

ABOUT TIME:  
ON TRAINING  
FOR UNCERTAIN  
FUTURES AND  
WHY WE  
SHOULD CARE

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Time is not something you receive, nor something that you are given, but a resource that can and should be managed, something that you produce by setting priorities. In that sense, indeed, there is no time and we have no time. And the same probably holds true for places and things.<sup>1</sup>

This essay has taken its time. It is a reflection that has grown out of *This is Not a Love Song*, a one day tribunal held at the Sandberg Instituut in the fall of 2018 dedi-

1 Maarten Simons & Jan Masschelein: 'School - A Matter of Form' in: Pascal Gielen & Paul De Bruyne (eds): *Teaching Art in the Neoliberal Realm - Realism versus Cynicism*, Amsterdam: Valiz, 2012, p. 71.

2 *This is Not a Love Song* was a one day tribunal held at the Sandberg Instituut on 11th October 2018. For more information see [www.notalovesong.org](http://www.notalovesong.org).

4 Feminist consciousness raising is a practice developed by the Women's Liberation Movements across Europe and The USA in the 1960's and 1970's. For more information on the Danish Redstocking's Movement see: Lynn Walter, 'The embodiment of ugliness and the logic of love: The Danish Redstocking Movement', in: *Feminist Review* 36, 1990; Grundhæfte No 4: 'Håndbog i rødstrømpebevægelsen - "Jordemorpiecen"', Copenhagen: Kvindebevægelsen, 1981, p. 9.

cated to "precarious work and life conditions within the arts and beyond".<sup>2</sup> Following the tribunal, in the winter of 2019, I met with a group of students at the Sandberg Instituut to discuss "the general precarious situation of being a student in

Amsterdam".<sup>3</sup> Five students participated in the workshop, which took the format of a feminist consciousness raising group meeting.<sup>4</sup> As

3 The students had replied to an invitation to join a workshop on precarity hosted by myself and artist Emilia Bergmark.

someone who has, like many of us, been trained into an exhausted and exhausting art world, it was easy to recognise in these students the longing for community and solidarity that coexists with the enormous pressure of trying to go into adulthood while manoeuvring the uncertainty of the future. We are all trained to become entrepreneurs of the self. Productive selves, innovative

selves, flexible, agile. "One of the most valuable product forces of the entrepreneurial self is its learning ability; a force that produces new competencies, adds value to the self and fuels the accumulation of one's human capital."<sup>5</sup> It takes time and effort for us

5 Simon & Masschelein (note 1), p. 70.

all to accumulate our human capital. And time, for the entrepreneurial self, is time of investment, even when that time is spent on reproduction. The following is a musing on exactly this, how we are both in time and out of time, how we train for it and how school, supposedly a time and place of freedom, is perhaps one of the most formative spaces in which we are temporally trained to inhabit future marketplaces. We sleep, eat, take time off to maximise our potential. Even at home, we are on the market. My suspicion is that this training is a cocktail brewed for us with equal parts neoliberal subjectivation, pressure of production and lack of material resources for the

maintenance of life, materialising in time or the lack thereof. How did all of our time disappear?

## THE CRISIS OF TIME

Movement – the progression of time towards betterment, the distancing of the present from the past and a certain orientation towards the future – is central to time as it is understood within European modernity.<sup>6</sup> Specifically, in western society, the rise of Merchant Capitalism in the seventeenth century was

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Baraitser, *Enduring Time*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, p. 6.

instrumental in thinking about the future because it hinged its ideas of futurity on the creation of profits. The future of commodities (if they are saved or sold) and advancements in calculation capacities particularly within the new insurance industry which was forming at the time, shaped ideas of the future. Instead of being an unavoidable endpoint the future became a space of profit. This new orientation towards the future brought with it a novel, positive orientation towards risk. The future, like the land and the oceans, became a territory

to be conquered or colonised. The future became a space of competition – a process that continues today.<sup>7</sup>

Along with this new calculative, risk-oriented view of the future came a worldview that celebrated limitless human potential and the controllability of nature. This

ideology persisted for centuries and the perception of risk-taking as a heroic quality remains at the core of entrepreneurship. The future, for the entrepreneur, remains a promised land.

