

Situating self-precarisation: cultural production, subjectification and resistance in kleines postfordistisches Drama's *Kamera Lauft!*

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ABSTRACT

In the current conditions of governance, cultural producers seem to willingly subordinate themselves to the dispositions of power, by aligning to the neoliberal model of labour through the adoption of entrepreneurial self-practices. This article explores how the concept of 'self-precarisation' is debated and negotiated through *Kamera Lauft!* (*Camera Rolling!*), a video project made in 2004 by the Berlin-based group kleines postfordistisches Drama (Small post-Fordist Drama). Situating the everyday lived experiences of cultural producers in a public sphere, kleines postfordistisches Drama problematises the possibilities for critical agency and collective resistance under the conscious and voluntary acceptance of precarious labour in the 21st century.

Introduction: 'just me and the market'

It's basically just me and the market.

– *Kamera Lauft!* 2004

The restructuring of production that accompanied the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism has been followed by radical ideological changes, including the rise of individualist modes of thought and behaviour and a growing culture of entrepreneurialism (Sennett, 1998; McRobbie, 2015). As a result of the dismantling of state responsibility and the promotion of the self-optimisation of the individual, working conditions have become increasingly unstable, insecure and flexible (Berardi, 2010; Marazzi, 2011). It is argued that those who work in the cultural sector, especially, are exploited easily, because they seem to bear their living and working conditions eternally due to strong beliefs in freedom and autonomy (Lorey, 2006). Indeed for many freelance and self-employed cultural producers, everyday life is marked by structural

discontinuity and permanent fragility. It is difficult for them to distinguish between work and life, between production and reproduction (Hardt & Negri, 2000; Sennett, 2006). Divisions between private selves and public personas and between creativity and its virtuosic performance are breaking down and actively producing new forms of precarious labour (Virno, 2004; Fisher, 2009).

However, we cannot speak of an overpowering and totalising 'economising of life' coming from the outside. In fact, many cultural producers have entered into precarious conditions of their own accord. They believe they have chosen their own living and working situations, thinking these can be arranged relatively freely and autonomously. They have also consciously chosen the uncertainties and lack of continuities under these conditions (Lorey, 2006). The strong desires for freedom and autonomy driving cultural producers can lead to a process of subjectification that political theorist Isabell Lorey calls 'self-precarisation'. Self-precarisation can be described as the condition of free and autonomous self-activity in the increasingly exploitative working and living conditions of neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism (Lorey, 2006).

In the context of cultural production, self-precarisation represents a mode of regulation that is highly ambivalent. On one hand, it stands for the pervasive results of the new labour market such as the transformation of the cultural producer's subjectivity into a commodity to be manufactured and sold. On the other hand, cultural production is by no means productive only for a new phase of capitalist accumulation, as it carries the potential to exceed capitalist regimes by allowing people to take control over life and the way time is spent. It is suggested that due to its affective dimensions and collaborative modes of production, self-chosen precarious labour offers opportunities for social transformation (Gill & Pratt, 2008). Many cultural producers believe in the liberating possibilities of self-precarisation, especially with regard to the experience of agency – that is, the degree of active involvement they have in shaping their personal experiences and social relations.

But what happens if the submissive and obedient moments of self-precarisation ultimately prevail over its transgressive and subversive aspects? How is self-precarisation different from the situation in which self-determined modes of production contribute to the conditions for becoming an active part of the exploitative relations in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism (Lorey, 2006)?

What does it mean that, in the new conditions of governance, the cultural producer has emerged as the figure of the precarious labourer par excellence? Taking these questions as a starting point, this article explores the potential for critical agency and collective resistance under the conscious and voluntary acceptance of precarious labour in the cultural sector. I investigate how subversive techniques of self-government within cultural production are debated and negotiated through *Kamera Lläuft!* (*Camera Rolling!*), a video made in 2004 by the Berlin-based group *kleines postfordistisches Drama* (Small post-Fordist Drama) (kpD).

kpD investigates the social context in which cultural producers have to position themselves as they are increasingly conventionalised into role models of economic privatisation. For *Kamera Lläuft!* the group interviewed cultural producers living in and around Berlin about their self-chosen precarious labour practices. By scripting and re-staging their personal testimonies in a fictional production setting, kpD drew

attention to the performative self-relations inherent in the processes of cultural production. My analysis of *Kamera Lauft!* builds upon primary research into kpD's practice and thinking, as well as secondary sources describing, interpreting and discussing their video project.¹ Drawing upon the work of political theorist Isabell Lorey, who is also a member of kpD, I examine the discursive strategies and conceptual tactics the group applies in order to negotiate the sense-making and meaning-giving of self-precarisation. My aim is to explore to what extent kpD's signifying practice offers innovative ways to politicise contemporary labour relations and create new socio-political alliances between precarious subjectivities in the 21st century.

