Artikel

When the Common Ground Seems Shattered

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Self-enclosed individualism and partial relationality in creative practice

By Sarah Charalambides

In his book *Combination Acts: Notes on Collective Practice in the Undercommons*, cultural theorist Stevphen Shukaitis argues the forming of collectivities that animate and are animated by struggles over common conditions are pre-empted by the internalisation of a perverse and highly individualised neoliberal logic. Drawing together 15 years of conversations with artists, musicians, activists and theorists about the nature and conditions of collaborative practice, he explores what interventions would be needed to "keep the grammar of self-organisation unfettered by the fixed forms of capital's continued accumulation demands" (Shukaitis, 2019, p. 2).

Yet, when interviewing creative workers operating in the Old Truman Brewery in East London, he discovers that today's cultural producers, rather than developing forms of collectivity or a basis of a new kind of commoning, are establishing more and more individualised forms of investment in work: "Here's my practice, this is what I do" (Shukaitis, 2019, p. 14). Concerned about the value of their artistic capital, as well as with very real questions of surviving within the precarious conditions of the creative industries, the interviewees hold off discussions of common struggles. While they perceive certain forms of injustice that collectively put them in an exploitative position, they do not develop political strategies that counteract individualising forms of creative labour.

In order to overcome the distances between artists within a hyper-segmented social space that multiplies everywhere, communication – exchanging experiences and reflecting together – is essential. Not only as a tool for diffusion but also as a new place, a new competence and primary material for the political (Precarias a la Deriva, 2003). At the same time, it is necessary to oppose portrayals of their social life in terms of atomisation or unconnectedness. As Shukaitis says, there is no point talking about collective conditions, let alone trying to change them, when it has been accepted that everyone is an entrepreneur of the self only seeking out the maximisation of their own self-interests (Shukaitis, 2019, p. 3). Rather than assuming that creative work is ego-centred, or that artistic collectivity is inherently competitive, I argue it is important to work out if, and when, new forms of collectivism take shape, and which forms they are or could be.

However, as capitalism advances, this is easier said than done. In Western post-Fordist industrial nations, neoliberal rationality has infiltrated not only politics and economy, but also common-sense ways of interpreting, understanding and relating to the world in both the private and public spheres of life (Brown, 2015). As a result of the dismantling of state responsibility and the promotion of the self-optimisation of the individual, connections between people are placed primarily in the service of economic valorisation, which reduces basic forms of mutual solidarity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). With the neoliberal conditioning of ego-related lifestyles and the valuation of the individual over the collective, it becomes increasingly difficult

for cultural producers to address the shared dimensions of precarity and construct common narratives.

This article claims that while artist collectives can be regarded as innovative modes of organising cultural, political and social relations beyond competitive networking, they are nonetheless often bound to prevailing discourses and expectations surrounding notions of coming together as a social congregation, free of friction, conflict or disagreement. Moreover, creative practitioners attempting to build alliances between struggles across a range of sectors and social spheres, frequently fail to address problems concerning power, privilege, recognition and representation. In the context of creative projects that focus on the experiences of marginalised groups, this may result in the reproduction of essentialising gestures, the construction of limiting identities, the erasure of difference(s) and issues of structural inequality, appropriation and exploitation.

Surveying different modalities and contradictions inherent to conceptions of commonality and solidarity in the arts, this article explores how cultural producers can resist essentialist configurations of political identity and practice 'commoning' within post-Fordist neoliberal capitalism. While the first part confronts the myth of precarious subjects harmoniously sharing common predicaments, the second part argues for the need to destabilise the notion of collectivity as solid, unified and total. Drawing on critical theories that challenge narrow understandings of 'belonging', I examine the notion of partiality as a potential pathway towards mutual support and solidarity across different politics, lives and subjectivities in our contemporary society. Ultimately, I posit that it is through the articulation of partial relationality that it becomes possible for cultural producers to challenge dichotomous distinctions between the individual 'I' and the collective 'we'. By self-consciously practicing becoming common with 'others' and making connections without assumptions of comparability, creative practitioners might be able to create a sense of insurgent togetherness in a moment in which the common ground seems shattered.

