriter, are designed to perform work; the work they do is cultural as well as utilitarian, helping to define the differences between women and men. ...Human personalities are shaped by social conditions, from ideals of family life and norms of gender behaviour to the economic opportunities available to people based on their cultural identities.

What the f. is *my* cultural identity?

The self is, to some degree, a manufactured object, a social product. ...The domestic ideal also functioned to define women as naturally suited to jobs involving neatness, courtesy, and personal service.

Oh, god, that freaks me out.

15.00 hours. Made a start with the minutes. Thinking of sabotaging them. No one takes the effort to read them anyway. Let's make them into a sort of message (some words from the *immer* inconspicuous secretary). Could squeeze in the tiniest message for G.

17.00 hours. Almost finished. I'll do a double check tomorrow. Send in the concept to G. (*signed it with a x*).

17.15 hours, subway. Thinking on the 'passive hosts' bit, 'drama played by others'. Quite depressing. Comes down to my role being reduced to the one of prompter. Prompting messages to 'Mr. Lead On Stage' (e.g. boss), whenever he might have forgotten them. I'm a (shitty) supporting character

Fuck, telephone.

Was E. Told her about my lovely insight. She said (laughing): 'Better a supporting character than a cameo appearance.' Need to look that up when I get home.

18.00 hours, home.

'A supporting character is a character in a narrative that is not focused on by the primary storyline, but appears or is mentioned in the story sufficiently to be more than just a minor character or a cameo

appearance. Sometimes, supporting characters may develop a complex back-story of their own, but this is usually in relation to the main character, rather than entirely independently.'

Well, that's uplifting.

19.30 hours, dinner, TV. Ally McBeal is on. Great sitcom office show. Love the scenes with Ally and Fish in the unisex-toilet. Would love to have the same at the office for some real-time confessional, office-gossip sharing. Or even better: have a John Cage for the imperative *slash* urgent *slash* essential disorder. Feeling completely comfortable in this warm, wonderful sitcom world.

22.30 hours, bed, reading.

The term secretary, from the same root as *secret*, had carried cultural prestige since the Renaissance, referring to the confidant and deputy of a powerful figure. The feminization of this almost exclusively male world occurred with unprecedented speed at the dose of the nineteenth century. By 1890, women held 60 percent of all typing and stenography jobs in the U.S. By 1920 it was 90 percent. Rarely has a field of employment - especially one invested with social status- altered its identity so quickly from male to female.

Invested with social status...?! The secretary?

The modern boss-secretary relationship is structured by such differences as masculine-feminine and active-passive. Machines mediate these relationships, standing between male

decision-making and female service. As sociologist Rosemary Pringle has pointed out, the very notion of 'secretary' is cloaked in sexual innuendo; the occupation has no absolute definition in terms of duties or responsibilities, but rather is identified tacitly by its gender (female) and its machines (typewriter and telephones).

The computer which I thought of as *servicing me*, is actually responsible for me serving my boss?

Better turn off light, set clock for morning: 07.00 hours.
Check. Head empty. Right. Sleep.

Fuck

Barry White's in my head, John Cage's favourite:

*We got it together didn't we
We definitely got our thing together
Don't we baby
Isn't that nice*

Tuesday – office

Forget about this day. Crazy, sick, stressed out, no lunch, mental jogging between mail and phone. What is it with this delirious, running-riot mailbox? What is it that people want from him that is *so* important? Well, that's not the real issue here. The issue being:

Fuck, telephone.

In the privy (which should be unisex) - having a small break *slash* hide away *slash* very much deserved elliptic moment - I thought of this: the time and effort to render all my services (eight fucking hours a day) are completely occupying: they not only occupy my brain, but also my body. My brain because of all the information I need to process, my body because of being physically tied to the chair. So... I not only *have* an occupation, I also *am* occupied - time, space and physique-wise.

Off course I immediately got frustrated with the idea that I'll probably instantly forget this quite interesting thought, once back at my desk. I need a voice-recorder, catch some of these precious insights.

I once asked my colleague why there are so little men working as secretaries. She said: 'They're not as tidy and precise as we are'. *Yeah right*. I didn't bother confronting her with the question why *we*, women, supposedly *are*? It wouldn't have mattered, she would've probably said 'that's just how we are'.

I was tempted to send her the piece of text I read last night (I'm excerpting here, taking minutes so to speak):

In addition to accepting low wages, women offered a number of attractive qualities to employers, including their perceived docility and agility, their willingness to perform routine work, and their lack of career ambitions.

I don't think dearest colleague could be bothered, even if it hit here right in the face.

I didn't see G. all day. Left at five.

18.00 hours, home, dinner, laundry, dishes, TV: nothing. Early bed, exhausted, tea and book (E. gave me another 'intellectually challenging' piece of writing. Sometimes I wonder what she is dragging me into. Can't I just simply read a novel?). Anyway, the given subject could be nice, but the style of writing *slash* used lingo *slash* the complete aura of the book annoys me. It's a catalogue, no, it's a collection of artists' writings. E. being artistically involved (*her* words) reads this stuff. She met an artist photographer at a venue (hideous places by the way) who told her about the issue of Art and Service. She thought it could be interesting for me, being a service provider myself. But then: *what's art got to do with it?*

Instead I entered a query on 'bull shit jobs'. Actually got a hit (*what the hell does that mean?*):

Growing up in a lefty, working class family, I felt this all the time: the ideological imperative to validate work as a virtue in itself; which is by the way constantly being reinforced by society at large. But there is also the reality and feeling that most work

is obviously stupid, degrading and unnecessary; it is best avoided whenever possible.

Ha! I could have said that!

...there is a whole infrastructure of receptionists, janitors, computer maintenance people, which are kind of second-order bullshit jobs: *they are* actually doing something, but they're doing it to support people who are doing nothing.

I'll tell boss this tomorrow - who knows, he might be relieved.

I read on a bit and found out about movements proclaiming *The Right to be Lazy (why haven't I ever heard of that before?)*.

...the division between anarcho-syndicalist unions and socialist unions played an important role; the latter were always asking for higher wages, while the anarchists were asking for less hours. The socialists were essentially buying into the notion that work is a virtue and consumerism is good, as long as it's managed democratically; while the anarchists were saying: 'no, the whole deal that we work more and more for more and more products, is rotten from the get-go.'

Never knew it, but supposedly I'm an anarchist.

Wrapping it up: we have a performance society here where it is mandatory to work out of moral imperatives and consumerism (the latter as a sort of fucking consolation

price). We no longer live in a welfare state but (as sociologists have it) a *workfare state*. Within that state citizens are only conditionally free. If you're able to discipline yourself, you'll be left alone, but when you fail to discipline yourself, society or the government will step in, as in cases of time discipline (*thou shalt work*) or applying for a new job: the employment agency, the *miss-she-has-a-nice-face-imbecile*.

Always hated the economic smugness of daily life, always wanted a life without having to work *ever*. My latent wish - let's be blatantly honest here - is to give into laziness, dormancy, hibernation, the better curling up, vacuity as a gift, the zen-factor of meaninglessness. But no. Instead I relentlessly find myself in a state of mental jogging. In the workfare state. Sounds like a song:

'Mental Jogging in the Workfare State'

Is it? No, it's not, only hit on YouTube: 'Mental Jogging – understanding success'. Ha! Fucking moron.

...the impact of increased self-discipline is nowhere as visible as in the so-called 'free or autonomous creative professions'. An impressive workers' morality prevails that has no need for boss, supervisor or time clock.

Should send this to E.

22.30 hours, getting tired, should sleep. Clock set. 07.00.

...to force back that insane performance-society that forces us to conduct our lives in an undesired

manner didn't we become too obedient too well-
behaved beginning of a solution might be situated
in the notion of beingnaughty
weshouldbedreamingmore dan

Wednesday – office

Saw G. in the elevator upon entering the office. He looked tired. Saw myself reflected in the elevator mirror and was happy to conclude that I looked great (albeit taking (too) much of my precious time: *cheers!*). We had the usual polite conversation, a little work, some private issues. Nothing really *in depth*. We ought to have a drink at the bar, would immediately solve these slightly embarrassing *in limbo* talks. Only good thing, he led me out of the elevator first, giving me the feeling he was looking at my ass.

Office work, same old. Nothing out of the ordinary. Three good things:

1. colleague not here, lovely silence, can pick my nose whenever I want
2. boss out all day
3. got response form G. on the minutes (best of all): he's very satisfied with the 'detailed and precisely written report'. Wow, good marks on that. Great.

Skipped lunch. Am reading something that fascinates me.

Typewriter is ambiguous. The word, in the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, meant both typing machine *and* female typist. There was a convergence of a profession, a machine and a sex.

...prior to their industrialization the two sexes occupied strictly symmetrical roles: women, with the symbol of female industriousness in their hands (needle and cloth), wove tissues; men, with the symbol of male intellectual activity in their hands

(pen and paper), wove tissues of a different sort called *text*.

Wrapping it up: women were nicely needling away - embroidering in front of a crackling fire, making lovely pillow covers that decayed within the decade and no one really cared about - and men were *writing*, publishing their all-important, earth shattering, consequential texts - to be read again by us, women. So, all in all, we women were blank tissues, white sheets of virginity, to be written upon, by the male pencil, *the penholder*.

Conclusion for the day on my part: boss can go and *fuck* himself.

Ok, ok let it go. I need the money, so better be the wiser.
Then again: 'I need the money?' What the f. am I whoring
myself away here?!

Well...I don't know.

...with industrialization and the introduction of the typewriter, all this changed. Men were deprived of the quill and women of the needle. The typewriter was an emancipatory tool that liberated the (hand)written word from its male exclusivity.

But ironically enough, the clerks, office helpers, and poet-apprentices of the nineteenth century, who were exclusively male, had invested so much pride in their laboriously trained handwriting as to overlook Remington's [typewriter] innovation for seven years. In came the women. in 1881 marketing strategists recognized the fascination their unmarketable machine [typewriter] held for the battalions of unemployed women. Lillian Sholes, daughter of inventor Christopher Sholes, presumably became the first typewriter in history.

Lillian Sholes? Let's look her up on the net. Picture? Face?

Fuck! Telephone (scares the hell out of me)

G. asking me to work on a ppt presentation. He wants it today. Should start work on that. Well, as long as it's not in my mailbox...

Writing with a writing machine, using keystrokes, automatic spacing and anonymous block letters, bypassed a whole system of education that women

missed out on [*i.e. the handwriting slash clerk education*]). Hence sexual innovation followed technological innovation almost immediately. Without resistance men cleared the field.

Women reversed the handicap of their education, missing out on the clerk education, turning it into a so-called emancipation. But that emancipation went as far as working with a type machine.

The fact that the female clerk could all too easily *degrade* into a mere typewriter made her an asset [*for employers that is*]. From the working class, the middle class and the bourgeoisie, out of ambition, economic hardship or the pure desire for emancipation, emerged millions of secretaries. It was precisely their marginal position in the power system of script that forced women to develop their manual dexterity, which surpassed the prideful handwriting aesthetics of male secretaries in the media system.

13.30 hours. Need to do some work, check e-mail.

But first let's get something to drink (*nice distractional, little walk to coffee corner*): coffee, tea?

What puzzles me is that although with the rise of the personal computer the keyboard began to lose its association with women's work, and boss and secretary have become less gender dependent positions, how comes 99 percent of secretaries is still female?

Despite all new communication devices, executives often have resisted relinquishing their personal assistants, who are a sign of status as well as a source of consistent, customized help.

In other words: executives like showing off they can afford a little house slave for all their tedious, time robbing, nerve wrecking 'little chores'.

Executive secretaries pride themselves on the specialised knowledge and range of skills involved in working with (*for!*) one boss.

Do I? More likely it's crucial to my economic survival.

Right. Work is calling.

Jesus Christ! ... what the fu

I am so... so fully, utterly, entirely, totally fed up with this whole rott

Romantically uncharged



Thursday – home, sick

Slept in today.

After breakfast, and some essential cleaning up, I installed myself on the couch with coffee and cookies. I didn't shower, I hate the constant washing, polishing, making-up of myself. What's the point anyway, I want be seeing anyone today (not in the least G.). I read some magazines and watched two episodes of Ally on the internet. Afterwards I dozed off for an hour and a half. Completely well-deserved *right to laziness*.

In waking (unable to push of a lingering feeling of guilt - *albeit*) I tried to read a bit in one of E.'s books. Complicated, densely written. I'm utterly annoyed with that. *Why would anyone want to write like that? What's the fucking point?* Does the author want to clarify something to me as reader (you know: *his public*), or does he want to be admitted to some 'higher intellectual rank'?

Anyway, I'll give it try, chew my way through it, might just reveal something. If not, I'll throw it in the bin.

Man himself acts through the hand, for the hand is, together with the word, the essential distinction of man. ...The typewriter tears writing from the essential realm of the hand, i.e. the realm of the word. ...mechanical writing provides this 'advantage', that it conceals the handwriting and thereby the character. The typewriter makes everyone look the same.

(according to Heidegger)

What I make of it: the soul of writing - stemming from the direct physical contact between paper and hand, hand and

soul - is lost to us because of standardizations of text through typewriting. Typewriting occurs through mediation of a machine instead of the manual writing of the sensual hand. Writing lost its sensuality:

Mallarme's insight: literature is made up of no more and no less than twenty-six letters. In contrast to the flow of handwriting, we now have discrete elements separated by spaces. Thus, the symbolic of the soul has the status of block letters.