Cultural production, subjectification and resistance

In her book *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, Isabell Lorey states that 'precarisation can be considered not only in its repressive, striating forms, but also in its ambivalently productive moments, as these emerge by way of techniques of self-government' (Lorey, 2015:14). Lorey's analysis focuses on Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, which describes the structural entanglement between the government of a state and the techniques of self-government in modern Western societies (Foucault, 1991). According to Foucault, the governability of individuals is always also made possible by the way they govern themselves. In other words, through self-conduct people can become socially, politically and economically controllable. Foucault states that 'the art of governing' is not easy to discern, as it consists in inwardly held self-discipline (Foucault, 2007a). This process of domination is not based upon the direct exercise of power but rather on the subtle control of (psychic) desire. As such, governmentality often appears as a free decision or personal insight. According to Lorey, the technique of self-government presents a process of subjectification that is contradictory in itself. Instead of negating the vitality and capacities of individuals, it creates, shapes and utilises individuals as 'free' subjects (Lorey, 2015:34). As such, the art of governing can be regarded as a power relation that works *through* and not *against* subjectivity.

Governing, controlling, disciplining, and regulating one's self means, at the same time, fashioning and forming one's self, empowering one's self, which in this sense, is what it means to be free. Only through this paradox can sovereign subjects be governed. Precisely because techniques of governing one's self arise from the simultaneity of subjugation and empowerment, the simultaneity of compulsion and freedom, in this paradoxical movement, the individual not only becomes a subject, but a certain, modern 'free' subject. Subjectivated in this way, this subject continually participates in (re)producing the conditions for governmentality. (Lorey, 2006)

Here the ambivalent nature of self-precarisation comes to the fore. It symbolises a contested field in which the attempt to start a new cycle of exploitation also meets

1 Through qualitative interviews as well as document, content and context analyses I establish original research into kpD's work as part of my PhD thesis on discursive feminist art practices and methodologies that interrogate precarity in neoliberal, post-Fordist capitalism.

desires and subjective behaviours (Frassanito-Network, 2006). Because the poles of self-determination and adaptation ‘perpetually reinforce one another’ (Raunig, 2011:202), self-precarisation represents a process of continuous becoming. It cannot be understood in terms of cause and effect, or having a beginning or end, but as a constantly shifting conflation.

Today, modes of subjectification that are ambivalently positioned between self-determination and obedience are no longer perceived as a phenomenon of exception, but are instead in the midst of a process of normalisation, which enables governing through the privatisation of risks and self-responsibility (Lorey, 2015). In the neoliberal post-Fordist ‘self-regulating’ market, everyone is required to take personal accountability for his or her own potential and development. As Nicolas Rose puts it, ‘The forms of freedom we inhabit today are intrinsically bound to a regime of subjectification in which subjects are not merely “free to choose” but obliged to be free’ (Rose, 1996:17).

The appropriation of desires for freedom and autonomy can be traced back to demands of the international social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, such as the Autonomist or Operaist (which translates literally as ‘Workerist’) movement in Italy. The emergence of this left-wing political organisation is rooted in the dissatisfaction of factory workers who rejected union compromises and called for go-slow policies and a refusal of work (Wright, 2002). Disregarding Fordist models of production that featured serial labour within a strong hierarchy and clear-cut working hours, Autonomists demanded more flexibility, consultative structures in the company hierarchy, increased autonomy for employees and respect for the individual (Lotringer & Marazzi, 2007). Although the movement fostered unprecedented levels of freedom and innovation in the workplace, developments within post-Fordism transformed their demands into new forms of control, exploitation and precarious conditions (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007). For example, the rights and protections workers had previously been entitled to, were compromised, while the labour force was dispersed, with an increase in franchising and subcontracting, as well as part-time, temporary and self-employed work (Weeks, 2011).