Check your Privilege: The politics of difference and solidarity in the arts

As creative practitioners are hailed as model entrepreneurs and self-motivated sources of productivity by industry and policy makers (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007; Rossiter and Lovink, 2007; Gill and Pratt, 2008), many cultural producers struggle to address the question of how to think and act together in order to challenge individualisation within post-Fordist neoliberalism. While pondering upon the ambivalent position and status of the artist within social, political and organisational analysis, Stevphen Shukaitis argues there are dynamics within the class composition of media, creative and artistic labour that tend to work against the sort of alliances and connections that could most productively be made based around a focus on capitalist exploitation (Shukaitis, 2012, p. 241). For example, the tendency to narrate shared problems within an individualising narrative undercuts the possibility of creating bonds between different struggles. This suggests that mobilising against neoliberal fragmentation requires working against certain patterns of ingrained assumptions that tend to exist within cultural contexts.

One of these assumptions is the idea that creative work contains an inherent radical political potentiality because of the way it is organised and relies on cooperation and networking.

Refreshing as it may be for artistic practice as a social movement project, the underlying emphasis on capacity and connectivity does not always address the question of unequal distribution of suffering and incapacitation in our contemporary society (Barchiesi, 2012). This is exemplified in overly positive celebrations of cultural labour and its potential for innovation (Florida, 2004) that often ignore the detrimental ramifications of the new centrality of creativity in European governance – such as gentrification of neighbourhoods, rising income inequalities, growth of a flexible and mobile work force and high levels of exploitation (von Osten, 2011; McRobbie, 2015). Without dismissing arguments about the democratising potential and creation of meaning and worth within creative practice – doing so would discard some of the main rationales and values that artists rely on to explain the importance of what they are doing (Shukaitis and Figiel, 2015, p. 538) – cultural producers need to be careful not to divert from critiquing the idea of 'cultural exception' and how such an exception is maintained (Vishmidt, 2005).

Whether working individually or collectively, creative practitioners interested in social and political organisation have to understand that capitalist measures are pervasive within the stratified global field of production, which implies that it hits everybody. Furthermore, they cannot overlook the fact that the most 'advanced' sections of the global working class – whether in terms of the level of their wage or in terms of the type of their labour – can materially reproduce themselves only on the basis of their interdependence with the 'less advanced' sections (Stavrides and De Angelis, 2010, p. 12). Employing the notion of the commons as a means of establishing a new political discourse that builds on and helps to articulate the many existing often minor struggles in order to overcome divisions of power within capitalism, political economist Massimo De Angelis puts it as follows:

> *The computer and the fibre optical cables necessary for cyber commoning and peer to peer production together with my colleagues in India is predicated on huge water usage for the mass production of computers, on cheap wages paid in some export processing zones, on cheap labour of my Indian high-tech colleagues that I can purchase for my own reproduction, obtained through the devaluation of labour through ongoing enclosures.* (Stavrides and De Angelis, 2010, p. 12).

Because every subject along this chain can be labelled as precarious in terms of their relation to capital, narrow discussions of contemporary forms of exploitation need to be challenged. After all, precarisation is a phenomenon that extends far beyond the creative industries and knowledge economies of post-Fordist industrial nations in the West (Lorey, 2015). For this reason, creative workers involved in the transnational EuroMa'yDay mobilisations in the early 2000s tried to broaden their focus and think and reach outside the field of cultural production (Foti, 2005; Tarì and Vanni, 2005). While building alliances between struggles across a range of sectors and social spheres – low-paid workers in chain stores, call centre operatives, self-employed computer programmers – they concentrated on what the global precariat (Standing, 2011) has in common. However, some have pointed out there is a risk of identifying common grounds for struggle by drawing out the implications of transformations in labour and life that do not necessarily resonate with those experiencing them, or do not necessarily produce unproblematic alliances (Shukaitis, 2012, p. 246). Notably, aspirations towards organising around a new political subject emergent from changing relations of production can problematically suppress difference(s). Questioning the disruptive possibilities of the EuroMayDay actions and

its celebration of 'precarity life style', the Madrid-based collective Precarias a la Deriva draws attention to the vast amounts of unpaid domestic work done by migrant women in Spain, as well as racialised labour divisions within modes of post-Fordist production (Casas-Cortés, 2009, p. 430). Confronting the myth of the precariat sharing a common predicament, they expose the dangers of disguising inequalities between different subjectivities living and working in neoliberal capitalism. That is, the exclusion of some from generalised proclamations about who is exploited contributes to the oppression of those who do not fit the dominant construction of precarious experience (Butler, 2009, p. 3). As such, any politics that is based on the changing nature of work has to consider how unevenness in access to social power and the ability to have a voice about one's conditions affect organising from those conditions.