Discrete elements separated by spaces: why can't I stop thinking of G. and myself in reading that sentence?

For mechanized writing to be optimized, one can no longer dream of writing as the expression of individuals, or the trace of individual bodies. The very forms, differences, and frequencies of its letters had to be reduced to formulas. So-called Man is split up into physiology and information technology.

Well, the tools that we use to write, once the typewriter now the laptop *slash* keyboard, might have lost their bodily connection but *have* left its traces on our thoughts: 'our writing tools are also working on our thoughts'.

After a week of typewriting practice, Nietzsche wrote, 'the eyes no longer have to do their work': *écriture automatique* had been invented. Indeed: Nietzsche changed from arguments to aphorisms, from thoughts to puns, from rhetoric to telegram style.

The telegram style of *thinking* is matched by its writing *because* of the interference of the typewriter. But:

‘Language does not store or transmit any meaning whatsoever for stenographers, only the indigestible materiality of the medium it happens to be.’

What is being argued here: that meaning got lost because of the introduction of the typewriter?

But that was the beginning of the 20th century and stenography is a thing of the past. Nowadays secretaries *do* need to read what is being presented to them (so far the improvement). Secretaries need to judge and act upon incoming e-mail information, they scan, read, answer and distribute information. Through them incoming requests are being assessed on importance and urgency and are send on, deeper into the organization. Setting of a chain of actions that somehow and sometime will come back to them - broken up in pieces, ultimately distilled to a shallow snippet of work. Because of the relentlessly incoming mails, secretaries need to act with speed and accuracy. The work is never finished, and the work is always repeating itself, day in day out. The secretary has become a medium *herself*, a transmitter of information, a communications device. The computer is a tool within a tool. Information flows through the secretary’s body: from the machine, to the fingers, to the eye, to the brain, back to the fingers, back to the keyboard, back to the machine. The secretary is a transmitter, a medium using another medium for sending information - information that in the end never truly concerns *her*.

...if we stenographers read little or nothing, do you know why? Because at night we are much too tired and exhausted, because to us the rattling of the typewriters, which we have to listen to for eight hours, keeps ringing in our ears throughout the evening, because each word we hear or read breaks down into letters four hours later. That is why we cannot spend evenings other than at the movies or going for walks with our inevitable friend. Every night going to the movies has to treat the wounds that the non-communicative typewriter inflicts upon secretaries during the day. An entanglement of the imaginary and the symbolic (*whatever that is supposed to mean*).

Drowning myself in sitcom, loving this imaginary world of Ally, Cage and Fish, *originates from inflicted 'working wounds'*?

Sitcom soothes me. It's a longed-for world where only the interpersonal, bodily *slash* love interactions are worth mentioning. Because in the end:

Do we actually ever see Ally working?

The working hours, being romantically uncharged (stiffening the body so to speak) have been cut out. An episode never lasts longer than 50 minutes.

Friday – 17.00 hours, ground floor bar

'I've got to be here, you see. And you don't, well... not per se. That's what I'm talking about. If I don't show up, I'll lose my job.'

'No, I read that somewhere...'

'You know, I've been reading this story about Nietzsche and his typewriter. *What?* Well, doesn't matter where I found it, I'll tell you later. *Yes*, I'm interested in typewriters - you know, me being a secretary, typing and all, well yeah... anyway -No, not so much in Nietzsche, that just came along. Anyway, it's about men dictating women, dictating to women and women being the receivers.

Don't laugh. It's interesting. The typewriter *reversed* the gender of writing and the *material basis* of literature. Because... you know, mechanized writing with a typewriter denies the phallocentrism (*Jesus....*) of the classical pen. Nietzsche's fate - you know him being dependent on a typewriter instead of his own *male* fingers - was not authorship, being '*the male poet*', but feminization. Nietzsche took his place next to the young women using the Remington. *Remington?* A typewriter. Yeah. *When?* I think somewhere in the 1880s when Nietzsche bought himself a typewriter. A (uhm)... writing ball. Strange, hideous thing, look it up sometime. *No!* not now, I'm telling you a story here. After two months Nietzsche's typewriter broke down in Genoa because of humidity - you know the keys getting stuck, the ribbon wet. But Nietzsche didn't surrender, *will to power hey?!...* well anyway. In one of his last letters he asks for a young person who is intelligent enough to work with him. He would even consider a two-year-long marriage for that purpose.

Yeah, I know! (is G. alluding to love here, sitting next to me?). He sabotaged the 'classical' notion of love. He actually thought a young person and a two-year-long marriage could continue his 'failed love affair' with a typewriter. Uhum... '

*My first, my last, my everything
And the answer to all my dreams*

'Do you want another drink?'

'...have they? what time is it anyway? No, I'm not going anywhere.'

*You're my sun, my moon, my guiding star
My kind of wonderful, that's what you are*

'Yeah, well... lots of people probably hate it. Did you know it's John Cages' favorite song?

John Cage? 'The Biscuit', you know partner of law firm Fish&Cage, Ally McBeal. The one who dances to this song and then usually drags his colleagues along. He considers this song a sexual incentive. But maybe you prefer Vonda Shepard?'

'No, just leave it. It's not uhm...'

'Yeah, what happened to Nietzsche?! Well, as I remember, his friend Paul... something, started searching for someone who could help him with his writing, copying, excerpting – you know, all the stuff I normally do. But instead of presenting him with a young man, he came up with a rather notorious young lady: Lou van Salomé. And then, well... the three of them became the most famous ménage à trois in

literary history. So, a derelict typewriter was replaced by a threesome (*his arm's touching mine*).

Uhum, yeah that's true, Nietzsche wasn't a woman's lover, he was actually described, I think, as *the most dangerous enemy of women*.

He fought 'gender wars' not only with Salomé but also with other students. I think Nietzsche said that Love is War (not peace), you know 'a deadly hatred of the sexes'. He fought against emancipation, defining woman as truth and untruth. *Uhum.*'

Fuck, telephone.

(Ah, not mine, his)

'No, off course, I understand. No, no... it's fine. Yeah, sure, was... yeah, nice. No, I'll drink it, don't worry. Hahahaaa. Yeah, see you... Monday' (*small kiss on cheek*)

You're my reality, yet I'm lost in a dream

You're the first, the last, my everything

'Could you turn that off, Glenn? Yeah... thanks.'

§

22.30 hours, home bed little drunk, reading

The typewriter (woman and machine) turns a poetic and erotically charged flow of speech - the 'Sir, I love you!' - into eleven letters, four empty spaces, and two punctuations marks, all of which comes with a price.

Exactly, that's what I say. Or should have said. Or not

Let's not forget (*did I?*) that Nietzsche was almost blind and could neither read nor write, if only with a machine or a secretary. Following the double loss of his writing ball and his Salomé, Nietzsche was on the lookout for secretaries into whose ears he could insert Dionysian words. ...he 'needed just somebody to whom he could dictate the text.' ...it is Nietzsche's most daring experimental setup to occupy the place of such a god. If God is dead, nothing is there to prevent the invention of gods. Nietzsche identifies with Dionysus, the master of media.

Maybe read this tomorrow, getting a bit freaky

Well, just conti

...Ariadne's composed lament arises out of complete darkness or blindness. She speaks about and to a 'veiled' god that tortures her body, following all the rules of mnemotechnology or memory inscription described in Genealogy. *Uhm...* A Dionysus that occupies the ear of his victims and inserts smart words, turns into a poet or dictator in all senses of the word. He dictates to his slave or secretary to take down his dictation.
I know 'I am your labyrinth', Dionysus said to the tortured Ariadne No, I don't

Nietzsche and his secretaries, no matter how forgotten, have introduced a prototype into the world. Word processing these days is the business

of couples who write (*instead of sleep*) with one another. And if, on occasion they do both, they certainly don't experience romantic love.

Another desk



Monday – morning, office, desk

Fuck! Telephone

Boss asking me to type out a report of his talks with the IoD. He wants it today. Hope I can read his scribbles. Should start work on that. Well, as long as it's not on my desk... And as long as dearest colleague is in meeting (all morning!), I have the place to myself. Lovely.

Was thinking of what E. said over the weekend in our Saturday-morning-deli-meet-up with coffees and bagels. Thinking on that (the deli that is): E.'s probably sitting there right now whilst me sitting here next to the hideous office plant (*artists... lucky bastards*). Anyway, she said something about secretaries turning into writers themselves.

Many novels written by recent female writers are endless feedback loops making secretaries into writers. Gertrude Stein became an author after working in an office at Harvard; Christa Anita Brück (*who...?*) wrote an autobiography '*Destinies behind typewriters*', without mention of love, only the desire to help those 'women who are not interested in motherhood' to have a breakthrough as women writers. Up until Hélène Cixous, women will write that only writing makes women into women.

Right.

11.45 hours. Let's write that report.

Board of Directors Meeting – September 6th 2016

Meeting was called to order at 9.00 a.m. at the management office meeting room. Quorum was established.

Attendees Present

John C. McCann, President
Laverne K. Woods, Vice-President
George Dolan, Head of directors
Sally F. Jameson, Association Manager
Nancy Paris, Secretary

Absent

William G. Morris, member, excused

1. The secretary would like to state

that from now on she will not only mediate messages but also produce them. She will bypass cultural expectations about the behaviour of female employee's paralleling the ones about communication devices: she will from now on be an *active host* within the drama played out by others.

2. The secretary would like to state

that the board is in definite need of 'another desk', the decisive one, the secretarial one, equipped with typewriter and paper to convert their scribbles into typewritten materials because in the end a Pallas named *Nancy Paris* solves all problems of writing in transforming scratched ideas via transcription into art. Under the conditions of high technology, Pallas, the goddess of art, is a secretary.

3. The secretary would like to state

that from here on she will not be dictated (to) or be bypasses by any primary storyline. Independent of main characters, she will develop a complex back-story of her own. *Nancy Paris* the supporting character will become a main character, in her own spin-off.

4. The secretary would like to state

George, I love you. That is fourteen letters, three empty spaces, and one punctuation mark; all of which comes with a price.

Meeting adjourned at 9.15 a.m

Monday – afternoon, office, elevator

16.00 hours. After a (...) moment in restroom (*feeling empty*), I walk in and see boss standing next to my desk. Upon seeing me he falls silent, just as dearest colleague.

‘Could you please, walk with me to my office?’

‘Nancy.’

(*Fuck!*)

I was calm, I was polite, I managed to project the proper combination of helpfulness and bafflement. That was something of a triumph for me. Normally, I don’t have much talent for deception, I’ve rarely fooled anyone about anything. That’s what I said to him - not that he believed me.

It wasn’t so much what he said, as how he looked, the way he dressed for his (pitied) role with such perfection: the impeccable suit, the well-cut hair, the smell of everyday showers, the Waterman pen in his hands, his watch, adorning his wrist like a proclamation of self-confidence. All this was strangely comforting to me, and I understand how this sense of unreality worked to my advantage. It allowed me to think of myself as an actor as well, and because I had become someone else, I suddenly had the right to deceive them, to lie without the slightest twinge of conscience.

So, that’s it. Better get the proverbial cardboard box out of the storage.

In returning, I see colleague in shock, yet at same time too embarrassed to say *anything*. Mouth hanging. Anyway, decided to take some stuff with me, although nothing much

here I can call my own. I box the office plant, some books, the stapler (could come in handy), a stag of writing paper (ditto), some post-its, the cookie jar. With that I probably cross a line for (moron-)colleague. She stirs a bit, moans. Sure, whenever it comes to food, the mother-hen springs back to life, safeguarding her eggs. I'll give her some slack and in walking up to her I open the jar (as if in handing her a cookie) and turn it upside down to spoil the contents on her keyboard. Then I walk out, taking the jar with me.

In the corridor, I hear her screaming '*Can't you just behave yourself?*' (and some other lovely comments). I yell back:

NO! I CAN'T. I CAN'T BEHAVE MYSELF, YOU FAT FUCKING FIG.

Some heads in the bypassed offices turn.

At the end of the corridor I see G. standing in the doorway of his office. I forgot about him in the spur of the moment. I'm light-struck by the prospect of never seeing him again. I walk up to him, he looks me in the eye and says:

- Will you be OK?
- Sure, I'll be fine (*no, off course I won't*).
- Shall I give you a hand? walk you to the elevator?
- No, I'm fine. It's not much.

He checks the box, looks a bit startled, *albeit* amused. He moves in close and whispers in my ear:

- By the way, loved the very precise and well written report.
- Thank you very much, Mr. G. I appreciate it.
- Shall we meet at five? Bar?
- Sure.

Well, that never happened off course. I never saw G. in that hallway, or ever again.

I took the elevator all the way down to reception.

Cabin the woods



January

The fire was brutal. It enlightened the entire cabin, setting it in an orange glow, the light of sunset in morning chill. Raging and raving, the cabin was filled with the sounds of fury and destruction, burning up the efforts and vigour of (once) growth and exuberance. In all its blazing warmth, it nonetheless was insufficient in dispelling the fierce and stinging cold, attacking the cabin in the long stretches of night and darkness. Everything seemed inert, comatose in frost and gloom. I was alone now. I was the only player left, staged in an unchanging décor of glacial standstill. No more cameo appearances. No supporting character. Just me. There was snow, but no longer soft and flaky like duvets, but hard as glass. I was set in a crystalized scene of crispness and transparency. Cold, water, glass.