Following post-Autonomist intellectuals in Italy and France, the precarisation of labour conditions is seen as a consequence of the new economy that has its emphasis on the immaterial production of information and services (Lazzarato, 1996; Hardt & Negri, 2000; Virno, 2004; Berardi, 2009). This type of labour – also referred to as creative, cultural, network, cognitive, info, service, affective or linguistic labour – does not so much produce physical objects as ideas, states of being and relations. It is dependent upon and productive of communication and cooperation rather than a finished product (Lazzarato, 1996). This is why relational skills and intersubjective competences have become important qualities in the immaterial production process (Virno, 2004). Moreover, this form of labour requires inventive and imaginative capacities: workers need to develop their creative potential and come up with ideas that are new, surprising, innovative and thus valuable (McRobbie, 2015).

In his book *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Paolo Virno states that production in neoliberal post-Fordist capitalism is developing towards a virtuosic performance (Virno, 2004). Individuals are no longer defined by what they produce but by the extent to which they produce and reproduce themselves. According to Virno, virtuosity finds its

fulfilment as an activity only in itself. In other words, it creates its own value. Because the work itself lacks a specific extrinsic goal or end product, the virtuoso worker has to rely on witnesses. Due to its performative characteristics, virtuosic production requires a social space that is structured like the public. It demands the presence of others; it demands that one 'exposes' oneself to the gaze of others (Virno, 2004:52).

It is suggested that the public performance of creative subjectivity has become a central feature of the neoliberal post-Fordist workplace (Holmes & von Osten, 2004). However, Isabell Lorey states 'the new form of labour force based on communication, knowledge, creativity and affect is by no means exclusively productive for a new phase of capitalist accumulation' (Lorey, 2015:103).² Because the value produced by this work cannot be entirely calculated and measured (i.e. it is difficult to economise), performative and virtuosic forms of production can go beyond the terms required by the contemporary economic system. Subject positions and social relationships arise that do not entirely correspond to the neoliberal logic of valorisation, and which could potentially exceed and disrupt capitalist control and regulation (Lorey, 2015:103). Yet it can be argued that the creative processes and affective relations characterising these alternative forms of production are used in order to promote the conditions required by the self-regulating markets of cognitive-cultural economies (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007).

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, social-democratic governments across Europe set in motion a transformative shift towards a culturalisation of the economy and a corresponding economisation of culture (McRobbie, 2015). This is exemplified in the structural adjustment plans of the German labour market in which self-employed and freelance professionals working in the creative and cultural sectors are presented as the role models for the new economy (Osten, 2011). Following Marion von Osten, 'subject positions outside the mainstream labour force are presented as self-motivated sources of productivity, and those who occupy these positions are celebrated as passionately committed "creators of new, subversive ideas"; innovative lifestyles and ways of working' (Osten, 2011:137). Around the turn of the 21st century, cultural producers in Berlin, Munich and Zurich who were critical of these developments started to engage in collaborative forms of action in order to confront the new realities of their production. kpD was one of these initiatives, aiming to investigate the social context in which cultural producers based in and around Berlin had to position themselves as they were increasingly conventionalised into role models of economic privatisation. Their 2004 video project *Kamera Lauft!* (*Camera Rolling!*) pays special attention to cultural producers who have willingly subordinated themselves to the new dispositions of power, by aligning to the neoliberal model of labour through the adoption of entrepreneurial self-practices.

Self-precarisation in kpD's *Kamera Lauft!*

The cultural production of kpD

kpD comprised filmmaker, artist and researcher Brigitta Kuster; political theorist and lecturer Isabell Lorey; artist, curator, teacher and researcher Marion von Osten; and

2 In a similar fashion, Michel Feher has argued that the neoliberal condition expresses aspirations and demands that its promoters had neither intended nor foreseen (Feher, 2009).

artist and researcher Katja Reichard, who also runs the thematic bookshop Pro qm in Berlin. The group was developed in the framework of the exhibition *Atelier Europa* held at the Kunstverein in Munich in 2004, and has founding connections with the *Be Creative! The Creative Imperative* project at the Museum für Gestaltung in Zurich in 2002 and the *Falsches-Leben-Show* at Prater der Volksbühne in Berlin in 2001 (kpD, 2005a). These projects aimed to discuss the changing perceptions and practices of cultural production amidst the process of adapting to a post-industrial information and service society (Osten & Grammel, 2004).