However, we find ourselves today at a temporal impasse. Neoliberalism, data-driven capitalism, seems to be speeding up time. The Climate Crisis, with its foreclosure of a deep planetary future at the will of humans, contradicts this very acceleration. According to British psychologist and cultural theorist Lisa Baraitser, in the current moment “we are learning painfully to attune ourselves to the contradictions of both experiences of immediacy and the rapid acceleration in social life, on the one hand, and the simultaneous slow

violences of contemporary capitalism on the other.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Baraitser, (note 6), p. 7.

Baraitser’s idea of slow violences points to the wounds inflicted on inhabitants of this planet over the course of centuries of capitalist extortion. It manifests in the present as the irreversible loss of biodiversity, the effects of nuclear catastrophes, the ongoing injustices of debt and wage slavery and the continuous privileging of certain bodies at the expense of others. These

violences, some immediately felt, others prolonged into the ‘deep future’ work in and between us to create not a bombastic event to end it all, but “a diffuse catastrophe that has already happened to unpredictably play itself out.”<sup>9</sup> The future, we seem to agree, is cancelled. Not concretely, of course, we will still have to get up Monday mornings and pay our bills, but the modernist idea of the future as development. The future

has become emptied of its affective qualities such as hope, anticipation, longing, or the promise of satisfaction or betterment. The future will come, for sure, but it will bring no fulfilment of the promises of the now.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

In this rather disturbing sense we are all out of time, stuck in a present with no future. But the ways in which we are out of time play out differently across lines of privilege. M., a student at the Sandberg, muses on her future in globally warmed Europe:

*I won't have a pension because I've always been a freelancer. But I know I'll inherit a plot of land so I'm playing with this idea: I'll have no money but then I can build a community in my home country, which will have grown warm because of climate change and we'll all grow our own food.*

For some, there is recourse; to parental aid, to plots of land. But how does the question of time play into this the formation of artistic-entrepreneurial subjectivity in art education? And how does it become visible with students at the Sandberg Instituut? How do we train *in* and *for* time?

## PROJECT TIME

Time is a strange thing in school, one seems to have both lots of it and never enough. Education is supposed to be a temporal free space in which, unlike after graduation, one can spend every waking, and for that matter sleeping moment on the subject of one's ‘passion’. School gives us time to be absorbed by ideas or by our *métier*, be it video art making, industrial design, medicine, teaching or auto mechanics.<sup>11</sup> At least that is how it should be. As F. notes:

<sup>11</sup> Passion is itself a highly problematic concept that is sold to us as the driver of production, the fuel that allows us to relish our time in school and on the labour market.

*Art school is a place of paradox. There's a pretence of freedom and the idea that all creation is worthy, but the outside world doesn't correspond with this model at all. There's no such thing as a free art practice. As artists you have to be entrepreneurs, have a network and connections. I understand that you don't want to be a school who teaches students to be business people, but ignoring what it means to survive as an artist nowadays seems even stranger to me.*

Today, universities must cater to the masses and to the market. An ever-increasing flow of new specialised programmes in creative education is offered to paying students and institutions face new levels of managerial demands and the burden of continuously rotating staff on zero-hour contracts. In this state of heightened production, school has ceased to be a utopian space of fantasy and freedom of deep engagement and the suspension of productive time.

Art and design education, perhaps to a higher degree than other fields of study, is governed by a wide range of highly dubious myths of passion, talent and genius. All of these come together in creative education to train students for a neoliberal labour market. In school, you learn to be dedicated, to always be in your studio preparing for your next crit, your final presentation, always working on a project. You train to never really be 'off'. You are, after all, a true artist. At the Sandberg Instituut this training to become an artist or designer, that is to become someone who physically and mentally inhabits their profession, can be traced back to the avant-garde ideal of uniting art and life, or life and work. The avant-gardes were revolutionary utopians who believed in an 'outside' to capitalism, a better future, the power of aesthetics to transform lives and worlds. Instead of a new world of creative freedom and exploration, what the avant-garde ideals have led to is the dissolution of the boundaries between life and work that has become the norm for highly skilled workers. This folding of passionate life into work has produced a figure that embodies work fully,

what Italian sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato has called 'the entrepreneur of the self'.<sup>12</sup>

