Margins of (Re)presentability
Contemporary Art and Knowledge Politics

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In the early 2000s French artist duo Bureau d'E´tudes began making interactive maps that identify links among global corporations, drawing attention to our own positions within those relations. After opening up the map-making process to other users, the duo turned away from institutional art practice to invest in local movements – an approach that is at times challenged for its potential distancing from the 'general intellect'. Yet in reflecting on their work, the question remains: How far does our embeddedness extend and how do we extricate ourselves, without, as Tom Holert asks, falling prey to dominant forms of representation? How can other movements like Lokavidya Jan Andolan (People's Knowledge Movement) in India motivate the recognition of knowledges that may not hold currency in what has come to be termed the 'knowledge commons'? [1]

From Representing Power to Localizing Knowledge

Since the late 1990s French artist duo Bureau d'E tudes (Le onore Bonaccini and Xavier Fourt) has worked on the investigative visualization and theorization of a system of global power relations. Their strikingly complex organizational charts of the 'world government' constituted by corporations, supra-national organizations, NGOs, state bureaucracies, the military and prison industries complexes, etc., populated the collective imaginary of the alter-globalist movement of the second millennium. The maps provided activists in Seattle, Porto Alegre, Genoa and elsewhere with hyper-dense information about a largely hidden network of repression and rule. Close collaborator Brian Holmes remembers how Bureau d'E tudes's infographic work 'exerted an estranging effect of disidentification and disorientation' among its audience. [2] 'Again and again you would see people peering into them, lost in thought, dumbstruck with curiosity, charged with a kind of cerebral rage.' [3] However, as Holmes does not fail to mention, the conditions under which such artistic-activist knowledge production took place were about to change drastically with the post-9 / 11 'new normal of global war and financial boom.' Bureau d'E tudes and their collaborators were 'relegated by society at large to the status of paranoids and disbelievers – artists at best, and at worst, "conspiracy theorists".' [4]

However, the duo did not even want to be artists any longer, at least not exclusively. Tired of the insufficiencies of their own 'artisanal approach to information,' [5] they decided to leave the 'feudal system of art (with its institutional chateaux, its private and public barons, its obsequious cultural craftsmen, its exploitation of subjectivities, its embedded critics)' [6] and associated themselves with local organizations in rural and urban France. Rather than making tangible the operations of capitalist / state power and the global network of oligopolies through their research-based, yet isolated practice as artist-designers-theorists, they proposed to develop a 'map generator' to be used by everyone who needs a data map.

The latter project has never been fully realized in the originally envisaged form, but moving from mapping as a mode of (visual) representation to mapping as a modality of political action and agency became a key and sustainable strategy of conceiving cartography as 'a form of organization.' [7] Moreover, Bonaccini and Fourt orientated themselves towards places and issues of the commons, such as the 2011 cooperative reinvigoration of place Andre Meunier in Bordeaux as a *the a tre e volutif* (including the creation of an 'assembly of inter-species spokesmen') in collaboration with Ooze architects, artist Marjetica Potrc, associations of the neighbourhood, municipal public services and other local actors. Seeking autonomy through cutting off the ties to the global 'governmentality of information' and affiliating with sovereign, inventive post-capitalist markets and lines of production, while escaping 'both the black box of spontaneous egalitarian organizations (which always hide informal, charismatic or insider influences) and the creeping normalization of meritocracy organizations,' [8] Bureau d'E tudes thus effectively commonized their practice through a turn to the local. In recent years they particularly engaged with rural economies, food production and the idea of an anti-industrial, anti-capitalist 'Agricultural Republic,' playing out equality against equivalence and solidarity against isolation. Informed by Proletkult concepts such as the 'comrade object,' the duo's 'local approach' supposedly 'substitutes abstract discursive entities with concrete discursive entities.' [9] The 'communing of people with things' also leads to site-specific, environmental and communal interaction which Bureau d'E tudes sustains by contributing to the creation of a currency network 'in tandem with the social, productive and commercial networks in a given terrain' [10] such as the agricultural commune Ferme de La Mhotte in central France.

'Specific Places' and the 'Local Horizon'

With reference to Paolo Virno's or Reza Negarestani's theoretical work on the general intellect or the ecology of the concept, respectively, to bring two (presumably wildly different) philosophical projects into the equation, Bureau d'E tudes's 'local approach' can be conceptualized as a politics of knowledge, even if the simple fact that Bonaccini and Fourt frame their practice in terms of (artistic) research and knowledge production may not be a sufficient reason to engage with an epistemological perspective. But through basing the visual-theoretical work and activist commitment of the *Atlas of Agendas* (2014) on the immersion in a local environment one could speak of a refusal to live in and by the 'common places,' the 'generic logical-linguistic forms,' which, according to Virno's enlistment of Aristotle's *topoi koinoi*, 'establish the pattern for all forms of discourse.' [11] In the post-Fordist predicament where language / coding is the key to social productivity, the 'common places' secure visibility and legitimacy for those who use them, and establish an apparently beneficial, but ultimately groundless, illusionary publicness. Meanwhile the 'special places' (Aristotle's *idioi topoi*) of dialects or idiolects, of metaphors and allocutions, the entire 'ethical-rhetorical topography' of irreducible associative lives and their vital public spheres gave way to a pervasive 'feeling of not-feeling-at-home.' [12] Linking the 'common places' to Marx's 'general intellect,' Virno contends that the estranged, uprooted, delocalized multitude inevitably turns 'to the most essential categories of the abstract intellect in order to protect themselves from the blows of random chance, in order to take refuge from contingency and from the unforeseen.' [13] Considered in this, arguably counterintuitive way, Bureau d'E tudes's 'localizing' strategy could be dismissed as a futile retreat into outworn 'special places' rather than a step forward in the endeavour of reconfiguring the general intellect.