I thought of Sachs: *'...he always worked with tremendous discipline and fervour, sometimes holing up for weeks at a stretch in order to complete a project.'*

After chopping wood all morning (defrosting the mind and body), I decided upon doing the exact same: I was set upon completing a project. In order to do so, I organised myself - a task which I am (supposedly) good at, being a former secretary after all. I put all written and collected material in neat little bundles. Sky-scraping the writing table, the white stacks represented divers categorisations: Utmost Important, Important, Non-Important, within that subcategories of various themes: Work, Art, Conditions, Myths. Within that, sub-subcategories of: Competition, Precarity, Autonomy and Authenticity. I worked as feverishly as ever.

At nights, close to the fire, I thought of my conditions, the time and solitude at hand. I now, since long, had plenty of both. It gave me the opportunity to do what I was doing right here and right now: think and write. Just *and only* because I was in a position that enabled me to do so in the first place - in having forsaken the battlefields of

(secretarial) work and subjugation - I was able to think of something else. I now often thought of Linda Tirado. Being the paradigm of the working poor, in working two or more jobs and still not able to cope, she was in the forefront of my mind. Tirado wrote a book about all the hardships and misconceptions regarding the poorest of the poor: the encountered roughness and impoliteness, the incomprehension and stupidity, igniting her to write, to reply with fury and (yet) irony in order to set things straight. In all her honesty Tirado makes clear that all the answers to 'Why do poor people do things that seem so self-destructive' simply relate back to a lack of money. Minimum wage and no benefits results in long shifts and constant commuting, which results in fast food consumption being the only viable option. Having no time to plan ahead and save money, results in a desire to have children now since there will never be a better time. Tirado makes no apologies for being a smoker, stating that smoking helps reduce hunger and relieves stress from working exhausting jobs.

In comparison, the writer's life is a life of utter luxury. No wonder Tirado stated that her life as a writer (after the success of her novel) was 'the *easiest thing* she had ever done'. This not only struck me, it made me cry. The endless working hours, alienating, self-denying, time-consuming and un-motivational, *were* the hardest thing to be done – undeniable and unrepairable by any (self-) delusional 'working virtue'.

Tirado finally ended up in a position that allowed her to set her own conditions, enabling her to live a life of self-determination.

In conditions of dependency (on work and money) anyone can be made a prey to institutions of welfare, employment and of market: a prey to the array of low paying jobs, meaning in the end *more* working hours (to secure sufficient income) and leaving you a loser in both fields: of money and

time. Working more than you want, earning less than you need.

In such a scenario, the artist's position seems quite a favourable one, invested as it is (or seems) with autonomy and self-determination. An utter position of luxury with enough time at hand to do whatever you want under own given conditions.

But as always, this is just half the truth. After all the investigating - first together and now alone - I (finally) came to different conclusions. The density of the material in front of me, the sky-scraping stacks of organised material on the writing table, nonetheless dared me. The 'writing it all down as clearly as possible', had become an audacious undertaking strewn with contradictions, (deliberate) obscurities and confusions. It made me postpone the issues at stake over and over again, willingly distracting myself at any given moment: going to the loo, getting a coffee or tea, making a snack, defrosting the water tank, chopping wood for the stove, warming my feet, doing a nap (*once I dreamed of spring and working in the garden, which reminded me – in waking up - of Voltaire: Il faut cultiver notre jardin*).

Then finally I started.

Introduction

Art (...) *Work* deals with notions of art and work and the divergent positions of artist and worker. It shows (in a performative way) the different workings and subjectivities of both artist - someone who creates artworks, in general a practitioner in the visual arts and worker - someone with a daily, money-earning job. It does so by showing their different, formative contexts and settings: Desk and Studio. The worker behind his desk and the artist in his studio are exemplifications of different roles and identities shaped by a complex of societal (mainly capitalist) constructions, myths and beliefs. The division of the individual in a worker

or an artist, is a capitalist, Fordist way of assigning the individual its pre-described role and position within society. Being a worker meaning in general being subjugated to time and place regimes, whereas the artist - in contrast - is freed from these contraptions by being his own boss. Since western society has become post-Fordist or neoliberal in its workings and outset, these strictly 'branded' roles and positions are being obscured and cross-faded: neoliberal regimes have placed us under the dictum of 'being one's own boss'. The artist in being the epitome of this idea of self-reliance, has served neoliberalism in exemplifying this notion to us *all*. Art has become the example for the worker to become an 'entrepreneur', to become free and autonomous in making his or her own decisions, free in dealing with his own 'personal management' as far as income and (in)security is concerned.

This thesis however

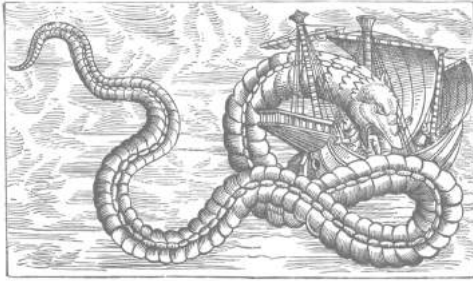
§

Snow has melted. After months of hiding, tracks have become visible again. Distinct, slippery paths crisscross the forest. New settings come in sight. New players as well.

I need to leave the cabin, money has run out. Maybe I could be 'typing for dollars'. Under whatever condition, in whatever form. All in all, I have found this secret passageway that runs straight from my head to the tip of my fingers. I'll use it, I'll put it to service.

References

Cabin in the woods



**Leviathan,
Sea Monster**
Great Norwegian
Sea-Serpent in the
Sea of Darkness, by
Olaus Magnus, from:
History of the
Northern Peoples,
1555

November

Morning mist, we saw nobody. We were writing on the script. As ever. The silence was deep. Everything was silent and as ever we struggled to find the right words. We lost ourselves in sidetracks and loopholes, fulfilling us both with fear and joy. We roamed our thoughts, but we, as ever, always found ourselves back at a long-lost beginning. There were moments we felt trapped in a no-man's-land between feeling and articulation. No matter how hard we tried to express ourselves, we rarely came up with more than a confused stammer. ¹

Still. We continued. Sometimes we would read the words we had found so far. Then our voices reverberated in the cabin, a strange and rare occasion. At nights, after long days of meandering and caverning, we stared into the flames. We warmed our bodies, rigid from hours of silent study. Then, finally, we dozed off in all-embracing sleeps. The next morning, we put ourselves back at our desks and started writing again.

One of us wrote:

topic

Leviathan was published in 1992. The novel follows the life and crimes of Benjamin Sachs, a writer who decides to take action over words to deliver his message to the world. The novel captures an extreme

1. **Leviathan**, Paul Auster, p.49

example of the resulting despair of a writer in a postmodern age in which texts have become empty husks, no longer conveying power and meaning. 2

2. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leviathan_\(Austrian_novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leviathan_(Austrian_novel))

Leviathan could be our basic material, we could use it to enlighten the problematics at hand. If we were dealing with this schism between work and art, then why not insert the topic of *Leviathan* and the personal struggles of Sachs? Both enlightening something that is relevant: Sachs struggling with the autonomous position of the writer, exposing him to feelings of 'irrelevance' and the ultimate question: 'what is the impact of the writer on the bigger (under)currents of society and politics?' And then Leviathan, not only as the sea monster it supposedly is, but foremost as the topic of the State and its societal structure and legitimate government. Shouldn't these be our topics: the supposed immanent clashes between writing (or in general the arts) and the working realities of daily life? Between the writer (or artist) having meaning or power or being an 'empty husk'?

The other wrote:

Should we reveal what this might entail in this 'revealing script' of ours? *Should* it be about commitment and autonomy?

The other wrote:

Yes. We should be writing about the writer's position and his uncertain impact. In its trail laying bare the frameworks of a system of belief, in art's so-called *mythical capacities*. Let's write about the 'myth of the artist' *and* the supposed reality check by the avant-garde. Speaking of which: on a more abstract level this seems to be dealing with the classical clash between ideal and reality - the desired versus the actualities of daily life.

The other wrote:

Yes, but that's the same ritual dance performed over and over again: reality wanting to outdo the ideal and the ideal wanting to outdo reality; the one wanting to show the naivety of the other and the truth of the self (and vice versa). But that's actually not the real problem - being too big an issue to handle anyway.

(do you want some more wine?)

Benjamin Sachs, our main character for the script, deals with the dead-end of writing by putting down his pen and deciding to take action over words. In the end (after some traumatizing events in his personal life) becoming a bomber of Statues of Liberty throughout the US. Peter Aaron, Sachs's best friend and 'another struggling novelist', wrote:

'After the success of his first novel, he

[Sachs] immediately started to write another, but once he was a hundred pages into it, he tore up the manuscript and burned it. Inventing stories was a sham, he said, and just like that he decided to give up fiction writing.’ 3

Didn’t Sachs take the wrong turn?

The other wrote:

Sachs’s turnaround in thinking and acting is something we need to ponder, as it actualises, dramatizes, radicalises even, our own efforts of writing, in writing this script.

(yes, please, I’d like some more)

The other wrote:

Should we doubt our own writerly efforts? Is that what

The other wrote:

Yes. Can we still write?

The other wrote:

We wrote somewhere: *‘The embracing of fiction leads to a radicalising of understanding’.* 4 Isn’t it all about understanding the issues at hand and conveying them in an engaged or ‘appropriate’ manner? Fiction could reveal something that other attempts couldn’t. Didn’t Sachs take the wrong turn, turning away from fiction?

3. **Auster**, p.48

4. **Ik besta, echt waar**, A. van Veldhuizen en D. van Weelden, De Gids, p.5

Despite given circumstances and surroundings (dark spine woods and the commencements of winter with its light sprinkles of snow), we still heard birds. Mornings and evenings, they twittered through the spruces, infecting us with the airy feelings of spring. Yet, we never saw them, no blackbirds, robins, chickadees or even crows. It left us mesmerized, confused, in the limbo lands of a somewhat off-season. The same state as our minds were in, wheeling in an in-between of indecisiveness and doubt. We wanted to write on the workings of work, and the workings of art, but were drowned in an ever-expanding swamp of preconceptions, struggles, and make beliefs. We were troubled by notions of autonomy and engagement, subjugation and precarity. Our writing hours now matched our former working hours (the 'eight f... hours a day'). We read, searched, wrote at a relentless pace, hour after hour. We even made a map once, trying to short cut time and effort. It showed all the points of interest and their interconnected or diverging lines. In the end, it showed us more than we could handle, the immensity dared us. We gave it up and threw it in the flames.

§

One of us wrote:

(could you stir up the fire? it's getting cold)

Always this questioning of the position of the artist and its desired and at the same time resented place of autonomy within society: the artist, retreated in his own bubble of creation, at the other end of society, giving comments but not actively participating. Does the artist care about us and *slash* or do we care about him?

The other wrote:

The autonomy of the artist, his supposedly free position (as time and conditions are concerned), feels as the promised land for anyone working under precarious conditions: eight hours a day, five days a week in the hope of gaining a living. Maybe the autonomy of the arts (of writing) is something to be cherished as 'a last resort'. Maybe the arts (like most 'useless', non-profitable affairs) are under attack by given economic and political regimes – in danger of being ruled and governed under same (subjectivating) conditions.

(I'll chop some wood)

The other wrote:

Apparently, there's a contradiction between the free position of the artist, and the need for a societal responsibility or usefulness. Not only by society at large but also by the artist himself, struggling with the marginal position he is placed in. Motives for this longing for 'societal responsibility' are

nonetheless completely different for both: the artist desires impact, society at large wants (economic) profit and subjugation to the prevalent context of the workfare state.

(that will take too long, throw in what we have left)

The other wrote:

Well, maybe envy plays its part: a position of autonomy that is not given to the masses, is not conceded to the minority. This envying of positions is symptomatic of discontent. It shows that the worker (being in majority), is discontented with his own position, being ruled by time and place regimes. But it also shows that the position of the artist should be scrutinized: why is the artist placed at the brim of society (sparking of this longing for impact), why is he being 'front-lined' since the ages of Romanticism?

(will do, but still we need to chop)

The other wrote:

The myths surrounding the artist since the late 18th century (the ages of Romanticism) might actually be indicating a societal benefit or interest. Because if the artist is unsatisfied with his own marginal position (working alone in his studio), then he could have taken (or maybe ought to have taken) a different course. For instance, in

cancelling himself - or even the arts in general - out. But in not having done so... what interest could there be: what function does the mythical discourse on artists and art perform?

(later. first warmth)

The other wrote:

Since the 19th century the discipline of art history, stemming from Romanticism, has built a common picture of artistry as a purely subjective truth, a picture from which all traces of social conflict and socio-economic imperatives have been carefully erased. The artists' life was and is represented as an uninterrupted string of signifiers of artistness, a seamless unity of life and work, production and personality 5 (*off course being a complete travesty*). It fed the notion of the arts as an autonomous domain with its own rules - being considered a liberation by the Romantics but an expulsion (from daily life) by the Modernists. 6

5. **De mythe van het kunstenaarschap**, Camiel van Winkel, p.72
6. Idem, p.25

The other wrote:

So, the art historians and the romantics proclaimed the autonomy of the arts, whereas the modernists (or avant-garde) issued the absorption of the arts (within daily life). Still, this historical exposé does not explain what *the interests in maintaining* the artistic myths are (regardless of being spurred on by

the romantics or detested by the modernists). Could we say that the artist is *content with his own mythical conditions* because they suite his purposes (*which ones exactly*)? And could we say that the worker is, in contrast, justly *discontent with his own conditioning conditions*? And from this discontent is being impelled to long for different circumstances, like the ones of the artist?