In a neoliberal economy, studying is an investment in human capital, in the self.<sup>13</sup> It may seem ruthless to regard

the art student as a figure collecting human capital as an investment for future profit, but our art schools, their staff and students embody this paradigm, just as

12 Maurizio Lazzarato, 'Neoliberalism in Action: Inequality, Insecurity and the Reconstitution of the Social', in: *Theory, Culture & Society* 26:6 (2009) p. 110.

13 Wendy Brown quoted in: Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt, 'At tælle nattens timer: Studerende fører regnskab for affektivt og reproduktivt arbejde i senkapitalismen', in: *Kulturo. Tidsskrift for moderne kultur* 47 (2019), p. 5.

we ourselves are amalgamations of an abstract capital that we fail to grasp (and which certainly fails to turn up on our bank accounts). As performance theorist Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt has pointed to, the individualised portfolio, so personal and unique, is how we assess our student's progress, the sum total of each project and each human subject.<sup>14</sup> 14 Ibid., p. 6.

Slovenian performance artist and theorist Bojana Kunst has argued that the time of the cultural worker is 'project time'. We're all involved with projects, interesting ones and lots of them.<sup>15</sup> The project, Kunst says, becomes the horizon of our experience as we live through the projective time of proposals, deadlines, production and evaluation. Projective temporality, Kunst argues,

<sup>15</sup> Bojana Kunst, 'The Project Horizon: On the Temporality of Making', in: *Le Journal des Laboratoires*, Sept-Dec, 2011. Accessed through: <http://www.leslaboratoires.org/en/article/project-horizon/suivre-capturer-le-temps-dans-la-performance-contemporaine>.

is tightly intertwined with the subjective experience of time; it can be argued that contemporary subjectivities are increasingly experienced as the simultaneity of many projects, be they private, public, social, intimate ones, etc. It seems as if the temporality of the project also influences the rhythm of the transformation of subjectivity, which has to be flexible while at the same time moving towards an accomplishment, a realisation, an implementation.<sup>16</sup> 16 Ibid.

Projective temporality echoes the idea of the future as a space of investment, but on a personalised level. We do not invest in ships, but in our projects, ourselves. The problem with this projective mode, according to Kunst, is that it overwrites other formations of time and work. Durational research, challenging collaborations' open-ended inquiry becomes impossible because we are always stuck in production with no time for intimate or political relations, constantly recalibrating towards possible and always-more-than-realistic futures with dream budgets that never materialise. In this never-ending projective state "the future seems radically closed-down while offering all its numerous possibilities. Time deprivation obstructs the imagination and the creation of radical gestures, and disables any experimentation with enduring present."<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, if we are constantly chasing deadlines, threatened by lack of income or the visibility we need to survive in a precarious economy, how can we even begin to imagine what radical creative gestures might be? If this is correct, if the constraints of project

time become embedded in our students in their formative years of education, then we have on our hands a very difficult situation for the production of any kind of radical creativity.

## SCHOOL TIME

In the article 'Giving an Account of One's Work. From Excess to ECTS in Performance Art Education' Ullerup Schmidt looks at the governing practices of students at the BA Performance, Context, Choreography at Inter-University of Dance in Berlin. The Bologna Declaration, agreed upon by 29 European countries in 1999, was itself an attempt to consolidate European markets and allow students and graduates to travel freely, like goods, across nation state lines.<sup>18</sup> The decision introduced a streamlined credit system, the ECTS point, to consolidate study points in educational institutions with vastly different ways of scoring time. The ECTS point is an indicator of time spent studying and varies slightly across countries, from 25 hours in Austria to 30 hours in Romania, with the Netherlands safely in the middle at 28 hours of study – or work – per credit.<sup>19</sup> Ullerup Schmidt looks at the ways in which the Bologna Process recommendations are implemented and interpreted into technologies of management and self-governance practices that form student subjectivity in complicity with neoliberal logics. The students in Ullerup Schmidt's study train their skills in accounting life as work by closely monitoring time spent on everything from documenting, having meetings, writing applications and making costumes to conversations with friends and parents, sauna practice and walking in the park

<sup>18</sup> See website of 'European Higher Education Area'. Accessed through: <http://www.ehea.info/pid34248/history.html>.