Another criticism of their approach might be drawn from Negarestani's notion of 'localization' that brings about an 'epistemic condition' that 'cancels any conserved relation between the knowing subject and the world' just to set free 'epistemic possibilities which until now had remained captives of the tyranny of here and now – that is, the knowing subject tethered to a local domain and a privileged frame of reference.' [14] Negarestani envisages the 'concept' itself as a 'local horizon, a locally organized space of information

within a vast inferential economy and immersed within the general structure of knowledge.' [15] Here, the local is 'a mobile framework immersed within a generic environment.' Even though Bureau d'E tudes at times use a language of the 'terrain' and emphasize the physical and existential concreteness of the local, their highly conceptual mode of 'localization' can be seen, again with Negarestani, as 'a response to this problem that we don't have immediate access to the global horizon or the universal space, we don't know its full scope, nor do we have its map.' [16] Exactly because Bureau d'E tudes have made a significant effort to fill this gap, to literally create maps of the universal space (of capitalism and [extra-]statecraft, in their case), they may be in a good position to 'localize' their 'epistemic possibilities.' For as Negarestani contends, the very lack of knowledge of 'the global structure in which we are working' will demand of knowledge to be 'directed toward procedures of local construction, organization and examination.' [17]

Clearly, the material localities of the agrarian and urban sites and sociabilities in which Bureau d'E tudes operate are of a different ontological order from the conceptual-epistemological localities addressed by Virno and Negarestani. However, the tension between the global / universal and the local / specific does concern knowledge practices either way. It also affects the politics of access to (and recognition of) knowledge. By putting their artistic / artisanal practice of visualizing power structures into the service of a post-capitalist economy and the maintenance of a local public sphere, Bureau d'E tudes participate in the commoning of knowledge and artistic methodologies. But their intention to enhance the agency of the (human and non-human) subjects of the commons is based on persuasions of the political usefulness or ethical value of certain knowledges in relation to others. However, although speaking in behalf of subjugated knowledges has become the default position for art practitioners engaged in the commons, the knowledge commons may require a more nuanced perspective.

Virtual and Ordinary Life Commons

For hierarchies and asymmetries *within* the commons are rarely discussed, [18] regardless of the fact that such asymmetries can be detected and should be politicized – for instance in the inequalities that exist between different types of knowledge at the geo-epistemic watersheds created by digitization. Not only do the knowledge commons constituted by and through the Internet depend on access to the global digital infrastructure, they also hold no guarantee for the recognition of knowledges that are being produced, learned and applied outside of this infrastructure. At the 2010 Wikipedia conference in Amsterdam, Amit Basole, a US-based economist from India, talked about and in behalf of Lokavidya Jan Andolan (JLR), the People's Knowledge Movement in India. JLR fights the downgrading of types of knowledge that are considered without value in terms of science, class and capital's logic of value being extracted from living labour and knowledge. Towards the end of his presentation Basole raised the question of 'a new hierarchy' between 'knowledge that is organized and represented (organizable and representable) on the Internet and that which is not.' Though not to be confused with older epistemic hierarchies between scientific and vernacular knowledge, it is a hierarchy nonetheless. Basole targeted the largely Western conference audience by asking, 'What can the defenders of the virtual knowledge commons do to act in solidarity with those who defend the ordinary life knowledge commons? That's the political question.' [19]

Insisting on the political nature of the issue of knowledge valuation (and knowledge's devaluation) and of the different degrees of knowledges' representability, Basole put those to task whose vocation it is to publish and distribute the products of their immaterial, usually precarious labour on the Internet, contributing to exemplary platforms of the knowledge commons and sharing economies such as Wikipedia. Even here, at the few remaining quasi-utopian nodal points of the Internet (where – in the early days – visions of democratized knowledge and open-source collaborativity were being promoted),

obliviousness concerning those forms of knowledge that do not have the required features to acquire visibility on the web was to be expected.

Although the ordinary life knowledge commons, as Basole stressed, are not necessarily to be found online, they constitute the crucial epistemological base of roughly ninety per cent of India's population that work in the informal sector – usually without any formal education, but with a rich and deep knowledge acquired in modes of learning and teaching based in local economic and social circumstances and organized in ways often called resilient with regard to these very circumstances. In a 2011 essay, once again addressing 'the leftists and progressives,' Basole proposes to look at society 'from the perspective of knowledge (as opposed to property, income, caste, race, etc.).'[20] Intimately bound to colonialism and colonial history, the epistemic hierarchies in Indian society are founded on 'claims of greater usefulness', according to which 'knowledge that is called "scientific" has been deemed to be on top,' for reasons both epistemological and economic. 'It is then "common sense" that the more superior kind of knowledge be the basis for the (re)organization of society. Which means that the holders of this knowledge should be given the initiative in shaping society. [...]. The Lokavidya Jan Andolan (LJA) will be the first social movement which publicly and directly questions this view.'[21]