Does the worker long for conditions that are in the end mythical (*and delusional*)?

(short-sightedness. we need to sustain the warmth, considering given circumstances)

The other wrote:

Maybe we are trapped in a no-man's-land between reality and myths. Leaving us with the awkward question of sustaining or exposing the myths at hand. Sustaining the myth would still grant us the 'artistic option' (yet delusional), exposing the myth would leave us bare handed.

(priorities. warmth is warmth. at least for now)

The other wrote:

Yes, we're in between reality and myths, between the daily realities of work and the myths of the arts. But instead of leaving us with the awkward option of choosing (the 'or-or' situation), maybe we should postpone an answer and

investigate the positions at hand.
Because so far, we have hardly come up
with more than a confused stammer.

The other wrote:

(mist thick as ever)

The other wrote:

(let's make fire)

Studio

Cardboard Cutouts
Portrait in absentia



Vase with Dragon,
hand painted
Jingdezhen porcelain
Ming Dynasty, Yongle
period, 15th century

off course being completely dismissed. I have a lot of experience in non-succeeding. Maybe I should capitalize on that.

This morning I remembered the book I read as an adolescent (another incident of *a-sides* that just keep on distracting me): *The Coming of the Fairies* by Arthur Conan Doyle. ⁷ Dealing with the (in)famous photographs of fairies taken by two Scottish girls at the beginning of the 20st century, it is an illustration to the question of images being genuine or not. The pictures came to the attention of Conan Doyle to illustrate an article on fairies he'd been commissioned to write for the Christmas edition of *The Strand Magazine* in 1920. Doyle, being a spiritualist, was enthusiastic about the photographs, and interpreted them as clear and visible evidence of psychic phenomena. Public reaction was mixed, some accepted the images as genuine, others believed them to be faked. ⁸

I remember two things (among others): I was fond of the detective style of writing, the exiting build-up of the story and maybe even therefore being convinced that elves *did* exist (growing up in the vicinity of woods must have contributed to this). But most important I remember the conversations on the topic with my best friend in fifth year of high school. We discussed the technique of the camera: how could the photographs *not* be true (e.g. being a true representation of reality with elves and all) given the fact that the

7. **The Coming of the Fairies**,
Sir Arthur
Conan Doyle,
1921

8. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cottlingley_Fairies

camera was such an objective device. The mind boggling thing was that other people, e.g. the girl's relatives *and* Doyle, could not see the elves. In going to the spot where the elves were photographed, the girls saw them flying and playing around but the others didn't. How then could the camera register these events if they were not to be seen by the blind eye? Could the camera see something that wasn't there? Or, in reverse: could the camera see things how they *really* were and were we as spectators the visually impaired? Were we unable to see reality as it is, was there a veil that needed to be shed? The camera couldn't lie.

All this made me and the boyfriend conclude that the elves *must* have been there, that they must exist. This conviction being helped by the 'extensive research' done by Conan Doyle on the photographs; they were scrutinized by well-known photographers and chemists of the time and all of them concluded that the photographs were not forged or tampered with.

§

Years later I read on the internet (which had not been there in the mid-eighties):

In the early 1980s the two Scottish girls, Elsie and Frances, admitted that the photographs were faked, using cardboard cutouts of fairies copied from a popular children's book of the time. Frances nonetheless

maintained that the fifth and final photograph was genuine. In a 1985 interview on Yorkshire Television Elsie said that she and Frances were too embarrassed to admit the truth after fooling Doyle, the author of Sherlock Holmes: *'Two village kids and a brilliant man like Conan Doyle – well, we could only keep quiet.'* In the same interview Frances said: *'I never even thought of it as being a fraud – it was just Elsie and I having a bit of fun and I can't understand to this day why they were taken in – they wanted to be taken in.'*

9

9. Ibidem
(Wikipedia)

So, in the end the camera *did* see it right, it registered what was actually there, the only thing being: it was faked, faked reality.

What we have here is a strange loop of an illusion (*the fairies*) being made physical (*the cardboard cutouts*), being recorded by a machine (*the camera*) that supposedly shows reality. The girls made a-make-believe (an improvised scene of fairy-puppets in wooded surroundings), but were flustered by all the attention given to it and as a result kept quiet. They were overwhelmed and numbed by the authority of one person (Conan Doyle), who saw something he *wanted to believe* because it suited his purposes.

Concluding: a reality, although a reality based on make-belief, came into being based on the beliefs of one person. That makes make-believe upon make-believe.

George came in. He wanted to discuss my progress on the latest objects, two Ming vases and a Dutch 17th century painting. He was satisfied with the vases, but the painting still lacked in detail and color. We checked the pictures on the computer - he sitting close to me. Now and then our fingers touched as we both alternately used the keyboard, or slightly stroked the mousepad (we decided upon meeting at five).

I continued working on the painting, adjusting lights and replacing reflectors, all to get the right balance between clarity and depth. The painting was set on its easel, silent as ever.

Thinking on faked realities I was mesmerized by the doubling of it all. I myself was playing a double game here: taking pictures of pictures, that in themselves supposedly reflect real life situations. In fact (*in reality*) they were *all* fictionalized realities, the pictures and the pictures of the pictures; all captured by the camera's lens to be on view in catalogues and internet, showing the museum's collections to a broader audience - in order to lure them to the idea of arts' (*and* the museums) authenticity, to enhance the museums role as an institution of esteemed cultural importance.

Am I building a reality here that needs to be believed in because of museum policies? Do we want to be taken in, because it so well suits our purposes?

At five I met up with George. We seated ourselves in the furthest corner of our favorite bar, enjoying the comfort of being tucked away in shadows and anonymity. Once again we were wound up in a conversation that comes to life when people are flirting with each other, a series of mad elliptical exchanges of riddles and innuendos. The trick was to say nothing about oneself in as elegant a manner as possible. I was, as always, intrigued by his amused and ironic smile, and had no objection to being led into a little game of cat and mouse. 10 George being Head of Design, and so in museum service, rattled on about being turned into a functionary, his independence being compromised by given compensations; the museums role in maintaining the mechanisms of the system of belief through which all artists are being kept hostage in a bubble of myth. I said that we wer always already serving. Studio practices might conceal this by separating production from the interests it meets in the long run. But in the end, we serve and I was happy to serve him and ready to believe in our myths as long as - I couldn't hear myself any longer, my words being drowned in music: *Vienna by Ultravox*. I squeezed George, somewhere in a functional and mythical part.

10. **Auster**, p.112

Late last night (I couldn't sleep) I thought of the 17th century painting residing in the studio and decided to look up the story of the painter, Emanuel de Witte. I was struck by the unexpected drama:

Following the arrest of his second wife and child (both being arrested for theft from a neighbor), Emanuel de Witte was forced to indenture himself to the Amsterdam notary and art dealer Joris de Wijs, surrendering all his work in exchange for room, board and 800 guilders annually. De Witte broke the contract, was sued by the dealer, and forced to indenture himself further as a result. Several patrons provided de Witte with support, but these relations did not work out well, for he tended to shout at his clients and at people watching him at work in churches. Records tell of his gambling habit and a fight with Gerard de Lairese. Around 1688 he moved in with Hendrick van Streeck, in exchange for training him as a painter of church interiors. According to Arnold Houbraken, after an argument about the rent, de Witte hanged himself from a canal bridge in 1692. The rope broke and de Witte drowned. Because the canal froze that night, his corpse was not found until eleven weeks later. 11

§

Next morning I was wary of entering the studio, knowing that De Witte's painting was right here, standing on its easel, being exposed to the camera and its inescapable lights - in full-fledged, naked sight.

Upon entering I cautiously walked over to the painting and examined it; gentle,

11. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emanuel_de_Witte

gingerly. I couldn't find any sign, anything. I felt utterly impaired, both in grasping the whole notion of De Witte's hands once painting this image, his hands brushing the strokes of paint in what finally became a bourgeois interior with a woman sitting behind a virginal, specks of light leaving their traces on the checkered floor, a bed in the corner. But most of all, what impaired me the most, was the prospect of photographing the painting. How was I to register something that was so unportrayable in all its historical layers and implications? I could only think of it as a portrait in absentia, an outline drawn around an empty space.

De Witte's excellent sense of composition combined with his use of light created atmospheres which seem honest and real. His theme may have been light and how it creates live-able space. 12

12. Ibidem
(Wikipedia)

'Live-able space', the unbearable irony of it all.

I concentrated on some other objects. A gun, a set of 18th century gloves and a small still-life painting.

In the afternoon, I returned to the painting. I decided to leave my inhibitions and started working on the lights and reflectors once again. I took comfort in the idea of making an image, nothing more, nothing less. For all it mattered: De Witte himself played tricks on reality, he occasionally combined aspects of different churches to depict his *ideal*

interior, populating it with the occasional dog. In this vein, I tried to photograph the painting, *ideally*.

I worked on it for the rest of the afternoon. At five I left the studio.

Services to Art



Mircea Cirtog
Porcelain Gun

The gun needed sharpening. It still lacked a certain crispness, some solid distinction. In looking at it closely, zooming in as far as I could, I saw the studio lights reflected on its shiny surfaces. Small white squares. I put layer on layer on the photo, covering it with the delusional gleam of reality.

(particularly brutal for a gun once deployed in action - killing another human being).

I was working at home, in my own studio; obviously not as grand as the museums, but still workable, comforting. I had a stack of work in front of me. All the shootings of the last couple of days needed to be reviewed, edited and prepared for publication on the museums website. I worked all morning, relentlessly. At lunchtime, I decided to go to the deli next door for some distraction. After ordering (cappuccino, pastrami bagel), I took out my notebook to write down some lingering thoughts. The discussion with George last night had made an impact, it triggered something that needed clarification. In writing it down I hoped to explicate some of its uncertainties.

The museum and the artworks it contains, are more profane than the museum visitor realizes; he or she sees artworks as isolated from practical life. Museum staff, on the contrary, hardly ever experiences this sacralised way of contemplating art works. They regulate temperature and humidity levels in museum spaces, they restore artworks

and remove dust and dirt - the perspective of the cleaning lady, so to speak. The technology of conservation, restoration, and exhibition is a profane technology, even if it produces objects of aesthetic contemplation. 13

Normally this profane side is shielded off from public view by museum walls. There have been avant-garde movements trying to reveal the factual, material and profane dimensions of art, but they never fully succeeded in their quest for 'the real'. The material side of art was permanently re-aestheticized, it was put under the standard conditions of art representation. The same can be said of Institutional Critique, also trying to thematise the profane sides of the art *institution*. But also here, Institutional Critique was institutionalized. 14

13. **The Truth of Art**, Boris Groys, p.4

14. *Idem*, p.6

§

Being a photographer to the museum I provide a service that is as much profane (e.g. practical and paid for) as it is sacralising - enhancing notions of authenticity by photographing artefacts in an optimized manner; showing their splendour (regardless of their factualness) to the fullest. Lights are being regulated, softened or sharpened, all in all to create a hyper-reality of singularity and legitimacy.

My role as photographer is to document art. Art documentation refers to art but is not (the) art (object) itself. Artworks can be emotionally and physically experienced in a setting that is explicitly

created for them. Art documentation on the other hand refers to art objects that are placed *out of context*, or more accurately: out of the *supposed* context, that of the physical museum. You could, indeed, argue that the museum is just as well a surrogate, a fiction, an artificial setting. What we have here is a doubling of missing contexts. The documentation is a surrogate for the real, the museum a replacement for daily life, fictionalizing its status as 'temple of art'. The art objects, the vases, paintings and guns, used to be part of daily life; but in documentation neither daily life, nor the museum is commemorated. The objects are suspended in limbo.

Maybe this situation has changed in recent years due to the internet. Artworks (as art documentation) are shown on the internet in the context of (a whole lot of) other information. They are both integrated in one and the same internet space, which is potentially accessible to all. The artworks in this setting become 'real and profane' because the information about art is used and treated in the same way as information about all 'other things in the world'. 15

15. Ibidem

Art works in the guise of art documentation can now be *reformatted, rewritten, extended, shortened*. They can be used and worked upon just as any other piece of information. You could even say that the internet has given art documentation its legitimate place. 16

16. Idem, p.7

By displaying their collections online, art institutions have begun to use the

internet as a primary space for *self-representation*. Digital depositories of art images are much more compact and much cheaper to maintain than the museum itself, moreover museums are now able to present parts of their collections that were usually kept in storage. 17

17. Ibidem

And this is where my part as a photographer comes in. I provide the museum *services of self-representation*. This profane part of the servicing - being the museums photographer - has however been guarded of, it is being kept a secret. I'm almost like the secretary, that prototype and apex of service, the one being able to keep a secret. The secretary and the photographer are both confidants *and* spokespersons to 'powerful figures' - in my case: an institution of esteemed cultural importance. *The product* that my service provides, the (online) photograph, is nonetheless very clear in its message: enhancing the museums role as a legitimate place of art's high culture.

I, the photographer provide a service that is invisible, my name is never mentioned, *I am the confidant*. My product, the photo, provides a service in enhancing the museums own reputation and status as temple of the arts; it is not a work in itself, *it is the spokesperson*.

The museum is denying its profanities but proclaiming its legitimacy.