<sup>19</sup> 'All You Need to Know about the European Credit System ECTS All You Need to Know about the European Credit System ECTS'. Accessed through: <https://www.mastersportal.com/articles/388/all-you-need-to-know-about-the-european-credit-system-ects.html>. Interestingly, ECTS points are estimates since a student might spend more or less time studying depending on prior knowledge, an acknowledgement that underlines the uneven distribution of privilege between students from different social classes.

<sup>20</sup> Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt, 'Giving an Account of One's Work. From Excess to ECTS in Performance Art Education', in: Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt, *Everybody Counts: The Aesthetics of Production in Higher Artistic Education and Performance Art Collectives*. PhD thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2019, pp. 39-53 (1-2).

if this is relevant to their course work.<sup>20</sup> This practice of self-accounting, of attuning to the market, is still taboo in many educational institutions that champion a (romantic) idea of passion, of the labour of love, and free artistic practice. The argument against training students in hard skills is usually that school should remain a creative and temporal free space before they are forced into so-called real life. The paradox here is, of course, that there is no such thing as a space not colonised by capitalism. While some educational

institutions do teach students to “get used to take care of the ongoing capitalisation and marketisation of your life”<sup>21</sup> – in the case of Inter-University by keeping score

of all hours spent on project work – Ullerup Schmidt argues that the practice of accounting for time holds a double bind. It trains the neoliberal governmentality of future workers while simultaneously acting as a critique of this same regime by “over-doing the demands of meritocracy and calculation [making the students] increasingly aware of the economy of time in artistic labour.”<sup>22</sup> Ullerup Schmidt quotes here

the strategies of the 1970s’ ‘Wages for Housework’ campaign which strategically made visible the affective and reproductive labour of women in the home, historically a site of femininity and a space of female enclosure. The Women’s Liberation Movement fought to free women from their

domestic duties and allow them access to the labour market on equal terms with men.<sup>23</sup> Paradoxically, and

perhaps pragmatically, for the Marxist feminists of the 1970s entering the workforce was a liberation from the kitchen; work shall set you free. In her seminal 1975

text *Wages against Housework* Sylvia Federici argues that by monetising the free labour performed by women in

the home, by rendering this ‘labour of love’ visible, the unpaid women house workers will be able to disavow

this work altogether.<sup>24</sup> By analogy, in making visible the

affective labour that *also* forms part of creative practice the students in Ullerup Schmidt’s article carve out spaces to exist outside of

work, in bed and at home: “to count one’s nightly hours is to politicise invisible labour and that is an act of solidarity. An inventory of affective and reproductive labour can create some clarity on the moments in

which we cash in on life.”<sup>25</sup>

23 The Women’s Liberation Movement was a political alignment of women emerging in the late 1960s and running into the 1980s. The (philosophical) work of the movement is often referred to as second wave feminism. While the movement was active worldwide the particular pockets of the movement I refer to here are primarily from the global North, namely the USA and Denmark. Core issues in the Women’s Liberation Movement in these countries were equal pay, abortion rights etc.