Basole thus observes how epistemology and ethics are being articulated for the sake of hegemony, in the interest of which particular claims to hegemonic knowledge are getting based on presumptions about the superiority of legitimate scientific and social values. Basole then makes the important, if – to some – scandalous seeming disclaimer that in contradistinction to progressives and leftists in the "science mode", as he calls them (that is, us), '*capital* sometimes appears to *challenge* knowledge hierarchies. It appears to support lokavidya because capital cares neither about epistemology, nor about usefulness or productivity. It cares about value (in the sense of surplus value). Thus any knowledge, whatever its source or social location, if it can produce value, will be used by capital. Neither epistemological nor technical objections will be raised.'[22]

Hence any struggle to prevent knowledge from getting used for purposes of legitimizing social power, may find itself side by side with capital – 'fickle' as it might be – as the agent allegedly disinterested in social prestige and reputation. However, this potential ally for struggles about epistemic equality is also utterly disinterested in defending the cause of lokavidya. Advancing to explain the 'lok' in lokavidya, Basole maintains that it 'is not the same as the "working class" or "the poor",' but 'that section of society who has living knowledge [...] of work, production, the arts, and general knowledge of morals and values. The first contribution of the lokavidya perspective is that the lok, the majority, is not defined through lack of knowledge, but the presence of it.'[23] Basole and LJA are keenly aware of the divisions and splits that run through the lok. Unrecognized by the institutions of formal education and by the part of the population being produced by these institutions, the lok creates its own methodologies of knowledge acquisition, transfer and circulation. Far from romanticizing the life-worlds of the subaltern and underprivileged in Indian society, the People's Knowledge Movement pursues a militant, while expressly non-violent, Ghandian mode of epistemic activism. It addresses inequality and marginalization through the questioning of the political and economical mechanisms of recognizing, or rather, the *refusal* of recognizing skills or knowledge of land, crafts, community, etc.

Battle Between Knowledges

In November 2011, Lina Dokuzović, a Vienna-based artist, researcher and activist working on translocal struggles around knowledge, went on a co-researching field trip with participants of the People's Knowledge Movement to Singrauli in northern India, the so-called Energy Capital of India, an area where massive restructuration, deforestation and displacement are taking place. Rather than producing an art piece or an article to be submitted to a scholarly journal, Dokuzović penned an extensive report of her trip and the history of Singrauli that was published a year later on the website of the West Bengali Sanhati Collective. This activist formation and investigative platform emerged in the 2006 fights over forced acquisition of land and the dispossession of thousands of farmers in the town of Singur. In her essay, Dokuzović documents the devastating effects of the World Bank-driven "development" schemes in the area, and elaborates on the necessity of linking the violence and oppression the people suffer from the authorities through the systemic devaluation of their skills and knowledge, as 'these forms of oppression and claims of not being eligible for employment were a structural construction that needed to be understood and fought against.' Dokuzović further argues that,

> the demands and need for social recognition of lokavidya became all the more obvious in a context where recognized knowledge – meaning the knowledge which has been quantified into units and qualified through the commodification of knowledge via complex reform processes [...] becomes the currency for negotiating human rights. People have survived on their lokavidya and are now unable to carry on under the new conditions, because their knowledge, capacity, skills and even citizenship go unrecognized. [24]

Both the lokavidya movement and an observer / co-researcher such as Dokuzović draw on presumtions of an *Epistemologies of Resistance* as philosopher José Medina titled his 2012 book on 'gender and racial oppression, epistemic injustice, and resistant imaginations.'[25] Medina responded to a critical project as pursued, among others, by feminist scholar Miranda Fricker in her 2007 *Epistemic Injustice: Power and Ethics of Knowing*. Members of structurally disadvantaged groups, in Fricker's terms, face either testimonial or hermeneutical injustices. Both forms of injustice bear a hybrid moral-epistemological character, potentially harmful for a subject in its capacity as a knower. Adding to this critical discourse, Medina develops ways in which epistemic injustice can be resisted and countered. Grounding this work on theories of oppression developed within feminism and race theory, Medina pursues analytical and normative ends, seeking ways of performing epistemic resistance.

The main theoretical source for this kind of endeavour is Michel Foucault's notion of 'subjugated knowledges' that he developed in the context of his writings on genealogy. Particularly relevant for any current discussion of a politics of knowledge may prove Foucault's 1975–1976 lectures on the defence of society. Referring to the Enlightenment, Foucault insists on looking beyond the metaphoric, crypto-theological oppositions of day and light symbolizing knowledge and ignorance and instead suggests to focus on the emergence of a new epistemic market or knowledge economy in the eighteenth century where competition became key. In the light of this economic perspective, knowledge and power appear inseparable and thus merge to *power-knowledge* [*pouvoir-savoir*]. Foucault identifies an 'immense and multiple battle between knowledges in the plural – knowledges that are in conflict because of their very morphology, because they are in the possession of enemies, and because they have intrinsic power-effects.'[26] Technological knowledge in particular became increasingly sought after and expensive (and thus secretive and possessive as the productive forces developed); it also grew in range and scope and 'circulated more easily, to annex, confiscate, and take over smaller, more particular, more local, and more artisanal knowledges.'[27]

