

Staš Kleindienst
**Between
Resistance and
Commodity
(Reartikulacija,
Part 2 of 3)**

e-flux journal #1 — december 2008 Staš Kleindienst
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→ Continued from issue #0: *Conditioned Contemporaneity (Reartikulacija, Part 1 of 3)*, by Sebastjan Leban

Let's continue with an example of what the contemporary art market can devise in order to propel its business further. The latest innovation in this field is undoubtedly SeaFair's Grand Luxe: a \$40 million megayacht built to accommodate up to twenty-eight commercial galleries at any given time, with the cost of renting gallery space ranging from \$10,000 to \$30,000 per week.¹ So far, its itinerary has been confined to the east coast of the United States, with a solemn presence at *Art Basel* in Miami. The interesting part about SeaFair is that the vessel can instantaneously react to changes in global markets – in the event of an unsavory economic climate in the U.S., it can anchor itself to any other part of the world. Of course, this example may be seen as somewhat extreme for how it operates at the raw market level, but at the same time it demonstrates what is perhaps a deep link between the global capitalist economy and art production. This link is made more apparent by the fact that visibility in contemporary art is determined on the basis of capital investments in the field, accompanied by appurtenant theories, histories, and critiques. Being visible in art today requires participation in such highly structured markets (national or international) that art production is effectively subjugated to the terms of capital.

Now my main questions would be: how do economic processes affect art production by instrumentalizing it and transforming it into consumable forms? Can there be a place of critique and resistance inside the art world today? We could say that the dependence of art production on the market has formed biopolitical processes that transform the artist's profession into a search for apolitical identities sufficiently compatible with the system to dwell inside it. This is manifest in the idea that the only way for a young artist to emerge in the field is to adapt his or her practice to standards imposed by various competitions and scholarships arranged by multinational corporations (which also build their own art collections and influence the art market, in turn privatizing the production of art history). The next question thus becomes: what is art for those who finance it? If we return to the above-mentioned SeaFair and the name of one of its first exhibitions, "Contemporary and Cutting Edge: Pleasures of Collecting," we see an example of how the market measures art production through a prism of commodity and surplus value rather than through an idea that art can change society or politicize a population. It is obvious that in contemporary art, no



Dinner, from *Buy Your Own Art Experience*, 2007. Price of performance: from 240 EUR / Price of photograph: 5.000 EUR / Photographer: Primož Zrnc (price includes dinner for 3 people, not including transportation fees). Courtesy Sebastjan Leban and Staš Kleindienst.



Working on a Farm, from *Buy Your Own Art Experience*, 2007. Price of performance: from 200 EUR / Price of photograph: 5.000 EUR / Photographer: Primož Zrnc (price includes one day on a tourist farm, with meals, not including transportation fees). Courtesy Sebastjan Leban and Staš Kleindienst.



Cigar Degustation, from *Buy Your Own Art Experience*, 2007. Price of performance: not for sale / Price of photograph: already sold / Photographer: Metod Blejec (price includes cigar degustation, not including transportation fees). Courtesy Sebastjan Leban and Staš Kleindienst.



Tennis, from *Buy Your Own Art Experience*, 2007. Price of performance: from 170 EUR / Price of photograph: 5.000 EUR / Photographer: Metod Blejec (price includes booking of tennis court for 2 hours, not including transportation fees). Courtesy Sebastjan Leban and Staš Kleindienst.

emancipatory values are needed. Or, to be more precise, the spectrum of critical or resistant ideas that contemporary art can produce is so regulated that the market is capable of producing its own self-critique, creating a sense of democratic plurality. It is not possible to produce any real critical discourse within the existing art system simply because most forms of resistance are so quickly converted into consumable forms. Marina Gržinić links this process to the notion of *kidnapped creativity* developed by Suely Rolnik, who describes how capitalism appropriates creative processes by separating them from their resistant capacity by “reiterating its alienation with respect to the life process that engendered it.”²

It is, in a sense, totally acceptable for art production to oscillate between luxurious arts events such as SeaFair and more socially engaged events because they are ultimately different sides of the same coin. How can a population be moved by an event that takes place inside an art gallery if it cannot be moved by real processes of violence? It seems as if art as we know it has become obsolete in its mission to actively intervene in social space. It is for this reason that critical art practices have to inhabit new forms of being: less bound by traditional notions of production and representation and closer to forms of practice that might involve the mixing of critical theory, social sciences, and politics. In short, art has to re-frame its own position and its role in contemporary society. Jacques Rancière argues that “art is more and more today about matters of distribution of spaces and issues of redescrptions of situations. It is more and more about matters that traditionally belonged to politics. But it cannot merely occupy the space left by the weakening of political conflict. It has to reshape it, at the risk of testing the limits of its own politics.”³ In order for critical art practice to remain critical it must, in a way, stop being art (in the traditional sense) and attempt to produce its visibility, territories of reception, and history on its own terms and in ways that cannot be reproduced inside the existing art system.

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→ Continued in issue #2: *Drawing a Border* (*Reartikulacija, Part 3 of 3*), by Marina Gržinić

Reartikulacija is an art project by a group consisting of Marina Gržinić, Staš Kleindienst, Sebastjan Leban, and Tanja Passoni. The group also publishes *Reartikulacija*, a journal for politics, art, and theory, edited by Gržinić and Leban.

Stoš Kleindienst is currently enrolled in the post-graduate program at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Ljubljana. He works in the field of art and theory in collaboration with Sebastjan Leban, and is a member of the group Trie. He has exhibited widely in Slovenia and abroad, and his writings have been published in various publications. He lives and works in Ljubljana.

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Thomas Crow, "Historical Returns," *Artforum* 46, no.8 (April 2008): p. 286.

2

Suely Rolnik, cited by Marina Gržinić, in "Abstraction, Evacuation of Resistance and Sensualisation of Emptiness," *NeMe* (July 9, 2006), <http://neme.org/main/459/abstraction>.

3

Jacques Rancière, "The Politics of Aesthetics," 16 beaver group (May 5, 2006), <http://www.16beavergroup.org/mtarchive/archives/001877.php>.

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