21 Simon & Masschelein (note 1), p. 71.

22 Ullerup Schmidt, (note 20), p. 2.

24 Sylvia Federici, *Wages against Housework*, 1975.

25 Ullerup Schmidt (note 13), p. 57. Author’s translation.

## MAINTENANCE TIME

Home is where we eat, wash and sleep. It is where we argue and foster intimacy, where we binge watch series, where we unload and reload. For many of us, home is where we spend time on socially necessary labour that is not directly geared towards the production of commodities. In other words, home is one of the key spaces of restitution, of the maintenance of life. In her 1969 *Manifesto for*

*Maintenance Art*, originally proposed for an exhibition entitled *Care*, artist Mierle Laderman Ukules famously underlines and makes visible all of the work she does to maintain the lives of herself, her partner and her child. Laderman Ukules' work laid bare the hidden labour of the home in order to revalorise maintenance work and break down the separation between high art (the work of men) and home work (that of women). In the later work *Touch Sanitation* (1979-1980) Laderman Ukeles met with 8500 'san-men', workers of the New York Sanitation Department, shaking their hands and thanking each of them for "keeping New York City alive". This ongoing performance underlined the temporal aspect of maintenance and care. According to Baraitser, maintenance is all the durational practices that keep the wheels of life and society spinning and maintain connections between people, things, institutions and places, those practices that "constitute the systems of sustenance and renewal that support

'life'".<sup>26</sup> Maintenance is also temporal, but the time of maintenance is often slow and uneventful, a time that

<sup>26</sup> Baraitser (note 6), p. 49.

can feel stuck, boring, without quality, suspended. As Laderman Ukules herself put it: "Maintenance is a drag; it takes all the fucking time."<sup>27</sup> As such, maintenance is the opposite of production and 'the new' and requires "an attachment to 'now-time'", the polar twin of the projected future.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Mierle Laderman Ukules, *Manifesto for Maintenance Art*, 1969.

Maintenance time is the time of cooking and cleaning, of doing laundry and groceries. It is risk free, safe and utterly unheroic.

<sup>28</sup> Baraitser (note 6), p. 53.

If we think of home as the key space of reproduction, or perhaps the key metaphor for a space to withdraw, then home becomes paramount for the maintenance of the productive self. That is, if we are lucky enough to have a home, which certainly isn't the case for many students of the Sandberg Instituut. As F. underlines after sharing the story of how the roof in her house literally fell down on her:

*I have to be grateful to have a house, and luckily I had insurance, but the damage it cost me mentally... I wasn't sure I could finish my first year here [at the Sandberg Instituut]... it left me totally hopeless. I mean, I have a house, I can't imagine if you don't even have a place to live.*

The school's placement within the heated housing market of Amsterdam has made it difficult for students to find a place to dwell, further adding to disparity between

the student who can rely on support and those who can't, raising the question how privileged you need to be to be able to study at the Sandberg. While, as we learn from students, there previously was a silent agreement that for students of certain departments the school could function as a home, currently they are not allowed to do so. It is a paradox: living in your studio is the ultimate merging of work and life, of productive space and the space of maintenance, you are always at school and never off, the time/space continuum of the entrepreneurial self in total fruition. There really then is no time and we have no time. And the same does hold true for places and things. There is no space or time for reproduction, because school has entrepreneured the hell out of you, and you have nowhere else to go.

There is another dimension to maintenance. We do not only maintain our bodies, buildings and relationships. We also maintain our moods, we maintain our systems and ideas. Ideas of science, of value, of education, of utopian or entrepreneurial selves. To look at education through a lens of time lays bare the ideologies and paradoxes of temporal organisation of educational time and space as well as the invisible spaces that uphold the academy – and with it the potential to change it. If there is no longer any distinction between the production of commodities and the production of ourselves, if the commodity is you, then reproductive labour risks being itself usurped by the market. This is why accounting for hours spent making creative work, rendering visible maintenance time, just as 'Wages for Housework' insisted on underlining the time and activities spent in the home, a radical act of care. Maintenance, as underlined by Baraitser, is the temporal dimension of care – for ourselves, each other and our worlds. The time of maintenance, she says, "lies therefore at the intersection between the lateral acts of stumbling blindly on, and the vertical axis of holding up, orientating us towards a future, even when that future is uncertain, or may not be our own."<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the only radical thing <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* left, now that we are always on a deadline, that the roof is falling on our heads and that the future is cancelled, is to foster new structural gestures of care, however vulnerable, unheroic and unsexy they may be.

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C O M M I S S I O N E D

C R I T I Q U E

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