The multiplicity or plurality of knowledges, however, could not be left on its own. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and ever since, the state intervened, 'either directly or indirectly, in these attempts at annexation, which are also attempts at generalization.'[28] Foucault distinguishes four ways of state intervention into the battle of knowledges. His diagram of epistemic rule is uncannily familiar when bearing the contemporary struggles against epistemic violence in India and elsewhere in mind: the disqualification, normalization, hierarchization and centralization of 'useless and irreducible little knowledges' [29] are quintessential operations of knowledge politics from above. These four basic operations organize the inclusion and exclusion of knowledges. They integrate them, make them interchangeable, organizable and productive on the scale of national economies and state government. At the same time, in vintage Foucauldian fashion, these operations might become the fertile ground of resistance and critical opposition. The People's Knowledge Movement and Dokuzović's trip to the Singrauli region in West Bengal could be read in the terms that Foucault has applied to eighteenth-century Europe, although many other critical categories have since joined his model of epistemic rule and violence and thus the toolbox of genealogical critique. A crucial factor for Dokuzović's interest and engagement in the struggles of the People's Knowledge Movement was her own involvement in the protests and occupations at universities and art schools in Europe in the 2008–2011 period: she participated – by grassroots activism and publishing work – in the struggles over the Bologna process and other neoliberal measures in higher education in Austria and Croatia, and particularly at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna where students and faculty started, in October 2009, a whole series of occupations of universities in Europe and abroad.

In the summer preceding the occupations at the academy, Dokuzović had presented her diploma thesis project on 'deregulative capitalist structures in relation to art' that was developed at the Post-Conceptual Art Practices department, run by feminist-decolonial conceptual artist Marina Gržinić. A little later in 2009 Dokuzović also co-edited *Intersections*, an important and timely volume on the 'production of knowledge, precarity, subjugation and the reconstruction of history, display and de-linking.' In the foreword of the reader, Dokuzović and Eduard Freudmann posit that the 'commodification of knowledge' creates a 'whole new format for exploitation and profit creation,' a 'normalization' based on economic principles that turns students 'into consumers of education and producers within the knowledge economy' and 'attempts to reproduce a desirable and structural sterility and passivity of social movements.'[30] Dokuzović's thesis project translated extensive readings and discussions around capitalist transformation and their effects on cultural production and educational institutions into intricate handwritten and blown-up diagrams. Aimed at mapping, the diagrams visualize the circularities and teleologies of capital's restructuration of labour, and intellectual and artistic labour in particular. They also include, unusually in the context of political economy and institutional analysis, the postcolonial and decolonial discourses on necropolitics and epistemological de-linking by the likes of Achille Mbembe and Walter Mignolo, as well as theories of gender and feminist epistemology.

One of these diagrams explores the double movement of capitalization of education and educationalization of capital by deploying the shape / model of the circuit; reminiscent of cosmological or astronomical models, a central axis is organized around categories such as 'autonomy' and 'heteronomy' with 'education' operating at the centre. On the top 'freedom' is placed, but apparently this freedom is ambiguous to say the least, at the same time neoliberal ideologeme and horizon of emancipatory struggle. Less ambivalent, another diagram that focuses on the effects entailed by the Bologna process makes it sufficiently clear how Bologna is being used by the corporate / state apparatus to stabilize class division by way of economic-educational measures.

Though her diagrams would have lent themselves to circulation and publication in art institutions critical of European knowledge policies and knowledge economy as such,

Dokuzović wouldn't necessarily claim these graphic endeavours to be her artwork, or to be art at all. While she actually publishes and exhibits them occasionally, it would even seem hard-pressed to discuss their status in aesthetic terms. And maybe that's exactly the point?

Reconfigurations of the Art / Knowledge Compound

This essay and the research and reflection on which it builds are driven by the intuition that a significant, albeit almost unacknowledged transformation has taken (and continues to take) place which sensibly alters and affects the epistemic, economic and political status of contemporary art. Reading Dokuzović or Basole, I wonder if there can be drawn any reasonable connection between this intuition and the political question, raised by Basole, concerning the very divide separating representable from not-representable knowledge, a divide that is palpable everywhere and that has material, technical, economic, political implications, most of which relate to issues of state, corporate, institutional and military power.

The specifics of this transformation, however, are certainly in need of explication, explanation and interpretation. Tentatively, I venture that it is – at least partially – marked by a peculiar conflation of knowledge, art and politics. The predominant view is that knowledge and knowledge production have become totally commodified, corporatized and controlled in and through what is often called cognitive capitalism. I tend to look instead for the situations and strategies where knowledge is considered in terms of a politics, as a – global, multidimensional – terrain of struggle, of social inclusion and exclusion, of hierarchies and power.

In order to make myself clear, knowledge here is always already understood in a very specific sense, a sense I would derive from Foucault's genealogical theory of a plurality of competing knowledges. Thus knowledge is not to be confused, for instance, with knowledge in the Kantian meaning of 'Erkenntnis' and thus endowed with 'truth.' The issue of truth or falsehood is not irrelevant, particularly in contemporary politics of knowledge. But knowledge in this context is rather to be understood very broadly as epistemic activity, be it individual or collective, human or non-human, or, to use a post-operaist terminology, as the self-organization of the social brain and the social power of abstraction. This broad definition comprises usage and enactment / enacting language, speaking, writing, lecturing, thinking, discussing, teaching, learning, programming, writing code, archiving, organizing, being creative… Knowledge in this sense is irreducible to rational cognition but may involve non- cognitive processes, affects, emotions, sensual experiences beyond words. It can also be considered both in terms of critical consciousness, in the Frankfurt School tradition, or as a productive (and revolutionary) agent, as Autonomist Marxism has it.

One of the reasons for this emphasis on the political is a skepticism with regard to the mainstream discourse of knowledge economy that is rooted in the theory of economics. Economics particularly with respect to the ideology that traditional forms of value extraction, such as land, labour and capital, have been partly or wholly replaced by valorizations of immaterial labour or knowledge work. There exist of course alternatives to this brand of knowledge economy discourse, for instance the – if somewhat worn – optimism of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's embodiment of Marx's general intellect in the multitude of networked knowledge producers in the social factory.