Notably, kpD uses the term ‘cultural producer’ in a strategic manner. The group does not speak of a certain sector or social category, but of practices that traverse different fields: ‘theory production, design, political and cultural self-organisation, forms of collaboration, paid and unpaid jobs, informal and formal economies, temporary alliances, project-related working and living’ (kpD, 2005b). Here, cultural production is understood as a type of ‘thinking-making’ informed by various economies and ecologies, which can be financial, social, political, libidinal or cognitive. Aiming to go beyond a reductionist approach towards the notion of cultural production, kpD employs process-based, collaborative and transdisciplinary ways of working. The group attempts to ‘align the logics of various knowledge milieus, research agendas, styles of thinking and practices of making things public’ (Holert, 2017). While negotiating different interests, demands and expectations, ‘unexpected and experimental commonalities’ can appear around shared urgencies in the creative and cultural sector (Holert, 2017).

Coupling the sociological analysis of cultural production with questions of self-precarisation, subjectification and resistance, kpD does not only develop aesthetic products but also discourses and socio-political fields of action. Their video project *Kamera Lläuft!* was presented as a multi-channel video installation in art exhibitions, and used as a target group video in workshops and seminars around the subject of self-precarisation.³ In this context, the project operates as a tool for cultural producers to raise their self-awareness of their own oppression, ‘in order to promote a political reinterpretation of their own life and establish bases for its transformation’ (Molina, 2004). As such, kpD’s practice is inscribed in traditions of women’s consciousness-raising groups deriving from second-wave feminism, which asserted that the only way to build a radical movement was by starting from the self (Sarachild, 1978). By beginning at a private level, in facing one’s own struggles and to start changing one’s own conditions, it becomes possible to identify with the struggles of others. For this reason, kpD locate personal narratives and exchanges at the heart of their artistic, cultural and political strategies. By taking the subjective experience of self-chosen precarious work as a starting point, the group aims to create new socio-political alliances between dispersed cultural producers.

For kpD, the production of knowledge, in terms of situatedness, is crucial for the formation of new subjectivities and coalitions. Situated knowledge stands for

3 I came across *Kamera Lläuft!* for the first time in March 2013, during a workshop on the self-precarisation of cultural producers organised by kpD member Isabell Lorey for the 4th Former West Research Congress *Documents, Constellations, Prospects* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin.

knowledge that is specific to a particular situation. It can be described as a form of objectivity that accounts for both the agency of the knowledge producer and that of the object of study. The concept has been developed by Donna Haraway, who argues for ‘politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims’ (Haraway, 1988:589). In the process of constructing meaning around self-precarisation, the members of kpD address their own situations as cultural producers. Confronting the conditions of their own work and personal life, the group generates knowledge that is situated and embodied, rather than supposedly neutral and distanced. Haraway asserts that ‘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, 1988:586). In a similar way, kpD’s self-reflexive practice does not offer a coherent understanding of self-precarisation. Instead, Kuster, Lorey, Von Osten and Reichard invoke a space in which singular threads of everyday lived experiences running between themselves and others can be articulated and related to one another.

Ambiguous subjectivities in *Kamera Lauft!*

For their video project *Kamera Lauft!* kpD interviewed 15 cultural producers living in and around Berlin to learn about the everyday lives, desires and perspectives of those whose workday is extremely flexible and largely autonomous.⁴ The group used the mechanism of the interview as an ‘excuse’ to talk among themselves and other cultural producers about self-chosen precarious living and working conditions. Questions asked during the interviews included the following: ‘How would you describe your working life? What do you like about it and what should change? When and why does it all become too much and what do you do then? What do you consider a “good life”?’ (kpD, 2005a).

kpD’s survey is based on the method of militant inquiry, a research praxis developed by Potere Operaio (Workers’ Power), a radical left-wing political group from Italy active between 1968 and 1973 (Lotringer & Marazzi, 2007). This praxis – referred to as militant research, movement research, research militancy, co-research or workers’ inquiry – supposes that the knowledge needed to change production methods and lifestyles is inherent in the conditions of production themselves and articulated in the desire for change felt by those working in this particular sphere (Colectivo Situaciones, 2007). As such, militant research cannot be separated from concrete struggle; rather it is embedded within it. It is a process that involves actual or everyday encounters between diverse parties, searching for an understanding of their own situations, developing together a collective language and able to name problems in order to fight them (Producciones Translocales of the Counter-Cartographies Collective, 2008). The production of knowledge is also the production of subjectivity and the agency of

4 Among the people interviewed were political scientist, writer and documentary filmmaker Dario Azzellini; artist Pauline Boudry; author, music journalist and cultural critic Diedrich Diederichsen; researcher and lecturer Katja Diefenbach, who also runs the bookshop and publishing house b_books in Berlin; art historian, art critic, writer and teacher Tom Holert; artist, costume designer and stage designer Mona Kuschel; as well as the four members of kpD.

common practices and languages, as well as the construction of a political self-organisation.