I left at 3 p.m. When I entered the studio, I saw the gun save-screened on my

computer, turning around its axis over and over again.

§

We met at Lin Fa. I had dressed up for the occasion, wearing my corporate looking, yet very female designer suit; being the deepest of blue it suited my hair but contrasted my skin. Night sky with chestnut and a touch of cream. Contradictions are the best aphrodisiac. Upon entering (George was seated at the window table, a beer in hand) I saw a shimmer of timidity crossing his face, a veil pulled up and immediately let down again. It had an empowering effect on me, realizing once again that male-female relations are the most subtle yet vicious of battlefields.

I was set on talking my way through the evening. I wanted to sharp my thoughts on that other battlefield occupying my brain: that of the arts. Being unsuccessful as an artist - having relentlessly tried to be part of the inner circles of the art world - I was haunted by the narcissistically gratifying idea of professional recognition. 18

I paraphrased Fraser:

I would have liked to been invited to participate in Documenta IX because the invitation would have constituted a moment of professional recognition that I would have found narcissistically stabilizing. It would have confirmed my identity with an image of that which I should hope to become.

18. **Museum Highlights,**
Andrea Fraser,
p.149

Art making is a profession of social fantasy. The representative function of art as a class culture, is partly based on the enormity of the aspirations fostered by producers. Those aspirations represent freedom from necessity for one dominant class fraction, individualism for another, entrepreneurial spirit for another, intellectual autonomy and integrity of conscience for another. 19

19. Idem, p.150

George was quite uncompetitive. He was writing a novel but would, nonetheless, never introduce himself as a writer. He rarely talked about himself in the way other writers do, and he had little or no interest in pursuing what people refer to as a 'literary career'. Once he stated that inventing stories was a sham and being a hundred pages into writing his second novel, he tore up the manuscript and burned it. 20 That was a kind of rigor that puzzled me, both as it excited me.

20. Auster, p.48

His un-competitiveness made it hard for me to convince him, being (off course) the intention of it all: accumulating authority, legitimacy, recognition. I told him this, while slicing up my noodles (as always, I was unable to handle chopsticks). He looked at my 'brutal slashing of a delicate dish'. I said that at the deepest level there is the simple certainty that my professional status as an artist depends on my ability to influence others, that is, the degree to which my work or my position becomes a model, a kind of norm. 21 The art world is after all a world of competitive

21. Fraser, p.42

struggles, more even so than the corporate world. Positions are scarce, money is lacking and there is no ideological coherence as far as the judging of art is concerned. Every judgement becomes a referendum, maybe not on the artwork itself, but on the dominance and the authority of the judge, whose 'declarations' or dictums must be defended to actually conceal the fundamental arbitrariness of 'it's art when I say it's art'. 22

22. Idem, p.44

This being an incentive for struggle among artists, curators and gallerists, it compels them to maintain their professional status in comparison to their colleagues, in a never ending and self-strengthening loop. The cynical version of this kind of analysis is that the artistic field is no different from any other market in luxury goods. They all serve social competition for status and prestige. 23

23. Idem, p.158

George said this was art under social scrutiny. The conditions that are revealed, the unseeable and unsayable in that social universe (although felt by most artists) are hardly ever explicated. They are accepted as being part of the conditions under which the art world operates. Explicating these reasons would reveal the social, economic and symbolic capital that is actually the true basis for artistic legitimacy. It would reveal the principles upon which one's success actually depends: the safeguarding of the investments made in the production of belief in the value of a given position, 24 because the status of our artistic activity

24. Idem, p.42

depends on the belief in *The Artist and his Artwork*, both concocted up in self-declared autonomy: the artist in his studio. The value of the artist and his artwork depends upon its rarity, 'the sacrosanct mysteries of the cult of the artwork', 25 and so all art professionals have an interest in maintaining, not to say, *increasing* their monopoly on certain (or so-called) competences. 26 Leaving us to only produce prestige value, symbolic value, according to a principle of autonomy, which in the end bars us from pursuing the production of specific 'social use value'. 27 The artist making artworks in isolation, recreating myths of autonomy, the gallerist buying and selling, not only artworks but foremost myths -enhancing in that same instance the status of the artist - art being a self-fulfilling prophecy. Art making is a profession of social fantasy. 28 Yes, indeed.

According to Pierre Bourdieu, the artistic field can only be understood as 'the product or prize of a permanent conflict': as a field of forces that is always also a field of struggles. Struggles to determine the boundaries and membership in the field, struggles to define the form of capital according to which positions within it will be hierarchized, and struggles to determine the distribution of this form of capital. All variants of fundamentally competitive struggles among members to maintain or improve their positions relative to other producers. 29

In this protecting of the social conditions of the artistic field - and who wouldn't do

25. **Foreword Pierre Bourdieu**, Museum Highlights, p. XIII

26. **Fraser**, p.41

27. **Idem**, p.160

28. **Idem**, p.150

29. **Idem**, p.42

that as long as it's one of insecurity, precarity and struggle, of permanent conflict - I was reminded of Conan Doyle. Elsie and Francis perceived Doyle as a brilliant man, his stature and the myths that had evolved around him, prevented them from telling the truth. Although there were no (economic) insecurities for the girls which urged them to protect 'their conditions', it still shows how belief, prestige and status works. Reality, the real occurrence of events, was covered up in favour of Doyle's *make* belief.

§

Again, I couldn't sleep. I wondered why it had taken me so long to become aware of the conditions under which art operates. Why hadn't I seen the hidden truth of social reality, why hadn't I exposed underlying power relations or confronted others with an unblinking view of what they were actually doing or why hadn't I de-mystified the artwork? What did this mean and what was I to do, being enlightened with something that could just as well break down something (*what exactly?*) that might be important. What to do in a de-mystified context? Was there anything left?

My feet were cold. I looked at George lying next to me, sleeping on his belly, face turned. I curled up. I thought of us sleeping together in one bed. I still couldn't get used to it. I longed for George's body but it had to be postponed

every time, over and over again. In its availability, it lost its appeal. The long discussions we had in bars and restaurants were nothing more than the postponing of sexual encounters. The building up of tension through a delicate alternation of wit, intellect and (flimsy) bodily contacts, was paramount. I needed the fiction, the make-belief.

Double Game
Portraits in presentia



Richiku Incense Burner
supported by entwined
dragons, mid 19th
century, Japan

The gun was in my bag. I was wary of it all the time: leaving the museum, doing my groceries, getting a coffee on the go, taking the subway. I guarded my bag more than usual, being conscious of the gun's presence every time I grabbed for something, my purse, a handkerchief, my keys.

Once home, I put on my white gloves, took out the gun (all black and shiny) and placed it on my bedside table. I looked at it for a while and took in the surroundings, the gun's new setting: unmade bed, dimmed lights, a floor of abandoned clothes. All Hollywood fiction, Tarantino kitsch.

In the studio, I worked for a couple of hours on some new pictures of Asian statues and ceramics. At four I quited and left for the kitchen to pour myself a glass of wine. I admired, once again, the Ming vase and the yellow berried twig it contained. Set against the dark blue wall it created its own depth of field. I sat myself at the table, placing the glass of wine next to the vase. I read a book. With the remote control I unleashed the delayed action shutter.

I was reading Museum Highlights: 'If we are always already serving, artistic freedom can only consist in determining for ourselves whom and how we serve.'

30 The logic of artistic autonomy has it that we only work for ourselves, for our own satisfaction and subject only to the demands of our own conscience and drives: the artist in his studio. I was

30. **Museum Highlights,**
Andrea Fraser,
p.160

wondering: am I really serving my own interests? Because in the end what freedom does this form of autonomy grant me? Nothing much as far as income is concerned, hence my services to the museum (a guaranteed income at the expense of time and autonomy).

The autonomy supposedly gained in artistic practices is nothing more than a basis for self-exploitation. My (and other artist's) labor is supposed to be its own compensation because we are working for own satisfaction ³¹ – and working for our own satisfaction is a luxury position in itself, not granted to most of us, being tied up to the drudgeries of daily working life. A position that is not granted to the masses is not conceded to the minority.

31. Idem, p.159

'It often seems to me that our professional relations are organized as if the entire art apparatus was established to generously provide us with the opportunity to fulfil our exhibitionistic desires in a public display.' ³²

32. Ibidem

Working in the studio is a longed for position and the artist (supposedly) needs it to dream of 'something else': a time-out zone that is conditional for making work. But the studio is also an artistic myth, one that needs to be kept alive in being the basis for our credibility. And this same studio-myth also keeps us from regulating our own economic conditions, because: 'Artists will be poor'. By keeping the myth alive we secure our own precarity.

I thought of Emanuel de Witte. Unable to regulate *his* social and economic conditions (which led to his gruesome death). Indentured to an Amsterdam notary and art dealer, De Witte was *forced to service*. Service in exchange for room and boarding. What has changed ever since?

I wondered what to do with De Witte's painting. '*Woman playing the Virginal*' was placed on the living room floor, opposite the couch. The painting had by now transformed into a magical object, a storehouse of obscure passions and inescapable fate. The painting was De Witte's portrait in absentia. 33 I myself headed in the opposite direction: *portraits in presentia*. I climbed out of the basement of anonymity, dragging the museum objects with me, giving us both a context that suited us: personal, daily, intimate. Not only the profanity of the objects was shown, but also my own, the photographer's: in every picture you see me pressing the delayed action shutter.

I didn't care so much about showing myself though. I couldn't care about 'personality' or the showing of a so called 'true self'.

'Artistic practice is usually understood as being individual and personal. But what does the individual or personal actually mean? The individual is often understood as being different from the others.' 34

However, I might be more interested in

33. **Auster**, p.66

34. **The Truth of Art**, Boris Groys, p.9

'one's difference from oneself' 35 - the refusal to be identified according to the general criteria of identification, indicating how others see us. I would like to proclaim the right to sovereign self-identification. I no longer want to have identities which are imposed on me by others – society, state, university, Academy, parents. Let's clear away with the national and cultural identities that are ascribed to artists, let's get rid of the myths of modern art, understanding itself as a search for the 'true self.' 36

35. Ibidem

The question is not whether the true self is real or merely a metaphysical fiction; the question of identity is not a question of truth but a question of power: who has the power over my own identity - I myself or society? 37

36. Ibidem

37. Ibidem

I discussed the options with George, being the internet specialist. He wasn't hesitant: *'this means nothing to me, Vienna'*.

The internet as an archive provided exactly what I needed: decontextualization and recontextualization. It gave me the chance to follow and understand the artistic strategy of nonidentity, in a much better way than the traditional archive or institution did. George placed my pictures on the website and secured the redirection. Clicking on the gun's picture on the museum's site would normally give information on the history and cultural importance of the object (in this case the killing of a politician). Now it redirected straight to my bedroom.

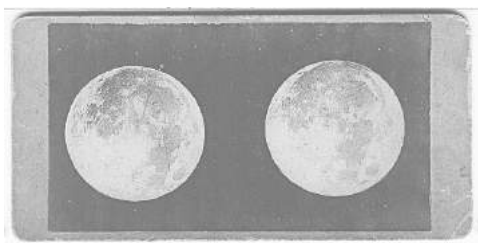
I was lying in bed, naked under the sheets, face turned, the gun next to me on the bedside table, glistening in its' own pool of light. Above me *Woman playing the virginal*, De Witte's painting, showing a man (De Witte?) in a four-poster bed, hardly visible, tucked away behind heavy curtains, looking at me, his viewer.

I started all over again, virginal.

*The image has gone
Only you and I
It means nothing to me* 38

38. **Ultavox**, Vienna, 1981,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DuCIGvsbMA>

(...)



Stereogram of moon
No title or publisher
[http://www.worldofstereo
eviews.com/snowpage
.htm](http://www.worldofstereoviews.com/snowpage.htm)

December

Snow was everywhere. It fell steadily and continuously, hour after hour, fluttering silently from the grey sky to the earth. No winds to distract it from its straight course until it accumulated on the ground as thick and airy as a duvet. Our footsteps, imprinted in the flaky morning snow, had disappeared within the hour. There were no traces of our existence left. Only the smoke coming from the roof top gave us away - which was ephemeral just the same.

Sometimes we heard thick patches of snow falling from the nearest trees' branches. The muffled sound of nature's abundance.

No other sounds were to be heard, not even birds. Everything was silent. And once again we were writing at our desk. For convenience sake, we had placed it as close to the fire as we could. One side of our bodies was warmed, while the other stayed cold. We had to switch places after an hour.

One of us wrote:

'Sachs's best ideas always seemed to come to him when he was away from his desk.' 39

That being the case, what are we doing here? Aren't we trapped in a swamp of inwardness, confronted as we are with the austerities of retreating?

39. Auster, p.41

The other wrote:

Let's just write a script. That is our main

objective. To be clear, decisive, communicative. Also, as far as Sachs is concerned, he hadn't any extraneous preoccupations to bog him down. Life had been reduced to its bare-bones essentials, and he no longer had to question how he spent his time. Every day was more or less a repetition of the day before. (...) The element of surprise had been eliminated, and that made him feel sharper, better able to concentrate on his work. 40 Sachs didn't just work *away* from his desk, but also *at* his desk.

40. Idem, p.140

In all its banalities it's about plain, ordinary routine. In addition, as an extra bonus, Sachs had the luxury of time and space. His conditions were optimal.

The other wrote:

Still (bringing back a former remark) 'where does the demand for engagement converge with the desire for autonomy?' In other words: can we have impact, and show our concerns with the other and the world, yet still maintain a free and autonomous position?