Today, the multitude in post-*Empire*, leftist parlance is increasingly being identified as the subject of the knowledge commons. Commoning (and un-commoning) knowledge has also reached parts of the art world. Here it is considered as an issue to be dealt with not least in the context of the continuing crisis in education that affects art schools and higher education in general. However, as with the discourse on the commons more generally, the

knowledge commons should not be 'reduced to managing the leftovers of the Western historical banquet' but should be 'elevated as an institutional structure that genuinely questions the domains of private property, its ideological apparatuses and the State – not a third way but a challenge to the alliance between private property and the state' (to quote Ugo Mattei, a lawyer and protagonist of the *beni communi* agenda, involved in setting up the legal foundations for Teatro Valle, which again is quoted by theorist Marina Vishmidt in an article posted on the *Open!* platform). [31]

In a recent essay, economic theorists Alfredo Macías Va squez and Pablo Alonso Gonza lez speculate about a potential politics of the knowledge commons 'beyond their socio-economic and instrumental functions.' [32] They state that since the 'capacity of the knowledge commons to generate wealth is higher than ever' – whereas, at the same time, 'wealth has never been so easily at risk of being appropriated by capitalist elites.' [33] As a consequence of this contradictory situation, Va squez and Gonza lez propose, in a somewhat cumbersome formulation, that the 'terrain of political struggle lies in the necessity of building a diffuse knowledge economy to face the distributive regression imposed by neoliberal financialization.' [34] Other than one would expect, coming (like me) from a background in art, theory and history, the diffusion here is less to be understood aesthetically, as a shape-shifting, obfuscating, confusing, alienating intervention into the knowledge economy. Rather the diffusion is to be organized in the form of governance or policymaking – operating on the level of the community and developing alternative analytical frameworks for economic science which are supposed to be based on anthropological and sociological research and aim at counteracting 'the neoliberal attack on the commons.' [35] Now, if the vocabulary of diffusion has reached the academic realm of, if radical, economic science as a potential political and theoretical strategy – where might art, contemporary art, find its place and role with regard to the politics of knowledge? What is contemporary art relation to knowledge anyway?

Philosopher Peter Osborne, an influential theorist of contemporary art, recently posited a peculiar shift from 'knowledge' to 'art'. Understanding this shift, Osborne holds, might enable one to 'to grasp the most distinctive cultural features (that is, the lived novelty) of the / our historical present.' [36] It is a somewhat baffling, counter-Hegelian idea that intimates that the notorious end of art, its transference 'into our ideas instead of maintaining its earlier necessity in reality and occupying its higher place' (Hegel), is to be reversed, in order to gain insight into the current situation. [37] The brief remarks on the 'shift of focus from knowledge to art' may prove helpful in registering and comprehending the relations that contemporary art entertains with knowledge. Osborne maintains that the so-called knowledge economy undoubtedly involves transformations in the relations and the practices of art and knowledge respectively. These changes render 'the transcendental constitution of "art" and "knowledge" as separate value-spheres, epitomized in Habermas's Weberian sociologization of Kantianism, increasingly phantasmatic.' [38] The knowledge economy is to be placed among the contexts of the new 'art industry' which thrives on the changed conditions of the culture industry that, Osborne maintains, 'no longer only makes "mass" products, but exhibits a highly sophisticated differentiation into market sectors – including, paradoxically, autonomous art, for which it is now the distributive mechanism.' [39] Osborne stresses the fact that while under the conditions of the present art industry the individual artwork 'has come increasingly to bear the burden of mediating its relations to the universality of "art" directly,' the 'transnational exhibition-form [...] fulfils the requirement of providing social meaning' and acts – alongside the institutionalization of the project-form – as the 'unit of artistic significance, and the object of constructive intent.' [40] The expanding habitat of global biennial culture thus hosts and stimulates the transcategorial artistic practices so symptomatic of the ontological transformation of art under the impression of globalization and digitalization and of the ensuing mutations of the culture industry.

Moreover, the processes of translation and transculturalization characteristic of the current exhibitionary dispositifs are mirrored by far-reaching reconfigurations of the art / knowledge compound – reconfigurations that are arguably caused and shaped by the demands of the knowledge economy. Displaying and performing "knowledge", research, documentation, the normalization of para-academic and educational formats such as the project exhibition, the workshop, the panel discussion, the conference, the lecture-performance, the curated screening, the artist talk, the reading room, the handout, the syllabus, the anthology of theoretical and historical writings, etc., entailed an almost complete makeover of art institutions, exhibitions, biennials, art school curricula and so on since the 1990s, coinciding with the rapid global expansion and translocal operations defining contemporary art.

The transdisciplinarity and transcategoriality of contemporary art has indeed gone a long way since the dissolution of boundaries in the 1950s and 1960s neo-avantgardes that inspired Theodor W. Adorno to speak of 'Verfransung' (fraying, frazzling) of former, Modernist artistic media and genres. [41] Adorno's Verfransung, however, is not to be confused with the radical dissolution of Habermasian 'value spheres' such as art and knowledge, or aesthetics and science, registered by Osborne.