Taking this into account, artists interested in articulating minor struggles have looked at dimensions of exploitation shaped by citizenship, ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexuality and ability. Emphasising a less monolithic and more multi-faceted understanding of transformations happening in society (Neilson and Rossiter, 2005) they engage groups that are less politically visible, such as undocumented migrants, women of colour, people with disabilities or working-class communities. By bringing together 'local' and 'global' practices, such initiatives consider the diverse realities of work and life in contemporary neoliberalism: the resources people count upon, the emotional and material support, the rights, the risks, the social value of what they do, the diversity of availabilities and sensibilities, etc.

To an extent these projects offer opportunities for artists to shift the focus away from themselves, and acknowledge conditions of 'others', while standing with them in solidarity. Yet, many instances end up reproducing divisions between specific groups of people. By relying on social categories that have long been axes of oppression, creative practitioners address situations of precarity in ways that re-inscribe inequalities of citizenship, ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexuality and ability. Failing to perceive the limitations of their own cultural perspectives, the use of such classifications perpetuates the hierarchies between what political theorist Isabell Lorey has called the 'underprivileged' from the 'better off' precarious (Lorey, 2015, p. 108).

Subsequently, on numerous occasions cultural producers have been accused of re-enacting exclusionary practices. Because they refrain from making visible structures of power and privilege within the systems they are operating, these accusations often happen through a politics of 'privilege-checking' (Saltman, 2018). Within the framework of identity politics and intersectionality, this can be described as a way of telling those who are making political statements that they should remember they are speaking from a socially advantaged position, because they are, for example, white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied or wealthy. Played out in the context of creative projects focusing on the experiences of marginalised groups in neoliberal capitalism, privilege-checking functions as a reminder for artists to be conscious of their own subjectivity and to throw their supposed 'neutrality' into question.

However, rather than a means to open up debate about how different minorities experience oppression differently, it is all too often used as a way to censor or silence those who are not speaking from personal experience of subjugation. According to cultural and political theorist Jeremy Gilbert, this kind of privilege-checking discourages relations of mutual support by

failing to foreground shared interests:

> *Its only function is to make people feel better within the confines of the social space within which their moral order is locally and temporarily established. It has no hope of extending that moral order across the social space, and has generally given up the idea of transforming that wider space at all. (…) Being sensitive to language or attitudes that reproduce oppression, thinking about the complexities and exigencies of 'allieship', addressing our potential for 'unconscious racism' – all of these remain important political tasks. But they are best thought about within a framework of solidarity, otherwise they can quickly degenerate into individualism, moralism.* (Gilbert, 2018).

Following Gilbert, the work of social critique cannot simply be about pointing out privilege, although this is vital and necessary labour. Besides unravelling the socially constructed conjuncture in which these problems emerge and get negotiated, critique entails posing a positive alternative, such as a politics of solidarity. For only then can creative practitioners step outside of the individualistic ideology of neoliberal culture and begin to imagine a more egalitarian future.

Needless to say, there are good reasons why many people are suspicious of such appeals, especially within the art world today. In any call for solidarity they hear a call for marginalised subjects once again to accept the subordination of their identities and desires to those of some greater unifying cause, in the name of some imagined future that will never arrive. These fears are legitimate. People from historically oppressed backgrounds are invited to participate in environments that profess to celebrate 'diversity', while in the context of their own lives, they are reminded again and again just how much they do not belong or matter. Not surprisingly they demand 'safe space' and protection for themselves and their peers, often drawing hard lines between allies and enemies. For this reason, any radical politics of solidarity would have to take into account issues of recognition and representation. If the risk of identity politics is that "it throws out the baby of solidarity and collective struggle with the bathwater of homogeneity and hierarchy" (Gilbert, 2018), any creative practice interested in building relations of mutual support beyond the field of cultural production needs to understand that 'solidarity' does not mean 'uniformity' and that it can never be imposed from above.[1]

Yet, this seems easier said than done. Today, many creative practitioners find it difficult to confront the risks involved in thinking and reaching outside the creative sector. Facing their own presumptions and non-innocence may result in artists adopting a more reflexive position and having greater awareness of problematic essentialising gestures, the construction of limiting identities, and issues of structural inequality, appropriation and exploitation within the cultural industries. But reckoning with their sense of entitlement also threatens to diminish their sense of self-worth and individual value, elements that are vital for economic survival within the entrepreneurial labour market. Accordingly, some creative practitioners tend to hold on to status-quo stories of self-enclosed individualism in order to protect themselves, doubling down

1) Stressing the importance of speaking for something, rather than someone, feminist theorist Sara Ahmed states that gestures of solidarity do not assume that people's struggles are the same, or that their hope is for the same future. At the same time, solidarity involves "the recognition that even if we do not have the same feelings, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground." (Ahmed, 2014, p. 189).

on their privilege to secure their status in a highly competitive art world.