Notably, kpD translated the results of their survey into a script, hybridising the personal testimonies of the interviewees into composite dramatised identities. Nine professional actors were hired to play out the problematic small 'work/life' dramas that occur for flexible workers in cultural contexts. Throughout the film, we see the characters waiting, rehearsing, preparing and performing auditions in a fictional production setting in Zurich. This setting – somewhere between a casting stage, a dressing room, a rehearsal space, a chill-out lounge and a bar – is used to re-contextualise the edited interview material in a social space. Among the protagonists are a self-employed publisher and journalist who works night shifts to make ends meet; a freelance costume designer who, as a single parent, receives benefits from the government to cover her costs of living; an independent music journalist who also works as a lecturer at a university; a former information technology specialist who wants to become a performing actor; and an artist who gave up her job at a cinema box office to start a bookshop co-operative.

All these characters have consciously chosen their living and working conditions and believe they are developing 'the essence of their being to the maximum in a relatively free and autonomous manner' (Lorey, 2011:84). However, in *Kamera Lauft!* their situations seem more exploitative than empowering. The multiple jobs and projects in which they are involved lead to a constant overtaxing of time and capacities. Their activities change the quality of their work and life, as well as the boundaries separating these spheres. As one character says, 'I find if work seeps into your life, it's really totally stressful to take free time because you always have to demand it of yourself'. Another expresses:

You make your own pressure above all – and work is, for me, very threatening. I don't think of spare time as free time. But I'm always thinking: 'Shit, then you've got to do this, then you still have to do that' ... I thread my way through the day captured like this.

If work can be done in non-standardised hours, it becomes difficult for them to stop working at all. As Beat Weber puts it, 'Every last bit of personal freedom is colonised by work, resulting in the continuous feeling that each minute must be devoted to something productive' (Weber, 2004).

Many of the cultural producers in *Kamera Lauft!* are physically mobile and mentally flexible; they can be 'plugged in' anywhere and anytime. As one character states, 'Usually I'm three days there, three days here, three days there. Everything depends very much on how I am merged into whichever institutional conditions'. Rhythms of labour are intermittent, fluid and discontinuous. Stop-and-go 'bulimic' patterns of working, in which periods with no work can give way to periods that require intense activity and round the clock working, have major impacts on their sleep, diet and health (Gill & Pratt, 2008). One of the protagonists complains, 'My arm's been hurting for months now. It's the computer arm that's gone on strike: I don't want to do it anymore.'

Nevertheless, the protagonists in the video also see certain possibilities within their self-chosen precarious labour. Learning and being able to deal with contingency and

the unforeseen are experienced as emancipatory. Freelancing or working independently, rather than in a position of permanent employment, corresponds to their desire for an enjoyable way of life that is not structured by others. Many of the characters believe they are moving towards higher levels of production. As one of them says, 'One can permanently get the feeling that something's happening, that you are addressed, that you're doing something.' Here, self-precarisation allows for the 'accumulation of diverse knowledges, skills and abilities through work and life experiences in permanent construction' (Precarias a la Deriva, 2004). Furthermore, the working relationships of cultural producers are less hierarchical and more informal in tone. Their collaborative modes of production provide opportunities for alternative social relations and affective interactions.

For these reasons, the characters in *Kamera Lauft!* would not give up their relationship to their working and living conditions, even though they know, on some level of awareness, the processes they are involved in to be 'self-threatening' (Ray, 2011:178). As the video progresses, we start wondering if the advantage of self-determination and the rejection of the rigid orders of Fordist regimes is still a convincing argument for self-precarisation. Perhaps the protagonists have become 'prisoners' as employees of their own temporary, ephemeral and project-based micro-enterprises? It seems that their self-realisation comes at the cost of a much higher risk that can be regarded as a kind of Faustian bargain.⁵ Instead of emancipated subjectivities, kpD enacts cultural producers as self-destructive agents who perpetuate the very systems that seek to oppress and limit their autonomy and freedom. The mechanisms of exploitation inherent in the process of self-precarisation are further problematised through the environment in which the characters are situated.