The '"Aesthetic-Practical" Type of Rationality' (Habermas) and 'the Paralogical' (Lyotard)

What exactly has been overcome or left behind in this development though? Let's quickly remind ourselves of how Ju rgen Habermas separated the 'value-spheres' or 'knowledge-systems' and conceived the relation of art and knowledge, aesthetics and science, i.e., his model of aesthetic-practical rationality. At the core of Habermas's thinking in the 1970s and 1980s operated the concept of the 'logic of cultural rationalization' marking cultural modernity. As the superiority of the rationality of the realm of culture is degrading in the process of what Weber has called 'disenchantment', the differential between the knowledge of the arts and the knowledge of the 'profane realm of action' [42] is being levelled out in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; the demand for metaphysical or religious worldviews vanished and was replaced by more or less revolutionary life-forms, as culture lost its function as the supplier of meaning and ideology.

Habermas asserts that the specific function performed by autonomous art is to express authentic human needs by evading the epistemic seizure by 'expert cultures' and to cultivate the 'independent logic of the aesthetic' [*Eigensinn des A sthetischenv*]. [43] He maintains that,

a certain type of 'knowing' is objectified in art works, albeit in a different way than in theoretical discourse or in legal or moral representations: these objectivations of mind are also fallible and hence criticizable. […] Art criticism has developed forms of argumentation that specifically differentiate it from the forms of theoretical and moral-practical discourse. As distinct from merely subjective preference, the fact that we link judgments of taste to a criticizable claim presupposes non-arbitrary standards for the judgment of art. [44]

The epistemological status of art, retrieved by art criticism, made Habermas believe 'that a pragmatic logic of argumentation is the most appropriate guiding thread through which the "aesthetic-practical" type of rationality can be differentiated over and against other types of rationality.' [45] Such rationality would make identifiable 'validity claims inherent in works of art' – claims which are, however, of a different order from normative claims in 'regulative speech acts.' Therefore 'a proper model for the relation between the potential for truth of works of art, and the transformed relations between self and world stimulated by aesthetic experience' [46] was required.

Habermas referred to what he then called 'post-avantgarde art', which is marked by 'the coexistence of tendencies toward realism and engagement with those authentic continuations of modern art that distilled out the independent logic of the aesthetic.' He sees 'moments of the cognitive and the moral-practical' [47] in play in contemporary art. 'It seems', he writes in his 1981 *Theory of Communicative Action*, 'as if the radically differentiated moments of reason want in such countermovements to point toward a unity – not a unity that could be had at the level of worldviews, but one that might be established *this side* of expert cultures, in a nonreified communicative everyday practice'. [48]

It is of course this universalist claim of an ontological 'unity' or pre-linguistic, though symbolically mediated 'consensus', that has elicited the massive criticism of Habermas's position, especially by Jean-Francois Lyotard. In his 1979 *Postmodern Condition*, first published as a report commissioned by the federal government of Quebec, entitled *The Problems of Knowledge in the Most Developed Industrial Societies*, Lyotard rendered a somewhat different role for art in the emerging knowledge economies. There's a lot to be said about this strange little book, about the commissioning of an unorthodox Marxist thinker, the former member of *Socialisme ou barbarie* by a provincial Canadian government, and about the somewhat unfair way it ridiculed Habermas. Here and now I only want to direct attention to the parallel emphasis that Habermas and Lyotard have put on the issue of the legitimation and deligitimation of knowledge in the postindustrial or postmodern societies of the Western hemisphere, seen from the standpoint of the late 1970s.

As is well known, Lyotard considered the decline of the grand Enlightenment narratives of philosophical speculation and political emancipation as typical for the postmodern condition. His obervation of a shift of emphasis from the ends to the means of actions, from the art of storytelling to the 'terror' of performativity, that is, the imperative of effectiveness of knowledge production, in many respects resembles the Habermasian critique of functionalist reason in late capitalism.

With regard to the role of culture and art, however, and not only here, they pursue very different agendas. Though Lyotard doesn't discuss aesthetic matters directly in *Postmodern Condition* (hardly comprehensibly considering his otherwise intense engagement with art elsewhere in his writings), he provides an implicit sketch of the potential function and form of art in a knowledge economy context devoted to the fulfillment of state and corporate demands for performance and effectiveness. Lyotard's 'ultimate vision of science and knowledge,' as opposed to the rule of effectiveness and capitalist productivity, was one of 'a search, not for consensus, but very precisely for "instabilities," as a practice of paralogism, in which the point is not to reach agreement but to undermine from within the very framework in which the previous "normal science" had been conducted.' [49] The paralogical (or paralogism) remains a – barely defined – concept in Lyotard's text, neither explained nor explicated in any detail, but serving as a stand-in for the 'heteromorphy' of language-games, for a deviant epistemic practice, for a disruption of research routine, for the contingency of social pragmatics. The paralogical may become a driver of innovation in science, the kind of rupture both feared and desired by the epistemic powers to be, but it also, as Lyotard has it, 'sketches the outline of a politics that would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown.' [50]

The subjects or agents of such politics of the paralogical are of molecular stature, little narratives, minorities, the disempowered. Linking the desires for justice and for the unknown, the libidinal silhouette of such political agency becomes apparent as a moral-epistemic project. Throughout *Postmodern Condition*, the sketchiness of these intimations is somewhat unnerving, however. Maybe this was a reason for the editors of the American edition of the text to append to it Lyotard's essay *What Is Postmodernism*? Another reason for the inclusion of this text certainly can be found in the fact that in it Lyotard compensated for the absence of any explicit consideration of the aesthetic dimension of

the postmodern condition in the Quebec report.