This could be one reason why, as neoliberal capitalism advances, artist communities become increasingly enclosed and secluded from the realities of the world they live in. Solidly anchored in their creative milieus, it becomes harder for artists to cross trajectories with other people or move into other communities in order to 'understand and learn', as political activist, writer and scholar Angela Davis put it.[2] If cultural producers want to free themselves from working and living in competition, they need to allow themselves to be less threatened by others. Being open to encounters in order to see, recognise and acknowledge different perspectives, and being ready to be transformed by them, are – following Davis – essential in order to 'unlearn' capitalist relationality and reconstruct their social world anew.

Thus, rather than building their own 'small enclaves of otherness' (Stavrides and De Angelis, 2010, p. 18), artists need to consider through what kind of exclusions their collectives are constructed, and keep in mind that those excluded domains might return to haunt the 'integrity' and 'unity' of their 'we' (Butler, 1992, p. 14). Going beyond simply pooling and lumping together different experiences of precarisation, any creative practice interested in commonality should consider "making visible the assignment of subject-positions" (Spivak, 2006, p. 332) in order to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced in neoliberal capitalism.

To say the least, this work can be profoundly disruptive to pre-existent understandings of what it means to be part of a group. When deconstructing identitarian categories, there is always the possibility that a collaborative practice produces relations marked by sensations of unease and discomfort rather than belonging. Especially in conditions of fragmentation and dispersion, it is hard work forming a collective and keeping it together. Those involved are riven with self-doubt, frustration, confusion, rage, empathy, bafflement and the weight of their own ignorance most of the time (Williams, 2019).

Therefore, collectives like Precarias a la Deriva have opposed utopian understandings of coming together as a social congregation free of friction. Affective encounters and communicative exchanges with others are not necessarily harmonious. There might be antagonisms between those

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2)
"We have to find new ways of coming together,
not the old notion of coalition in which we anchor ourselves very solidly
in our
specific racialised communities,
and simply voice
our
solidarity with other people.
I'm not suggesting that we do not anchor ourselves in our communities;
I feel very anchored in
my various communities.
But I think that,
to use a metaphor, the rope
attached to that anchor should be long enough to allow us to move
into other communities,
to understand and learn"..
(Davis quoted in Claycomb 2003, p. 102-3)

that demand clearer forms of identification, and those that appeal to forms of non-identitarian belonging. In trying to slowly and carefully break through habitual polarisations, they argue for the need to question desires for total consensus (Precarias a la Deriva, 2003). Rather than resolving contradictions into larger 'wholes', collectivity is about "holding incompatible things together" (Haraway, 2004, p. 7) because all are necessary and true. As Precarias a la Deriva stresses, building solidarity across difference(s) entails the search for commonalities as well as the fostering of singularities "while maintaining the tension between them" (Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias, 2007, p. 118). This, in turn, requires a space for conflict and disagreement, in order to uncover the difficulties at play when dealing with contentious positionalities. Instead of presenting a unified subject as a prerequisite for "community-as-togetherness" (Bishop, 2004, p. 79) artists interested in building solidarity should consider working towards modes of connectivity that are predicated not on social harmony but on exposing that which is repressed in sustaining the semblance of this harmony.[3]

Partial Relationality: Challenging dichotomous distinctions between the individual 'I' and the collective 'we'

As I have tried to demonstrate, it proves difficult for individualised cultural producers to regard difference as a strength for developing relations of solidarity and shared interests. Part of the problem seems to lie in thinking that commonality is limited to the context of a particular group or locality, and that social power and political efficacy are dependent on the formation of a community conceptualised as being coherent and harmonious. When trying to identify what different people might share in neoliberal capitalism, it is necessary to disturb beliefs in a homogenous collective subject and work towards inventing new models of identification. Leaving behind narrow understandings of 'belonging', the final section of this article engages critical theories that explore pathways towards alternative social ontologies in order to demonstrate that the impossibility of defining an identitarian 'we' still enables connection to others. In my view, this is crucial in order to move away from self-contained forms of creative production in which artists seem permanently locked in competition with one another and unable to construct common narratives.