Our present situation of solitude doesn't seem to enable anything. No script, no impact, no freedom (in being contained within the inner swamps of doubt).

(could you please turn on the light? the snow is covering the sky)

The other wrote:

The engagement you are referring is taking on mythical proportions in its conception of art representing undogmatic thinking, being the conscience of society and being able to redirect other people's thinking. Anyone implying that art can *do* something (directing people's gaze, or improving the social cohesion in deprived living areas), implicitly implies that it *ought* to do something. 41

41. Van Winkel,
p.11

*(open the curtains. the snow
might reflect the light)*

The other wrote:

Sachs, in wanting to be engaged and have impact, left his writerly life (and his beloved wife) to live a life of action. What can our script *en-act*?

*(the snow darkens the sky. All
is grey, there is no light)*

The other wrote:

The myths evolving around the artist are confusing. They pollute our minds. It urges us into thinking that the artist is special and is thus capable of *doing* something special, which *makes* him special, and so on and so forth - in an ever-ongoing loop of self-fulfilling prophecy. The artist is a stereotype, full of commonplaces and convictions that is being sustained out of demands of self-interest. In the end the artist

believes in art because he wants to believe in art.

*(I'll open the curtains and turn on the light.
we'll have best of both worlds)*

The other wrote:

Yes, but disputing the myth is futile because there is no alternative. Complete de-mystification would lead to the end of art. 42

42. Idem, p.17

(the weather is changing)

The other wrote:

Forget about the myths. Not only are they inescapable - in being kept alive over and over again - but also superfluous. The myths nourish the dynamics of repetitive renewal in contemporary art: behind the rejection of the old, superseded myth lies a re-introduction in a new, customized form that makes it *zeitgemäss* - for a short time span. 43 On the other hand the myths we supposedly cannot escape, are being corroded. The mainstreaming of avant-garde norms and values has hollowed out the mark of the artist. Media, corporate culture and even politics have discovered the appeal of ground-breaking behaviour, uncompromised self-expression, the breaking of taboos, anti-framing and disrespect for tradition and authority. 44

43. Idem, p.18

44. Idem, p.81

The other wrote:

So, all is gone?

We changed positions.

The other wrote:

Instead of the myths we should focus on conditions. As I said before, Sachs' conditions were optimal, he was given the luxury of time and space. Was he ever worried about the necessities of 'earning a living'? Was he ever pre-occupied with wearing of insecurity and taking care of himself in given precarious circumstances? Was he ever forced to work, to devoting his precious time to working hours – instead of (his beloved) writing? Under precarious conditions the individual is being propelled in an *immer* continuing survival-mode, with hardly time left to do or think anything else, other than doing the things that supposedly 'need to be done'.

(yes, the winds are becoming fierce. shaking up the trees)

The other wrote:

The luxury of time and space is granted to us in being here, in our cabin in the woods. We have, although for a short time span, been able to postpone work, working hours and precarious conditions. So yes, a luxury. But still, it has left us where we are now – empty handed.

(leaving them naked in discarding their white duvets)

The other wrote:

Not empty handed, just in limbo. We need the silence to be able to think of something else. Leave the myths and their intoxicating properties. Let us not re-direct our lives to the social and cultural reality of the artistic myth, which is delusional in the end, letting us believe in alleged autonomy and fashionable roles and places. Serving the cultural and symbolic capital upon which institutions have been founded. Let us enjoy the time at hand, the fact that we are free from working and it's time consuming characteristics.

(the world is turning to colour)

One of us wrote:

The mythical substance of art is a dreamed of little corner within collective conscience. Don't we need this little corner because otherwise everything would be radical, obscene and redundant positive, in a suffocating triumph of reality? 45 Don't we need the myth, the make-belief?

45. Idem, p.76

(the trees are scratching the cabins roof, a sound worse than the shrieking of crows)

One of us wrote:

We are in a corner, yet not mythical. This is real. Let's make the best of it.

While we can.

(still, birds)

One of us wrote:

(...)

(it makes me shiver to the bone)

One of us wrote:

Yes, our best point of departure.

§

Still, no script.

I threw another piece of wood in the
flames.

Desk

Supporting Character



Embassy VII.a
Thomas Demand
C-print/ Diasec
2007

Week 37

Monday – office

This morning I remembered why I'm here in the first place. It was 1999, the setting being an employment agency: one woman sitting in front of the other (desk and computer in between). Woman one typing: 'First impression: she has a nice face. Could be ok for receptionist work.'

I wasn't supposed to see that, but I did. Being offended (*and let's be honest: flattered*) I managed to squeeze myself into a slightly better position: that of the secretary. Now there is a desk between me and my boss. To soften up life's brutalities I lure myself into the thought that his status and importance might be flowing back to me (me being his extension after all).

Telephone rings.

Need to take this. Reception: guest for boss. Need to go down and take him up to the seventh floor.

Right... they're comfortably settled in his office, coffee, tea, everything under control. Continue: e-mail. 35 left to read, scan, answer, act upon. All important, all for him.

12.30 hours. Lunch, 30 minutes in cafeteria. Talk, laughter with colleagues (boss in office). Thank god, G. was here. Gives a little spunk to the day. We, again, had the smallest, tiniest of eye contact. Lovely.

Right. Desk again. Mail down to 10, still lots to do. Last week's minutes are breathing down my neck. Can't seem to find the right moment for it: telephone rings, guests are waiting to be welcomed, meetings to be scheduled, etc.

Ah... G. came in. A distraction I can handle (*looking great, nice suit, great hair, little shabby, great contradiction, love it*). Anyway. He wants the minutes today. Great.

To distract myself (in complete stress-denial), lets read what friend E. send me over the weekend. *Mechanical Brides*:

...cultural expectations about the behaviour of female employee's parallel expectations about communications devices: both are asked to serve as passive hosts to a drama played out by others. 46

'...passive hosts, drama played out by others'. Not quite the motivational thing to read right now.

46. **Mechanical Brides**, Ellen Lupton, p.29

Women regulate the flow of information by taking messages, transferring calls, receiving orders, dialling for the boss, etc. Such jobs make the female worker a human extension of a technological system, charged with mediating – rather than *producing* - messages.

47

47. Ibidem

Fuck, telephone.

Interesting stuff though:

Mechanical devices, from the washing machine to the typewriter, are designed to perform work; the work they do is cultural as well as utilitarian, helping to define the differences between women and men. ...Human personalities are shaped by social conditions, from ideals of family life and norms of gender behaviour to the economic opportunities available to people based on their cultural identities. 48

48. Idem, p.7

What the f. is *my* cultural identity?

The self is, to some degree, a manufactured object, a social product. ...The domestic ideal also functioned to define women as naturally suited to jobs involving neatness, courtesy, and personal service. 49

49. Ibidem

Oh, god, that freaks me out.

15.00 hours. Made a start with the minutes. Thinking of sabotaging them. No one takes the effort to read them anyway. Let's make them into a sort of message (some words from the *immer* inconspicuous secretary). Could squeeze in the tiniest message for G.

17.00 hours. Almost finished. I'll do a double check tomorrow. Send in the concept to G. (*signed it with a x*).

17.15 hours, subway. Thinking on the 'passive hosts' bit, 'drama played by others'. Quite depressing. Comes down to my role being reduced to the one of prompter. Prompting messages to 'Mr. *Lead On Stage*' (e.g. boss), whenever he might have forgotten them. I'm a (shitty) supporting character

Fuck, telephone.

Was E. Told her about my lovely insight. She said (laughing):
'Better a supporting character than a cameo appearance.'
Need to look that up when I get home.

A supporting character is a character in a narrative that is not focused on by the primary storyline, but appears or is mentioned in the

story sufficiently to be more than just a minor character or a cameo appearance. Sometimes, supporting characters may develop a complex back-story of their own, but this is usually in relation to the main character, rather than entirely independently. 50

50. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supporting_character

Well, that's uplifting.

19.30 hours, dinner, TV. Ally McBeal is on. Great sitcom office show. Love the scenes with Ally and Fish in the unisex-toilet. Would love to have the same at the office for some real-time confessional, office-gossip sharing. Or even better: have a John Cage for the imperative *slash* urgent *slash* essential disorder. Feeling completely comfortable in this warm, wonderful sitcom world.

22.30 hours, bed, reading.

The term secretary, from the same root as *secret*, had carried cultural prestige since the Renaissance, referring to the confidant and deputy of a powerful figure. The feminization of this almost exclusively male world occurred with unprecedented speed at the dose of the nineteenth century. By 1890, women held 60 percent of all typing

and stenography jobs in the U.S. By 1920 it was 90 percent. Rarely has a field of employment - especially one invested with social status- altered its identity so quickly from male to female. 51

51. Lupton,
p.43

Invested with social status...?! The secretary?

The modern boss-secretary relationship is structured by such differences as masculine-feminine and active-passive. Machines mediate these relationships, standing between male decision-making and female service. As sociologist Rosemary Pringle has pointed out, the very notion of 'secretary' is cloaked in sexual innuendo; the occupation has no absolute definition in terms of duties or responsibilities, but rather is identified tacitly by its gender (female) and its machines (typewriter and telephones). 52

52. Idem, p.48

The computer which I thought of as *servicing me*, is actually responsible for me serving my boss?

Better turn off light, set clock for morning: 07.00 hours. Check. Head empty. Right. Sleep.

Fuck

Barry White's in my head, John Cage's favourite:

We got it together didn't we

We definitely got our thing together

Don't we baby

Isn't that nice 53

53. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtwOoeWhoo>

Tuesday – office

Forget about this day. Crazy, sick, stressed out, no lunch, mental jogging between mail and phone. What is it with this delirious, running-riot mailbox? What is it that people want from him that is *so* important? Well, that's not the real issue here. The issue being:

Fuck, telephone.

In the privy (which should be unisex) - having a small break *slash* hide away *slash* very much deserved elliptical moment - I thought of this: the time and effort to render all my services (eight fucking hours a day) are completely occupying: they not only occupy my brain, but also my body. My brain because of all the information I need to process, my body because of being physically tied to the chair. So... I not only *have* an occupation, I also *am* occupied - time, space and physique-wise.

Off course I immediately got frustrated with the idea that I'll probably instantly forget this quite interesting thought, once back at my desk. I need a voice-recorder, catch some of these precious insights.

I once asked my colleague why there are so little men working as secretaries. She said: 'They're not as tidy and precise as we are'. *Yeah right*. I didn't bother confronting her with the question why we, women, supposedly *are*? It wouldn't have mattered, she would've probably said 'that's just how we are'.

I was tempted to send her the piece of text I read last night (I'm excerpting here, taking minutes so to speak):

In addition to accepting low wages, women offered a number of attractive qualities to employers, including their perceived docility and agility, their willingness to perform routine work, and their lack of career ambitions. 54

54. Lupton,
p.44

I don't think dearest colleague could be bothered, even if it hit here right in the face.

I didn't see G. all day. Left at five.

18.00 hours, home, dinner, laundry, dishes, TV: nothing. Early bed, exhausted, tea and book (E. gave me another 'intellectually challenging' piece of writing. Sometimes I wonder what she is dragging me into. Can't I just simply read a novel?). Anyway, the given

subject could be nice, but the style of writing *slash* used lingo *slash* the complete aura of the book annoys me. It's a catalogue, no, it's a collection of artists' writings. E. being artistically involved (*her* words) reads this stuff. She met an artist photographer at a venue (hideous places by the way) who told her about the issue of Art and Service. She thought it could be interesting for me, being a service provider myself. But then: *what's art got to do with it?*

Instead I entered a query on 'bull shit jobs'. Actually got a hit (*what the hell does that mean?*):

Growing up in a lefty, working class family, I felt this all the time: the ideological imperative to validate work as a virtue in itself; which is by the way constantly being reinforced by society at large. But there is also the reality and feeling that most work is obviously stupid, degrading and unnecessary; it is best avoided whenever possible. 55

Ha! I could have said that!

...there is a whole infrastructure of receptionists, janitors, computer maintenance people, which are kind of second-order bullshit jobs: *they*

55. **Bull Shit Jobs, the Caring Classes, and the Future of Labor: an interview with David Graeber.**
<http://www.hamptoninstitution.org/bullshitjobs.html#.WKCEuBirKR8>

are actually doing something, but they're doing it to support people who are doing nothing. 56

56. Ibidem

I'll tell boss this tomorrow - who knows, he might be relieved.

I read on a bit and found out about movements proclaiming *The Right to be Lazy (why haven't I ever heard of that before?)*.

...the division between anarcho-syndicalist unions and socialist unions played an important role; the latter were always asking for higher wages, while the anarchists were asking for less hours. The socialists were essentially buying into the notion that work is a virtue and consumerism is good, as long as it's managed democratically; while the anarchists were saying: 'no, the whole deal that we work more and more for more and more products, is rotten from the get-go.'57

57. Ibidem

Never knew it, but supposedly I'm an anarchist.

Wrapping it up: we have a performance society here where it is mandatory to work out of moral imperatives and consumerism (the latter as a sort of

fucking consolation price). We no longer live in a welfare state but (as sociologists have it) a *workfare state*. Within that state citizens are only conditionally free. If you're able to discipline yourself, you'll be left alone, but when you fail to discipline yourself, society or the government will step in, as in cases of time discipline (*thou shalt work*) or applying for a new job: the employment agency, 58 the *miss-she-has-a-nice-face-imbecile*.