Virtuosic performances of the self

The narrative of *Kamera Lauft!* revolves around a casting process including a series of auditions in which we see the protagonists performing monologues in front of cameras. kpD chose this format for their video project during a time when reality TV talent shows were becoming popular in Germany, such as *Deutschland sucht den Superstar* (*Germany Seeks the Superstar*) broadcast in 2002 on RTL. These programmes, in which candidates are called upon to demonstrate their 'talents' and self-initiative, can be regarded as the ultimate example of the neoliberal economising of subjectivities, in which issues of performativity, virtuosity and self-promotion are taken to extremes. The reality TV casting format illustrates how the competitive structure of contemporary society relies on a theatrical exhibition of individuality. Encouraging participants to 'be themselves' on camera (often without payment), the show provides a template for a form of profit-generating performance of personality, in which creative, innovative and virtuosic individuals are generating their own self-brand (Hearn, 2010; Ouellette, 2014)

While being filmed, the cultural producers in *Kamera Lauft!* are asked to 'come out' and openly express private thoughts, feelings and beliefs about their self-chosen working and living conditions. When they perform their monologues, their behaviour

⁵ Here, the adjective 'Faustian' implies a situation in which an ambitious person surrenders his or her (moral) integrity in order to achieve power and success for a fixed term.

is affected by the presence of the cameras, directors and production team. Many of the protagonists have difficulty concentrating, get nervous or fail to reproduce their text. Consequently they experience feelings of frustration and irritation. As one character says, 'Don't walk around please.' And later, 'Can you leave the room, you're totally annoying me.' In between their auditions, we see the candidates rehearsing their monologues. They recite from scripts, while recording their voices or filming themselves with handheld cameras. Instead of face-to-face communication, there is a lot of face-to-camera mediation in *Kamera Lläuft!*. The distinct presence of cameras as well as the title of kpD's video project ('Camera rolling' is the traditional cue at the beginning of a take) points to the fact that nowadays the public sphere is increasingly becoming a construction of mediated performances in which self-reflexivity plays an important role.

Besides the protagonists, the directors, kpD members Kuster, Von Osten and Reichard, and the production team working on set and behind the scenes are also visible on screen. We do not just see those who are inscribed in *Kamera Lläuft!* (the actors) but also those who are producing it (the directors, producers, camera operators, sound and lighting technicians, set dressers, costume designers, hair and makeup artists, etc.). In other words, we see cultural producers working *in* and *for* the video project at the same time.⁶ All activities taking place in *Kamera Lläuft!* are expressed by means of on-camera/off-camera intercutting. Consequently, it is not always clear whether the video is documenting a scripted situation or an actual occurrence. We do not always know if we are looking at a rehearsal, a casting audition or a production setting. It can be argued that all activities occurring in kpD's production setting involve virtuosic performances of the self that require the presence of others. But this dependency on others seems to lead to a proliferation of feelings of isolation. Even though the cultural producers in *Kamera Lläuft!* are part of the same continuum, they do not seem to express and define themselves from the common ground of their precarious conditions. Despite their highly collaborative and networked practices based on communicative abilities and social relations, they do not exchange practices of disobedient self-government in order to re-appropriate and politicise self-precarisation.

Cultural producers as political actors

In her book *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, Isabell Lorey explores the extent to which cultural producers can become political actors. She notes that there is

6 Exposing the constructed artificiality of their production, kpD bring into action the so-called disposition or apparatus of *Kamera Lläuft!*. Michel Foucault defines disposition (*dispositif*) as 'a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions' (Foucault, 1995:194). Giorgio Agamben extends this understanding by stating that an apparatus is 'literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control or secure the gestures, behaviours, opinions, or discourses of living being' (Agamben, 2009:14). Both definitions suggest a device that has a strategic function and is organised in response to specific needs. The disposition or apparatus kpD employs for *Kamera Lläuft!* might in some ways be reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's deployment of the alienation effect. Brecht attempted to activate alienation positively in order to provoke critical thought that might lead to actions of resistance and change. He wanted his audiences to adopt a critical perspective in order to recognise social injustice and exploitation and to be moved to go forth from the theatre and effect change in the world outside (Martin, 2013).