In recent years in the field of social sciences, and the arts as well as politics, debates on the notion of the commons and 'commoning' have inspired the envisioning of a new social practice within capitalism. Expanding Karl Marx's account of primitive accumulation – as well as its more contemporary articulation in marxist economic geographer David Harvey's critique of 'accumulation through dispossession' (Harvey, 2004) – marxist feminist theorist Silvia Federici understands commoning as an insurgent togetherness that is built on relationality, reciprocity and care (Federici, 2011). Moving beyond the European framework of land enclosures, her analysis recognises different (feminist and post-colonial) struggles for the commons as both the claims for the sustenance of shared resources, and as a struggle for different forms of relating and belonging (Baldauf, 2018). As such, commoning can be regarded as a practice that expands beyond the limits of any closed community or collective identity.

3) In her article 'Fractured Community' Gender and cultural theorist Linnell Secomb has argued it is not disagreement, resistance and agitation that destroy community, but rather the suppression of difference and disagreement in the name of unity and consensus which destroys 'the engagement and interrelation of community' (Secomb, 2000, p. 134).

Comparably, numerous post-structuralist philosophers have argued for the need to destabilise the notion of community as unified and total. According to Roberto Esposito, community is not an entity or collective subject, but rather the relation that makes subjects no longer individual: "it is the 'with,' the 'between,' and the threshold where they meet in a point of contact that brings them into relation with others to the degree to which it separates them from themselves" (Esposito, 2010, p. 139). The idea of community functioning as a threshold or in-between can also be found in Jean-Luc Nancy's work on the implications of understanding being-with as radically and irreducibly relational (Nancy, 2000). Reflected in his use of the hyphenated term 'being-singular-plural', Nancy proposes a co-essence in which the subject is never purely self-referential. It is not 'me', nor 'the other', but always the result of a resonance between these poles. Focused on tracing the relational zones between different beings, these ideas challenge binary-oppositional structures in which people are separate from their external world.

Since the 1980s, feminist and post-colonial theorists have brought into play similar critiques of individual autonomy in order to reframe social relationality. Through a radical deconstruction of the Western liberal notion of sovereign subjectivity, Gayatri Spivak emphasises the inherent multiplicity and heterogeneity of collectivity, while calling into question the collapse of various experiences and situations into one stable and undivided subject position (Spivak, 2006). Rebuffing essentialist conceptions of political identity – such as the precariat – Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou's work inspires a re-theorisation of subjectivity that does not refer to a self-contained individuality, but rather to "responsive dispositions of becoming-one-with-another, as they are manifested, for example, in the various affects that throw us 'out of joint' and 'beside ourselves'" (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, p. 71). Such radical decentralisations of selfhood question the hard and dividing lines between 'self' and 'other' that neoliberalism draws.

In her critique of post-Enlightenment European social configurations, Denise Ferreira da Silva proposes to think the world as "an infinite composition in which each existant's singularity is contingent upon its becoming one possible expression of all the other existants, with which it is entangled beyond space and time" (Da Silva, 2016, p. 58). Rejecting the idea of a fundamental separation between human collectives, whether in terms of nationality, ethnicity or social (gender, sexual, racial) identity, she understands 'difference' not as a manifestation of an unresolvable estrangement but as a thread of commonality. This re-imagination of sociality supports an ethico-political intervention capable of interrupting processes of isolation in a segmented world. If people understand themselves to be interconnected and mutually influencing each other, and thus as co-creating experiences and articulations, they might be able to resist the mechanisms of financialised capitalism that structures mutual dependency in such a way that interests are often mutually exclusive.

Certainly, there are limitations of simply advocating for 'relationality' as if it were a self-evident good (Gilbert, 2014). As we have seen in the context of cultural production, connections are to be made but never simply given or assumed. As Stevphen Shukaitis found when interviewing creative workers operating in the Old Truman Brewery in East London, artists are often caught between competing agendas, as well as in the gap between their declared aims and the actual complexity of everyday practice. Their communities seem fragmented into hierarchies of powers and in conflicts of interest with one another – conflicts materially reproduced by the workings

of the entrepreneurial labour market.