As it is well known to the student of theories of postmodernity, Lyotard in the 1980s reactivated Kant's concept of the sublime, only to distinguish between a modernist and a postmodernist sublime, the latter offering none of the pleasure and solace of the former. Furthermore he proposes a disturbance of modernist temporality and a de-linking of author- time from the time of the aesthetic event. Anticipating Osborne's notion of the post-conceptual as that category of art which in each instance, in each work has to render the concept of art from scratch, Lyotard sees the postmodern artist or writer

> in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done. [51]

The actual, capitalist reality of such knowledge production on the side of the art practitioners, however, appears much less eventful and far away from any experiences of the sublime. Rather than fostering the un(re)presentable to be created or to happen, the principles of effectiveness of the postmodern knowledge economy have come to colonize the realm of art and aesthetic reflection. Interestingly, and I'd suppose for the first time, the English translation of Lyotard's essay introduces the clumsy term 'artistic research' at the occasion of describing the dependencies of the artist conceived as knowledge producer:

> Artistic and literary research is doubly threatened, once by the 'cultural policy' and once by the art and book market. What is advised, sometimes through one channel, sometimes through the other, is to offer works which, first, are relative to subjects which exist in the eyes of the public they address, and second, works so made ('well made') that the public will recognize what they are about, will understand what is signified, will be able to give or refuse its approval knowingly, and if possible, even to derive from such work a certain amount of comfort. [...] The objects and the thoughts which originate in scientific knowledge and the capitalist economy convey with them one of the rules which supports their possibility: the rule that there is no reality unless testified by a consensus between partners over a certain knowledge and certain commitments. [52]

To escape this consensual conception of the knowledge economy and the firmly embedded functionality of 'artistic research' (and development) as responding to expectations and demands with regard to what is known and knowable, Lyotard turns to the sublime and thus to a category or 'a sentiment' that 'takes place [...] when the imagination fails to present an object which might, if only in principle, come to match a concept.' The refusal of 'knowledge' and representation, both of which Lyotard associates with the beautiful, emerges as the ultimate aesthetic politics:

> We can conceive the infinitely great, the infinitely powerful, but every presentation of an object destined to 'make visible' this absolute greatness or power appears to us painfully inadequate. Those are Ideas of which no presentation is possible. Therefore, they impart no knowledge about reality (experience); they also prevent the free union of the faculties which gives rise to the sentiment of the beautiful; and they prevent the formation and the stabilization of taste. They can be said to be unpresentable. [53]

Beyond Art's Aesthetico-Epistemological Core

The issue of a politics / aesthetics of presentability and unpresentability connects with Bureau d'E tudes's notion of the map as a form of organization in a synthesis of representation and political-communal practice, as it does with Basole's questioning of the representability of lokavidya / ordinary life knowledge on the platforms and screens of digital networked media. It could further be asked whether the non-representability of certain, vulnerable modes of knowledge should be preserved and protected or contested and eventually overcome. In the context of past, current and future struggles around the exclusionary and oppressive character of ruling epistemologies, variously situated in feminist, indigenous, decolonial, migrant, or disability perspectives on knowledge, the answers to this question will by necessity be different, as they depend on political strategies, local circumstances, and long-term objectives regarding issues of security, recognition and access.

Art and aesthetics are often conceived as modalities of rationality that contest notions of the superiority of cognitive-scientific knowledges. I have mentioned Habermas's concept of the 'logics of aesthetics' [*Eigensinn des A sthetischen*] and Lyotard's 'working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done', as proposals to render art's aesthetico-epistemological core. One could add more recent claims about art's relation to knowledge, such as philosopher Graham Harman's contention that '[the arts] have cognitive value without providing knowledge.' [54] On a different note, artist Jonas Staal, taking a stand in the 2015 debates around Amsterdam's temporary 'new university' and the embattled field of knowledge commons in the Netherlands, proposes that artists contribute their 'visual literacy to the social movement'; such 'visual literacy' would be 'the capacity of artists to "read" form,' be versed in 'morphology,' to articulate 'specific sensibilities through form.' [55] In other words, the knowledge generated and cultivated in the name of contemporary art has a distinctive epistemological status of a specialist's knowledge reaching beyond other types of knowledge. Associating modes of thinking, perceiving and feeling with art and aesthetics that are irreducible to 'knowledge' in its commodified, standardized, academic, normalized and hierarchized modes has a long tradition in aesthetic theory reaching back to Kant and beyond. In a knowledge economy environment such insistence on art's epistemic special status seems particularly justified. Ultimately, the artistic knowledge as defined by Habermas, Lyotard, Harman or Staal are to be counted among the endangered knowledge species to be defended from extinction or normalization. By the same token one could argue that the ongoing philosophical certification of the singularity of art's modes of cognition contributes to a valorization of art by reifying its incommensurability, serving the aim of better taking advantage of its claims for autonomy. Since while securing its epistemological independence with regard to cognitive capitalism – how does contemporary art actually contest the ruling episteme without being trapped by the imperatives to represent and be represented?