no increase in politicisation solely on the basis of living and working conditions dependent on communicative abilities, networking and social relations (Lorey, 2015). Performative-virtuoso production is not immediately and automatically linked with political freedom, but rather with individualistic forms of freedom. She writes that 'even though it can only be carried out in the presence of others and often involves social cooperation, and though it is situated amid the materialisation of the social, a servile virtuosity concentrated on itself hinders common political action' (Lorey, 2015:87). In other words, a disobedience or rejection of capitalisable self-government can only happen through non-servile and non-individualistic virtuosity. As such, the political dimension of self-precarisation can only be explored together, through substantial affective encounters and communicative exchanges with others.

According to kpD, the cultural producers surveyed for their video project answered questions about individual strategies of dealing with their self-chosen precarious working and living conditions. However, the interviewees barely responded to queries addressing the shared dimension of self-precarisation. Moreover, questions about collective politicisation and (self-)organisation were hardly touched upon at all (kpD, 2005b). This is the reason why the cultural producers in *Kamera Lauft!* are mostly oriented to themselves and their own milieu. Even though they are located in the same physical space, they do not seem to 'sense' each other's self-precarisation. Attempts to discuss the common dimensions of their situations lead to confrontations in which the different points of view of the protagonists (pragmatic, activist, scholarly, artistic) cause friction and disagreement. The social context, in which the cultural producers are forced to endlessly produce and reproduce virtuosic self-images, creates a dynamic that prevents their individuated understandings and subjectivities finding their commonality.

Franco Berardi argues that:

in order for struggles to form a cycle there must be a spatial proximity of the bodies of labour and an existential temporal continuity. Without this proximity and this continuity, we lack the conditions for the cellularised bodies to become [a] community. (Berardi, 2010:34)

Social and political movements in the early 2000s attempted to create a politics of labour which was not based upon being located in the same physical workplace, but rather through the creation of shared positions in various cultural fields. For example, the transnational EuroMayDay mobilisations held between 2001 and 2006 aimed to build alliances across the social sphere and bring together antagonisms against common but differing forms of exploitation, such as the positions of low-paid workers in chain stores, computer programmers and undocumented migrants (Shukaitis, 2012). In 2003, the Intermittents du Spectacle, an organisation of precarious cultural workers in the entertainment industry in France, demanded new collective social rights and a state-guaranteed system of social security. In doing so, they rejected the reproduction of conventional subjectivities and the division into 'artists' and 'other precariously employed persons', such as undocumented immigrants, researchers, journalists and students (Global Project / Coordination des Intermittents et Precaires d'Ile de France, 2004). For these movements, the convergence of struggles is intended to unite different

protests emerging in various social spheres and to turn their limited collective actions into a multi-sector mobilisation.

On one hand, it can be argued that *Kamera Lauft!* reflects a very tight discussion of Western post-capitalism that needs to be challenged. kpD's video project primarily addresses cultural producers from the fields of art, creative industries and alternative politics. There are no explicit relations to the dimensions of self-precarisation that are shaped by migration, citizenship or racism. If self-precarisation is a subject that needs to be viewed through different practices and critiques, it is necessary to think and reach outside the field of cultural production. Only then can self-chosen precarisation be transformed into an accessible instrument of resistance, enabling the imagination of different contemporary politics, lives and subjectivities. On the other hand, as Stephen Shukaitis points out:

There is a risk of identifying common positions and grounds for struggle by drawing out the implications of changes in the forms of labour that do not necessarily resonate with those experiencing them, or do not necessarily produce unproblematic alliances. (Shukaitis, 2012:246)⁷

Social and political movements thematising precarisation as the starting point for communal solidarity and political action, often aim to turn the multitude of isolated, precarious workers into an effective political agent. But in trying to bring together disparate groups in order to promote a specific argument, crucial differences are erased. The point is not to collapse various types of precarious workers into one composite category, such as the much circulated term 'precariat'.⁸ Equally, it is insufficient to subordinate different labour practices to a single logic of production (Rossiter & Neilson, 2005). By any account, precarity does not have a model worker. Self-precarisation does not have a model producer either. As its very reality is characterised by a plurality of experiences, knowledge about self-chosen precarious working and living conditions cannot be displayed in a subject-oriented or identitarian way.