Always hated the economic smugness of daily life, always wanted a life without having to work *ever*. My latent wish - let's be blatantly honest here - is to give into laziness, dormancy, hibernation, the better curling up, vacuity as a gift, the zen-factor of meaninglessness. But no. Instead I relentlessly find myself in a state of mental jogging. In the workfare state. Sounds like a song:

'Mental Jogging in the Workfare State'

Is it? No, it's not, only hit on YouTube: 'Mental Jogging – understanding success'. 59 Ha! Fucking moron.

...the impact of increased self-discipline is nowhere as visible as in the so-called 'free or autonomous creative professions'. An impressive

58. **Niemand's Slaaf**, Koen Haegens, De Groene Amsterdammer nr. 12, 23 maart 2016, p.10

59. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vCzI32C6iA>

workers' morality prevails that has no need for boss, supervisor or time clock. 60

60. Haegens,
p.12

Should send this to E.

22.30 hours, getting tired, should sleep.
Clock set. 07.00.

...to force back that insane performance-society that forces us to conduct our lives in an undesired manner didn't we become too obedient too well-behaved beginning of a solution might be situated in the notion of beingnaughty
weshouldbedreamingmore dan 61

61. Idem, p.14

Wednesday – office

Saw G. in the elevator upon entering the office. He looked tired. Saw myself reflected in the elevator mirror and was happy to conclude that I looked great (albeit taking (too) much of my precious time: *cheers!*). We had the usual polite kind of conversation, a little work, some private issues. Nothing really *in depth*. We ought to have a drink at the bar, would immediately solve these slightly embarrassing *in limbo* talks. Only good thing, he led me out of the elevator first, giving me the feeling he was looking at my ass.

Office work, same old. Nothing out of the ordinary. Three good things:

1. colleague not here, lovely silence, can pick my nose whenever I want
2. boss out all day
3. got response from G. on the minutes (best of all): he's very satisfied with the 'detailed and precisely written report'. Wow, good marks on that. Great.

Skipped lunch. Am reading something that fascinates me.

Typewriter is ambiguous. The word, in the 19th and beginning of the 20th

century, meant both typing machine *and* female typist. There was a convergence of a profession, a machine and a sex.

...prior to their industrialization the two sexes occupied strictly symmetrical roles: women, with the symbol of female industriousness in their hands [needle and cloth], wove tissues; men, with the symbol of male intellectual activity in their hands [pen and paper], wove tissues of a different sort called *text*. 62

62. Kittler, p.187

Wrapping it up: women were nicely needling away - embroidering in front of a crackling fire, making lovely pillow covers that decayed within the decade and no one really cared about - and men were *writing*, publishing their all-important, earth shattering, consequential texts - to be read again by us, women. So, all in all, we women were blank tissues, white sheets of virginity, to be written upon, by the male pencil, *the penholder*.

*Conclusion for the day on my part: boss
can go and fuck himself*

Ok, ok let it go. I need the money, so better be the wiser.

Then again: 'I need the money?' What the f. am I whoring myself away here?!

Well...I don't know.

...with industrialization and the introduction of the typewriter, all this changed. Men were deprived of the quill and women of the needle. The typewriter was an emancipatory tool that liberated the (hand)written word from its male exclusivity.

But ironically enough, the clerks, office helpers, and poet-apprentices of the nineteenth century, who were exclusively male, had invested so much pride in their laboriously trained handwriting as to overlook Remington's [typewriter] innovation for seven years. In came the women. In 1881 marketing strategists recognized the fascination their unmarketable [typewriter] machine held for the battalions of unemployed women. Lillian Sholes, daughter of inventor Christopher Sholes, presumably became the first typewriter in history. 63

63. Idem, p.193

Lillian Sholes? Let's look her up on the net. Picture? Face?

Fuck! Telephone (scares the hell out of me)

G. asking me to work on a ppt presentation. He wants it today. Should start work on that. Well, as long as it's not in my mailbox...

Writing with a writing machine, using keystrokes, automatic spacing and anonymous block letters, bypassed a whole system of education that women missed out on [*i.e. the handwriting slash clerk education*]. Hence sexual innovation followed technological innovation almost immediately. Without resistance men cleared the field.

Women reversed the handicap of their education, missing out on the clerk education, turning it into a so-called emancipation. But that emancipation ⁶⁴ went as far as working with a type machine.

The fact that the female clerk could all too easily *degrade* into a mere typewriter made her an asset [*for employers that is*]. From the working class, the middle class and the bourgeoisie, out of ambition, economic hardship or the pure desire for emancipation, emerged millions of secretaries. It was precisely their marginal position in

64. Ibidem

the power system of script that forced women to develop their manual dexterity, which surpassed the prideful handwriting aesthetics of male secretaries in the media system. 65

65. Idem, p.94

13.30 hours. Need to do some work, check e-mail.

But first let's get something to drink (*nice distractional, little walk to coffee corner*): coffee, tea?

What puzzles me is that although with the rise of the personal computer the keyboard began to lose its association with women's work, and boss and secretary have become less gender dependent positions, how comes 99 percent of secretaries is still female?

Despite all new communication devices, executives often have resisted relinquishing their personal assistants, who are a sign of status as well as a source of consistent, customized help. 66

66. Lupton, p.53

In other words: executives like showing off they can afford a little house slave for all their tedious, time robbing, nerve wrecking 'little chores'.

Executive secretaries pride themselves on the specialised knowledge and range of skills involved in working with (*for!*) one boss. 67

67. Ibidem

Do I? More likely it's crucial to my economic survival.

Right. Work is calling.

Jesus and Christ! ... what the fu

I am so, so fully utterly entirely totally fed
up with this whole rott

Romantically uncharged



Flur (Corridor)
Thomas Demand
C-print/ Diasec
1995

Thursday – home, sick

Slept in today.

After breakfast, and some essential cleaning up, I installed myself on the couch with coffee and cookies. I didn't shower, I hate the constant washing, polishing, making-up of myself. What's the point anyway, I want be seeing anyone today (not in the least G.). I read some magazines and watched two episodes of Ally on the internet.

Afterwards I dozed off for an hour and a half. Completely well-deserved *right to laziness*.

In waking (unable to push of a lingering feeling of guilt - *albeit*) I tried to read a bit in one of E.'s books. Complicated, densely written. I'm utterly annoyed with that. *Why would anyone want to write like that? What's the fucking point?* Does the author want to clarify something, to me as reader (you know: *his public*), or does he want to be admitted to some 'higher intellectual rank'?

Anyway, I'll give it try, chew my way through it, might just reveal something. If not, I'll throw it in the bin.

Man himself acts through the hand,
for the hand is, together with the
word, the essential distinction of

man. The typewriter tears writing from the essential realm of the hand, i.e. the realm of the word. mechanical writing provides this 'advantage', that it conceals the handwriting and thereby the character. The typewriter makes everyone look the same. 68
(according to Heidegger)

68. Kittler,
p.198

What I make of it: the soul of writing - stemming from the direct physical contact between paper and hand, hand and soul - is lost to us because of standardizations of text through typewriting. Typewriting occurs through mediation of a machine instead of the manual writing of the sensual hand. Writing lost its sensuality:

Mallarmé's insight: literature is made up of no more and no less than twenty-six letters. 69 In contrast to the flow of handwriting, we now have discrete elements separated by spaces. Thus, the symbolic of the soul has the status of block letters. 70

69. Idem, p.14

70. Idem, p.16

Discrete elements separated by spaces:
why can't I stop thinking of G. and myself in reading that sentence?

For mechanized writing to be optimized, one can no longer dream of writing as the expression of individuals, or the trace of individual bodies. The very forms, differences, and frequencies of its letters had to be reduced to formulas. So-called Man is split up into physiology and information technology. 71

71. Ibidem

Well, the tools that we use to write, once the typewriter now the laptop *slash* keyboard, might have lost their bodily connection but *have* left its traces on our thoughts: 'our writing tools are also working on our thoughts'.

After a week of typewriting practice, Nietzsche wrote, 'the eyes no longer have to do their work': écriture automatique had been invented. 72 Indeed: Nietzsche changed from arguments to aphorisms, from thoughts to puns, from rhetoric to telegram style. 73

72. Idem, p.202

73. Idem, p.203

The telegram style of *thinking* is matched by its writing *because* of the interference of the typewriter. But:

'Language does not store or transmit any meaning whatsoever for stenographers, only the indigestible

materiality of the medium it happens to be.'⁷⁴

74. Idem, p.175

What is being argued here: that meaning got lost because of the introduction of the typewriter?

But that was the beginning of the 20th century and stenography is a thing of the past. Nowadays secretaries *do* need to read what is being presented to them (so far the improvement). Secretaries need to judge and act upon incoming e-mail information, they scan, read, answer and distribute information. Through them incoming requests are being assessed on importance and urgency and are sent on, deeper into the organization. Setting of a chain of actions that somehow and sometime will come back to them -broken up in pieces, ultimately distilled to a shallow snippet of work. Because of the relentlessly incoming mails, secretaries need to act with speed and accuracy. The work is never finished, and the work is always repeating itself, day in day out. The secretary has become a medium *herself*, a transmitter of information, a communications device. The computer is a tool within a tool.

Information flows through the secretary's body: from the machine, to the fingers, to the eye, to the brain, back

to the fingers, back to the keyboard, back to the machine. The secretary is a transmitter, a medium using another medium for sending information - information that in the end never truly concerns *her*.

...if we stenographers read little or nothing, do you know why? Because at night we are much too tired and exhausted, because to us the rattling of the typewriters, which we have to listen to for eight hours, keeps ringing in our ears throughout the evening, because each word we hear or read breaks down into letters four hours later. That is why we cannot spend evenings other than at the movies or going for walks with our inevitable friend. Every night going to the movies has to treat the wounds that the non-communicative typewriter inflicts upon secretaries during the day. An entanglement of the imaginary and the symbolic (*whatever that is supposed to mean*). 75

75. Ibidem

Drowning myself in sitcom, loving this imaginary world of Ally, Cage and Fish, *originates from inflicted 'working wounds'?*

Sitcom soothes me. It's a longed-for world where only the interpersonal,

bodily *slash* love interactions are worth mentioning. Because in the end:

Do we actually ever see Ally working?

The working hours, being romantically uncharged (stiffening the body so to speak) have been cut out. An episode never lasts longer than 50 minutes.

**Friday – 17.00 hours, ground floor
bar**

'I've got to be here, you see. And you don't, well... not per se. That's what I'm talking about. If I don't show up, I'll lose my job.' 76

76. **Auster**, p.12

'No, I read that somewhere...'

'You know, I've been reading this story about Nietzsche and his typewriter. *What?* Well, doesn't matter where I found it, I'll tell you later. *Yes*, I'm interested in typewriters - you know, me being a secretary, typing and all, well yeah... anyway -No, not so much in Nietzsche, that just came along. Anyway, it's about men dictating women, dictating *to* women and women being the receivers.

Don't laugh. It's interesting. The typewriter *reversed* the gender of writing and the *material basis* of literature. Because... you know, mechanized writing with a typewriter denies the phallocentrism (*Jesus...*) of the classical pen. Nietzsche's fate - you know him being dependent on a typewriter instead of his own *male* fingers - was not authorship, being '*the male poet*', but feminization. Nietzsche took his place next to the young women

using the Remington. 77 *Remington?* A typewriter. Yeah. *When?* I think somewhere in the 1880s when Nietzsche bought himself a typewriter. A (uhm)... writing ball. Strange, hideous thing, look it up sometime. *No!* not now, I'm telling you a story here. After two months Nietzsche's typewriter broke down in Genoa because of humidity - you know the keys getting stuck, the ribbon wet. But Nietzsche didn't surrender, *will to power hey?!...* well anyway. In one of his last letters he asks for a young person who is intelligent enough to work with him. He would even consider a two-year-long marriage for that purpose. 78

77. Kittler,
p.206

Yeah, I know! (is G. alluding to love here, sitting next to me?). He sabotaged the 'classical' notion of love. He actually *thought* a young person and a two-year-long marriage could continue his 'failed love affair' with a typewriter. 79 *Uhum...'*

78. Idem, p.208

79. Ibidem

*My first, my last, my everything
And the answer to all my dreams*

'Do you want another drink?'

'...have they? what time is it anyway?
No, I'm not going anywhere.'

You're my sun, my moon, my guiding star

My kind of wonderful, that's what you are

'Yeah, well... lots of people probably hate it. Did you know it's John Cages' favorite song?

John Cage? 'The Biscuit', you know partner of law firm Fish&Cage, Ally McBeal. The one who dances to this song and then usually drags his colleagues along. He considers this song a sexual incentive. But maybe you prefer Vonda Shepard?'

'No, just leave it. It's not uhm... '

'Yeah, what happened to Nietzsche?! Well, as I remember, his friend Paul... something, started searching for someone who could help him with his writing, copying, excerpting – you know, all the stuff I normally do. But instead of presenting him with a young man, he came up with a rather notorious young lady: Lou van Salomé. And then, well... the three of them became the most famous ménage à trois in literary history. So, a derelict typewriter was replaced by a threesome 80 *(his arm's touching mine).*

80. Ibidem

Uhum, yeah that's' true, Nietzsche wasn't a woman's lover, he was actually described, I think, as *the most dangerous enemy of women.*

He fought 'gender wars' not only with Salomé but also with other students. I think Nietzsche said that Love is War (not peace), you know 'a deadly hatred of the sexes'. He fought against emancipation, defining woman as truth and untruth. 81 *Uhum.*'

81. Idem, p.209

Fuck, telephone.