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Footnotes

1. This is a revised version of a talk given in the Critical Studies programme of the Sandberg Instituut, Amsterdam, 2 March 2016. I would like to thank Tom Vandeputte and the Sandberg's staff for inviting and hosting me, as well as the students of the programme for interesting discussions. I am also grateful to Sven Lu tticken and Jorinde Seijdel for their critical interest in the paper and to Janine Armin for her careful proofreading of the final draft.
2. Brian Holmes has translated much of Bureau d'E tudes's writings and has written about them as well.
3. Brian Holmes, 'Dis / orient: Information Cartography / Life Experiments,' in Bureau d'E tudes, *An Atlas of Agendas: Mapping the Power, Mapping the Commons* (Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2014), iv.
4. Ibid.
5. Bureau d'E tudes, 'Resymbolizing Machines: Artwork after Oyvind Fahlstro m [2004],' in *An Atlas of Agendas*, 150.
6. Ibid., 146.
7. Bureau d'E tudes, 'Bringing the Earth into Balance [2008-...],' in *An Atlas of Agendas*, 169.
8. Bureau d'E tudes, 'Governmentality of Information [2003],' in *An Atlas of Agendas*, 49.
9. Bureau d'E tudes, 'Localising. Art and Commons Culture [2013],' in *An Atlas of Agendas*, 180.
10. Ibid., 181. For the Ferme de La Motte commune see www.fermedelamhotte.fr.
11. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson (New York: Semiotext[e], 2004), 36.
12. Ibid., 36–37.
13. Ibid., 38.
14. Reza Negarestani, 'Where is the Concept? (localization, ramification, navigation),' lecture at *When Site Lost the Plot*, a conference organized by Robin Mackay, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2013.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. See, e.g., Elinor Ostrom and Roy Gardner, 'Coping with Asymmetries in the Commons: Self-Governing Irrigation Systems Can Work,' *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 7, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 93–112.
19. Amit Basole, 'Knowledge Satyagraha: Towards a People's Knowledge Movement,' *Wikipedia Conference*, Amsterdam, 20 April 2010, www.vimeo.com, c. 18: 20.
20. Amit Basole, 'LJA: Engaging the leftists and progressives,' blog entry, *Lokavidya Jan Andolan*, 15 February 2011, lokavidyajanandolan.blogspot.co.at.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Lina Dokuzović, 'Bhikharipore Singrauli: A Case for Just Development,' *Sanhati* (30 September 2012), www.sanhati.com.
25. Jose Medina, *Epistemologies of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
26. Michel Foucault, '*Society Must Be Defended.' Lectures at the Colle ge de France, 1975-76*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana; general ed. Franc ois Ewald and Alessandro Fontana; English series ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 179.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 180.
29. Ibid., my emphasis.
30. Lina Dokuzović, Eduard Freudmann, foreword, in *Intersections. At the Crossroads of the Production of Knowledge, Precarity, Subjugation and the Reconstruction of History, Display and De-Linking*, ed. Lina Dokuzović, Eduard Freudmann, Peter Haselmeyer and Lisbeth Kovac ic (Vienna: Lo cker, 2009), 10f. See also Dokuzović's PhD thesis,

Struggles for Living Learning: Within Emergent Knowledge Economies and the Cognitivization of Capital and Movement (Vienna: transversal texts, 2016).
31. Ugo Mattei, 'First Thoughts for a Phenomenology of the Commons,' in *The Wealth of the Commons: A World beyond Market & State*, ed. David Bollier and Silke Helfrich (Amherst, MA: Levellers Press, 2012) www.wealthofthecommons.org; see Marina Vishmidt, 'All Shall Be Unicorns: About Commons, Aesthetics and Time,' *Open! Platform for Art, Culture, & the Public Domain*, 3 September 2014, www.onlineopen.org.
32. Alfredo Maci as Va zquez and Pablo Alonso Gonza lez, 'Knowledge Economy and the Commons: A Theoretical and Political Approach to Postneoliberal Common Governance,' in *Review of Radical Political Economics 4*8, no. 1 (March 2016), 154.
33. Ibid., 153.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 155.
36. Peter Osborne, 'The Postconceptual Condition: Or, the Cultural Logic of High Capitalism Today,' *Radical Philosophy* 184 (March / April 2014):26.
37. The context of Osborne's suggestive proposition is a reflection on the specific temporality of contemporaneity, its reconfiguration, and transcending of what otherwise might be called the present or actuality. Osborne spends a lot of argumentative energy in the philosophical upscaling of post-Conceptual Art to the status of an activity that realizes apposite movements of making tangible the condition of contemporaneity.
38. Ibid., 20. Osborne does not elaborate on this becoming-phantasmatic of the separation of art and knowledge as distinct value-spheres, whilst his (earlier) musings on contemporary art's 'incorporation [...] into the cultural industry, via the new inter- and transnational spaces of art' in his 2013 book *Anywhere and Not At All* do resonate here. See Peter Osborne, *Anywhere and Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London / New York: Verso, 2013), 167.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. See Theodor W. Adorno, 'Art and the Arts [1967],' trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford, : Stanford University Press, 2003), 368–387 (Livingstone translated 'Verfransung' as 'erosion').
42. Ju rgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two: Lifeworld and System: a Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 353.
43. Ibid., 398.
44. Ju rgen Habermas, 'Questions and Counterquestions [1984],' in *Habermas and Modernity*, ed. R. Bernstein (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1985), 200.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 203.
47. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two*, 398.
48. Ibid.
49. Fredric Jameson, foreword, in Jean-Franc ois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xix.
50. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 67.
51. Jean-Franc ois Lyotard, 'Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism? [1982],' trans. Regis Durand, in Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 81.
52. Ibid., 76–77.
53. Ibid., 78.
54. Graham Harman, 'Object Lesson,' letter to the editor, *Artforum* 54, no. 1 (September 2015):38 / 40.
55. Jonas Staal, 'New Art for the New University,' in 'Perspectives for the New University,' *Krisis: Tijdschrift voor actuele filosofie*, no. 2, (2015), www.krisis.eu.

Tags

Aesthetics, Commons, Critical Theory

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