Bearing in mind solidarity involves commitment and work, Sara Ahmed poses that alliances between people are not guaranteed by the pre-existing form of a social group or community, whether that form is understood as commonality or uncommonality. Proposing a model of 'strange encounters' as a form of political activism and collective work, she asserts collectivity "is not about proximity or distance, but a getting closer which accepts the distance, and puts it to work" (Ahmed, 2000, p. 180). Taking this into account, perhaps the question is not so much *what* it is that creative practitioners may share, but rather *how* they make connections with others. This is exemplified in the practice of Precarias a la Deriva, who organised a series of workshops on globalised care in Madrid in 2003. Set up to function as a space of encounter among female domestic workers, these workshops offered the possibility to create concrete transnational alliances and networks of cooperation between women from very different geographic and ethnic backgrounds. Whilst highlighting the symbolic and material asymmetries between migrant and indigenous domestic workers, the group actively tried to deconstruct hierarchies within the Spanish care labour market reinforced by European immigration laws. In doing so they engaged the complicities produced in encounters and addressed their own implications as research-activists.

One way of conceptualising the manner in which occupants of different positionalities relate and communicate can be found in the notion of partiality. In her 'Manifesto for Cyborgs' as well as 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', Donna Haraway employs the term partiality in order to challenge the assumption that all knowers are effectively interchangeable and that knowledge exists separately from them. Besides throwing the neutrality of (feminist) epistemology into question, her motive is to envision a world in which people are "not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (Haraway, 2004, p. 13). Entertaining the possibility of making connections without assumptions of comparability, this conception offers an imaginative entry into how we might conceive of social relationships in our contemporary society.

Following Haraway, partiality allows for a rendering of reality that, explicitly coming from a particular or specific site of enunciation, accepts its non-totalising character, as well as the existence of other valid renderings coming from diverse locations (Haraway, 1988, p. 584). Such politics of positioning and situating also questions the concept of one true and complete self. While stressing the split and fragmentary aspects of subjectivity, Haraway writes: "the knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another" (Haraway, 1988, p. 586).

Because partial subjects can only ever make partial connections with others, they aspire to dialogue rather than identification. In her book *Partial Connections*, anthropologist Marilyn Strathern argues this is the kind of connection one might conceive between entities that are made and reproduced in different ways, but which work together (Strathern, 1991, p. 37). Echoing Haraway's analysis of the cyborg as a field of extensions, Strathern claims partiality is neither a singular 'I' nor a plural 'we', neither one nor many, but a circuit of connections

that joins parts that cannot be compared insofar as they are not 'isomorphic' with one another (Strathern, 1991, p. 54). Because subjects are never corresponding or similar in form, partiality is able to create "webs of connections" and "shared conversations" (Haraway, 1988, p. 584) between beings who do not require to be bound by appeal to common unity or origin, but who are connected as different, exterior presences to one another.

With regards to commoning and building solidarity across difference(s) in neoliberal capitalism today, I suggest reinstigating the notion of partiality, allowing artists to imagine subjectivity outside of binaries that signify relationships of 'either or' or 'the one as opposed to the other'. As a consciously enacted strategy for social and political organisation, partial relationality offers a pathway to reconsider the divide between friends and strangers, between commonality and uncommonality, between sameness and difference. For those who are suspicious of holism but yearn for connection, it asserts the claim that collectivity does not have to be understood merely in terms of aggregations of atomised individuals or of homogenising communities. Whether conceived as individual or collective, a partial subject cannot be approached holistically or atomistically, as an entity or as a multiplication of entities.

For it replicates an interesting complexity, the idea of partiality is also able to make cultural producers more conscious of the mechanisms they use to defend and maintain structures of inequality within the creative sector. As discussed in this article, their responsibility and accountability can be extended to see not only how they are oppressed but also the way in which their actions maintain other people's subjection. Becoming partial can inspire such a practice. Following Haraway's claim that "we do not seek partiality for its own sake, but for the sake of connections" (Haraway, 1988, p. 590), my hope is that creative practitioners relate difference by partial connection rather than antagonistic opposition or capitalised functionality. As opposed to an individualised independence that fends off the negatively connoted dependency of others, the recognising of partial relationality can form the beginning of a process of constructing the common in a moment in which the common ground seems shattered. By practising a self-conscious commoning with 'others' and making connections without assumptions of comparability, creative practitioners might be able to overcome some of the distances that a fragmented, segmented and competitive social space multiplies everywhere.

Abstract

Surveying different modalities and contradictions inherent to conceptions of commonality and solidarity in the arts, this article explores how cultural producers can resist essentialist configurations of political identity and practise 'commoning' within post-Fordist neoliberal capitalism through the notion of partial relationality.

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