Ah, not mine, his.

'No, off course, I understand. No, no... it's fine. Yeah, sure, was... yeah, nice. No, I'll drink it, don't worry. Hahahaaa. Yeah... see you... Monday' (*small kiss on cheek*)

*You're my reality, yet I'm lost in a dream
You're the first, the last, my everything*

'Could you turn that off, Glenn? Yeah... thanks.'

§

22.30 hours, home bed little drunk, reading

The typewriter (woman and machine) turns a poetic and erotically charged flow of speech - the 'Sir, I love you!' - into eleven letters, four empty spaces, and two

punctuations marks, all of which comes with a price. 82

82. Idem, p.180

Exactly, that's what I say. Or should have said. Or not

Let's not forget (*did I?*) that Nietzsche was almost blind and could neither read nor write, if only with a machine or a secretary. Following the double loss of his writing ball and his Salomé, Nietzsche was on the lookout for secretaries into whose ears he could insert Dionysian words. 83 ...he 'needed just somebody to whom he could dictate the text.' ...it is Nietzsche's most daring experimental setup to occupy the place of such a god. If God is dead, nothing is there to prevent the invention of gods. Nietzsche identifies with Dionysus, the master of media. 84

83. Idem, p.213

84. Idem, p.211

Maybe read this tomorrow, getting a bit freaky

Well, just conti

...Ariadne's composed lament arises out of complete darkness or blindness. She speaks about and to a 'veiled' god that tortures her body,

following all the rules of mnemotechnology or memory inscription described in Genealogy. *Uhm...* A Dionysus that occupies the ear of his victims and inserts smart words, turns into a poet or dictator in all senses of the word. He dictates to his slave or secretary to take down his dictation. **85** *I know 'I am your labyrinth', Dionysus said to the tortured Ariadne* **86** *No, I don't*

85. Ibidem

86. Idem, p.213

Nietzsche and his secretaries, no matter how forgotten, have introduced a prototype into the world. Word processing these days is the business of couples who write (*instead of sleep*) with one another. And if, on occasion they do both, they certainly don't experience romantic love. **87**

87. Idem, p.214

Another desk



Embassy VII.a
Thomas Demand
C-print/ Diasec
2007

Monday – morning, office, desk

Fuck! Telephone

Boss asking me to type out a report of his talks with the IoD. He wants it today. Hope I can read his scribbles. Should start work on that. Well, as long as it's not on my desk... And as long as dearest colleague is in meeting (all morning!), I have the place to myself. Lovely.

Was thinking of what E. said over the weekend in our Saturday-morning-deli-meet-up with coffees and bagels. Thinking on that (the deli that is): E.'s probably sitting there right now whilst me sitting here next to the hideous office plant (*artists... lucky bastards*).

Anyway, she said something about secretaries turning into writers themselves.

Many novels written by recent female writers are endless feedback loops making secretaries into writers. Gertrude Stein became an author after working in an office at Harvard; Christa Anita Brück's (*who the hell is...?*) wrote an autobiography '*Destinies behind typewriters*', without mention of love, only the desire to help those 'women who are not interested in motherhood' to have a

breakthrough as women writers. Up until Hélène Cixous, women will write that only writing makes women into women. 88

88. Kittler,
p.221

Right.

11.45 hours. Let's write that report.

Board of Directors Meeting – September 6th 2016

Meeting was called to order at 9.00 a.m.
at the management office meeting
room. Quorum was established.

Attendees Present

John C. McCann, President
Laverne K. Woods, Vice-President
George Dolan, Head of directors
Sally F. Jameson, Association Manager
Nancy Paris, Secretary

Absent

William G. Morris, member, excused

1. The secretary would like to state
that from now on she will not only mediate
messages but also produce them. She will
bypass cultural expectations about the
behaviour of female employee's paralleling
the ones about communication devices: she
will from now on be an *active host* within the
drama played out by others.

2. The secretary would like to state
that the board is in definite need of 'another
desk', the decisive one, the secretarial one,
equipped with typewriter and paper to
convert their scribbles into typewritten
materials because in the end a Pallas named
Nancy Paris solves all problems of writing in
transforming scratched ideas via
transcription into art. Under the conditions
of high technology, Pallas, the goddess of art,
is a secretary.

3. The secretary would like to state

that from here on she will not be dictated (to) or be bypasses by any primary storyline. Independent of main characters, she will develop a complex back-story of her own. *Nancy Paris* the supporting character will become a main character, in her own spin-off.

4. The secretary would like to state

George, I love you. That is fourteen letters, three empty spaces, and one punctuation mark; all of which comes with a price.

Meeting adjourned at 9.15 a.m

Monday – afternoon, office, elevator

16.00 hours After an elliptical moment in restroom (*feeling empty*), I walk in and see boss standing next to my desk. Upon seeing me, he falls silent, just as dearest colleague.

'Could you please, walk with me to my office? Nancy.'

(Fuck!)

I was calm, I was polite, I managed to project the proper combination of helpfulness and bafflement. That was something of a triumph for me. Normally, I don't have much talent for deception, I've rarely fooled anyone about anything. That's what I said to him - not that he believed me.

It wasn't so much what he said, as how he looked, the way he dressed for his (pitied) role with such perfection: the impeccable suit, the well-cut hair, the smell of everyday showers, the Waterman pen in his hands, his watch, adorning his wrist like a proclamation of self-confidence. All this was strangely comforting to me, and I understand how this sense of unreality worked to my advantage. It allowed me to think of myself as an actor as well, and because I had become someone else, I suddenly

had the right to deceive them, to lie without the slightest twinge of conscience.

So, that's it. Better get the proverbial cardboard box out of the storage.

In returning, I see colleague in shock, yet at same time too embarrassed to say *anything*. Mouth hanging. Anyway, decided to take some stuff with me, although nothing much here I can call my own. I box the office plant, some books, the stapler (could come in handy), a stack of writing paper (ditto), some post-its, the cookie jar. With that, I probably cross a line for (moron-)colleague. She stirs a bit, moans. Sure, whenever it comes to food, the motherhen springs back to life, safeguarding her eggs. I'll give her some slack and in walking up to her I open the jar (as if in handing her a cookie) and turn it upside down to spoil the contents on her keyboard. Then I walk out. Taking the jar with me.

In the corridor, I hear her screaming '*Can't you just behave yourself?*' (and some other lovely comments). I yell back:

NO! I CAN'T. I CAN'T BEHAVE MYSELF, YOU FAT FUCKING PIG.

Some heads in the bypassed offices turn. At the end of the corridor I see G. standing in the doorway of his office. I forgot about him in the spur of the moment. I'm light-struck by the prospect of never seeing him again. I walk up to him, he looks me in the eye and says:

- Will you be OK?
- Sure, I'll be fine (*no, off course I won't*).
- Shall I give you a hand, walk you to the elevator?
- No, I'm fine. It's not much.

He checks the box, looks a bit startled, *albeit* amused. He moves in close and whispers in my ear:

- By the way, loved the very precise and well written report.
- Thank you very much, Mr. G. I appreciate it.
- Shall we meet at five? Bar?
- Sure.

Well, that never happened off course. I never saw G. in that hallway, or ever again.

I took the elevator all the way down to reception.

Cabin the woods



Crow with key

*'Yet, we never saw
them, no blackbirds,
robins, chickadees or
even crows'*

January

The fire was brutal. It enlightened the entire cabin, setting it in an orange glow, the light of sunset in morning chill. Raging and raving, the cabin was filled with the sounds of fury and destruction, burning up the efforts and vigour of (once) growth and exuberance. In all its blazing warmth, it nonetheless was insufficient in dispelling the fierce and stinging cold, attacking the cabin in the long stretches of night and darkness. Everything seemed inert, comatose in frost and gloom. I was alone now. I was the only player left, staged in an unchanging décor of glacial standstill. No more cameo appearances. No supporting character. Just me. There was snow, but no longer soft and flaky like duvets, but hard as glass. I was set in a crystalized scene of crispness and transparency. Cold, water, glass.

I thought of Sachs: *'...he always worked with tremendous discipline and fervour, sometimes holing up for weeks at a stretch in order to complete a project.'*

After chopping wood all morning (defrosting the mind and body), I decided upon doing the exact same: I was set upon completing a project. In order to do so, I organised myself - a task which I am (supposedly) good at, being a former secretary after all. I put all written and collected material in neat little bundles. Sky-scraping the writing table, the white stacks represented divers

categorisations: Utmost Important, Important, Non-Important, within that subcategories of various themes: Work, Art, Conditions, Myths. Within that, sub-subcategories of: Competition, Precarity, Autonomy and Authenticity. I worked as feverishly as ever.

At nights, close to the fire, I thought of my conditions, the time and solitude at hand. I now, since long, had plenty of both. It gave me the opportunity to do what I was doing right here and right now: think and write. Just *and only* because I was in a position that enabled me to do so in the first place - in having forsaken the battlefields of (secretarial) work and subjugation - I was able to think of something else. I now often thought of Linda Tirado. Being the paradigm of the working poor, in working two or more jobs and still not able to cope, she was in the forefront of my mind. Tirado wrote a book ⁸⁹ about all the hardships and misconceptions regarding the poorest of the poor: the encountered roughness and impoliteness, the incomprehension and stupidity, igniting her to write, to reply with fury and (yet) irony in order to set things straight. In all her honesty Tirado makes clear that all the answers to 'Why do poor people do things that seem so self-destructive' simply relate back to a lack of money. Minimum wage and no benefits results in long shifts and constant commuting, which results in fast food consumption being the only

89. **Hand to Mouth: Living in Bootstrap America,** Linda Tirado, 2014

viable option. Having no time to plan ahead and save money, results in a desire to have children now since there will never be a better time. Tirado makes no apologies for being a smoker, stating that smoking helps reduce hunger and relieves stress from working exhausting jobs. 90

In comparison, the writer's life is a life of utter luxury. No wonder Tirado stated that her life as a writer (after the success of her novel) was 'the *easiest thing* she had ever done'. This not only struck me, it made me cry. The endless working hours, alienating, self-denying, time-consuming and un-motivational, *were* the hardest thing to be done – undeniable and unrepairable by any (self-) delusional 'working virtue'. Tirado finally ended up in a position that allowed her to set her own conditions, enabling her to live a life of self-determination.

In conditions of dependency (on work and money) anyone can be made a prey to institutions of welfare, employment and of market: a prey to the array of low paying jobs, meaning in the end *more* working hours (to secure sufficient income) and leaving you a loser in both fields: of money and time. Working more than you want, earning less than you need.

In such a scenario, the artist's position seems quite a favourable one, invested as it is (or seems) with autonomy and self-

90. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hand_to_Mouth:Living_in_Bootstrap_America

determination. An utter position of luxury with enough time at hand to do whatever you want under own given conditions.

But as always, this is just half the truth. After all the investigating - first together and now alone - I (finally) came to different conclusions. The density of the material in front of me, the sky-scraping stacks of organised material on the writing table, nonetheless dared me. The 'writing it all down as clearly as possible', had become an audacious undertaking strewn with contradictions, (deliberate) obscurities and confusions. It made me postpone the issues at stake over and over again, willingly distracting myself at any given moment: going to the loo, getting a coffee or tea, making a snack, defrosting the water tank, chopping wood for the stove, warming my feet, doing a nap (*once I dreamed of spring and working in the garden, which reminded me – in waking up - of Voltaire: Il faut cultiver notre jardin*).

Then finally I started.

Introduction

Art (...) Work deals with notions of art and work and the divergent positions of artist and worker. It shows (in a performative way) the different workings and subjectivities of both artist - someone who creates artworks, in general a

practitioner in the visual arts - and worker, someone with a daily, money-earning job. It does so by showing their different, formative contexts and settings: Desk and Studio. The worker behind his desk and the artist in his studio are exemplifications of different roles and identities shaped by a complex of societal (mainly capitalist) constructions, myths and beliefs. The division of the individual in a worker *or* an artist, is a capitalist, Fordist way of assigning the individual its pre-described role and position within society. Being a worker meaning in general being subjugated to time and place regimes, whereas the artist - in contrast - is freed from these contraptions by being his own boss. Since western society has become post-Fordist or neoliberal in its workings and outset, these strictly 'branded' roles and positions are being obscured and cross-faded: neoliberal regimes have placed us under the dictum of 'being one's own boss'. The artist in being the epitome of this idea of self-reliance, has served neoliberalism in exemplifying this notion to us *all*. Art has become the example for the worker to become an 'entrepreneur', to become free and autonomous in making his or her own decisions, free in dealing with his own 'personal management' as far as income and (in)security is concerned.

This thesis however

Snow has melted. After months of hiding, tracks have become visible again. Distinct, slippery paths crisscross the forest. New settings come in sight. New players as well.

I need to leave the cabin, money has run out. Maybe I could be 'typing for dollars'. Under whatever condition, in whatever form. All in all, I have found this secret passageway that runs straight from my head to the tip of my fingers. 91 I'll use it, I'll put it to service.

91. **Auster**, p.49

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For all the Linda Tirado's of this world

Art (...) Work
Martine Folkersma

Gerrit Rietveld Academy
DOGtime IDUM
Lector Willem van Weelden
2017