Conclusion: 'just us and the market'

How much potential for individual and collective resistance comes with the shifted productive relations and the modified subject of cultural labour remains a matter of debate. kpD recognises the difficulties in using the assumed experience of a shared space, time or framework within the context of self-chosen precarious labour. Their video does not offer specific directions for cultural producers to express and define

⁷ The problem of organisation and thinking together about different experiences of precarisation has been addressed by the Madrid-based feminist collective Precarias a la Deriva. Their publication and video project *A la Deriva, Por los Circuitos de la Precariedad Femenina (Adrift Through the Circuits of Feminised Precarious Work)* from 2002 explores possibilities of articulation among women who share the common experience of feminised precarious labour but are doing extremely different types of work: from university professors to sex workers. In comparing these different realities, the Precarias aim to demonstrate the variations in social recognition and degrees of vulnerability (Precarias a la Deriva, 2004).

⁸ This neologism brings together the meanings of 'precarious' and 'proletariat'. In his book *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, Guy Standing argues that precarious workers form a distinct social class with separate conditions and interests from other workers (Standing, 2011).

themselves from the common ground of self-precarisation. Yet we should not judge the transformative potential of *Kamera Lauft!* in a binary way. The kind of collaborative and transversal cultural production realised in kpD's project would hardly have worked if it took place solely on the ground of a 'negativist' approach.

kpD does not present ideas around the self-shaping of creative individuals and the social regulation of their selfhood as already understood or resolved. Recognising the ambiguities inherent in the process of self-precarisation, the group holds onto the many different layers of subjective stories, expressions and testimonies. For this reason, those seeking a clear answer to the problem of self-chosen precarious labour may find *Kamera Lauft!* frustratingly discursive. However, if self-precarisation symbolises a contested field in which the attempt to start a new cycle of exploitation also meets desires and subjective behaviours, cultural producers cannot be positioned in reductionist or dichotomous ways. Their situations cannot be addressed without working through the contradictions they are experiencing: within themselves, between each other and in relation to their working and living conditions. When investigating modes of subjectification ambivalently positioned between self-determination and obedience, we also need to displace the binary view of the cognitive-cultural economy as a hegemonic power and the alternative one as powerless. As Gene Ray observes, 'The culture industry [...] may operate according to a dominant logic, but the operations of this logic cannot exclude all possibilities for resistance. The culture industry is not utterly monolithic, any more than the capitalist state is' (Ray, 2011:175). Critical subjects can still emerge, and there is always some autonomy to claim and activate.⁹

kpD is careful to acknowledge that gaps and openings for critical agency within the virtuosic and performative processes of cultural production exist. Instead of anticipating the emergence of a new and disobedient self-government of precarious subjectivities, *Kamera Lauft!* further underlines the practical and conceptual difficulties around actualising the political potentials of self-chosen precarious working and living conditions. While negotiating different interests, demands and expectations, we should not shy away from exposing conflict and confrontation in this process. If the political re-appropriation of self-precarisation requires searching for commonality while fostering singularities, it also entails maintaining a certain tension between those singularities (Precarias a la Deriva, 2003).

As we have seen, kpD's project is formulated from the specific social context in which it fulfils its effective practice. Used as a target group video in workshops and seminars, *Kamera Lauft!* functions as a tool for cultural producers to raise their awareness of the exploitative mechanisms they are involved in. In this process, cultural producers can become critical observers and active participants in the creation of meaning around self-precarisation. Notably, consciousness is not perceived as a pre-existing object but rather as something to be generated. As such, kpD's project stimulates the production of knowledges that are situated and embodied, rather than supposedly neutral and distanced. Furthermore, it is through the articulation of a

9 Here, we can follow Michel Foucault, who proposes as a definition of critique the general characterisation of 'the art of not being governed quite so much' (Foucault, 2007b:45). In a similar fashion, we can start thinking about kpD's project as 'the practice of not being precarised quite so much.'

variety of everyday lived experiences within the specific context of cultural production that the common question of self-precarisation can be addressed. While analysing the conditions of their own small post-Fordist dramas, cultural producers may discover that what seems to be an isolated and individual problem actually reflects a common condition faced by many others. And this is where the transformative potential of kpD's video project lies. It provides a starting point from which cultural producers can begin to imagine a shift from 'just *me* and the market' towards a 'just *us* and the market'.

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