THE CALIFORNIAN SUBJECT 2
Temples & UN-SdA

This exhibition takes up the thesis that there is a new form of accumulation emerging around an alternative concept of living labor. In the process, new material infrastructures of standardization and assessment are coming up, and new imaginaries and hopes are growing among people. The central value of this new capitalism is no longer machine and physical labor, although it continues to exist; it is the labor of feeling and sudden affect, of creativity, intelligence, and knowledge. Competing for them, lurking for their appropriation, and speculating on their transformation into capital, we struggle without knowing exactly where our interests might lie. Whether or not we want to know, we would certainly be excluded from our ability to act if we did not find an entrance into this new social subject, which is said to have been invented in California. Alongside the subject of our ability to act, a changing world awaits new descriptions and representations.

Method

The different phases of capitalism are distinguished historically, although the demarcations between the phases and the effects of the transformation on the terms are disputed. A historical phase has a relative unity through a type of accumulation, a mode of production, an organization of labor, the certain political and juridical measures of its establishment, and, finally, through the penetration of the hearts and brains of the people – so that the respective phase becomes a world and a common consciousness, wherein different inventions and imaginations, sciences, and arts have their common roots. The totality of possibilities provided by this current version of capitalism makes it an automatic subject that mediates and distributes agency while standing outside the planning and intent of those acting within it.

Various hypotheses are circulating that attempt to describe the new form of capitalism that is currently emerging: communicative capitalism, cognitive capitalism, surveillance capitalism, and neofeudalism. They make the different aspects of something whose totality is not yet representable recognizable.

In this exhibition, theoretical concepts and artistic works are understood as models that can make visible a shared reality that is both physically palpable and abstract, both material and

semiotic. Yet texts and concepts on the one hand, and artworks and artistic methods on the other, as part of functionally differentiated societies, always establish their respective path dependencies. They repeat themselves in retrospect of the history and theory of their discipline and in anticipation of success. However, the fact that they are part of the reality to be described and not autonomous both enables cognition and simultaneously limits it. For a more differentiated view, in this exhibition, the respective methods and concepts of art and science will be linked to enable an examination of their usefulness in the real abstract realism of the current version of the world.

The Artwork as a Model that Connects Existing Media Infrastructure with a New Organization of Methods that make Visible its Inherent Measurements and Evaluations

Part two of the exhibition shows works that make the mediating structures between material and value recognizable. Such infrastructures and medial processes of transformation become invisible when attention is directed to distinguishable objects and subjects in a stage-like consolidated world, as well as to institutionally divorced sectors of society whose values are not related to their shared equivalences and differences. This happens, for example, with works of art that are separated from the material and symbolic practices of their production in order to dress them up as mythicized vehicles of ideology for consumption as luxury goods. The works in this exhibition allow different perspectives to emerge, enabling a reading of them as a process of their own making and reception. In doing so, they traverse social domains, technology, art, and the simulations of remnants of bourgeois publicity. At the interfaces, as in the crossing of borders, an exchange of transformation takes place that makes them readable as measurements – media structures of measuring and evaluation. Every specific distribution is legible as a measurement and valuation; every particular transformation in exchange is a measuring choice that designs the period of its possibility. Time, space, and systems of meaning are the effects of measurements made through their fragmentation and recomposition.

For John Dewey, values are hypotheses; they are the measure of the connection of value perception with the reflection of its conditions and its possible resulting actions. Thus, values are

always assessable; they are permanent measurements based on different value systems. Values are therefore neither fundamentally and objectively given nor individually relative, but results of historical and social experience to be constantly measured anew, which permeate all facts of the human world, indistinguishable from them, towards a newly measured world.

The labor theory of value by Adam Smith, which was specified by Karl Marx, sees the substance of the value of a commodity in the living labor that is socially necessary for its production. Labor is measured in its duration and in the wage for labor time. How the time – which is itself a measurement and not a given substance – of the different labors of muscle, nerve, and brain is measured in price and money is a question of the material organization of the circuits of production, consumption, and surplus-value extraction, which changes historically. Value, then, is not an immediate entity but an expression of a relationship – a particular historical organization of labor. If, according to the hypothesis of cognitive capitalism, feelings, intelligence, and knowledge are identified as the authoritative labor in a new form of capitalism, the question arises through which media and infrastructures this value is measured and transformed into monetary-distinct units. What form of production of time as an effect of measurement is appropriate to a valuation of affect as labor? What new spaces of meaning become obligatory through material-semiotic measurements of the value of the contents of consciousness?

Whether the new subject of collective imagination and agency I have called “Californian” is a grand illusion that will eventually burst, as an expanding credit system and growing money supply would lead us to expect, or whether it is the harbinger of a consolidating new order of the world that will materialize, here it is. It is there, as a phantasm, that determines the real current conditions of our interaction and communication. It is among us, within us, as paranoia and control.

The exchange value detached from the commodities themselves and existing as a commodity beside them is money. Money forms a system of social relations and communication as well as a psychic condition. In this exhibition, the concept of an economy of images, understood as a process of representation, serves to investigate money as a system, as exchange value, and as

social subject. Image production as a model of communication is better suited to imagining the dynamic structures of the mediation of material and valuation than the communication model of sender and receiver or the distinction between content and form derived from text. When images are understood as reflexive processes of their production and consumption, they form a complex web of mediations between social domains, institutions, and programs, of transformations of the material and the symbolic, and fringes of the factual and the fictional, and they involve the imaginings of persons who represent and are represented, who anticipate and are anticipated, who receive and are received.

Pictures as processes of representation – of production, depiction, imagination, and substitution – are medial chains of exchange; they are defragmentations of time, space, and meaning from which entire systems of meaning can emerge, like currencies that constantly appreciate and depreciate against each other. An economy of images produces subjective worlds whose binding force we cannot evade simply by pointing to their abstraction or fictitiousness. Its instruments of measurement and its effects of evaluation distribute agency and the capacities of feeling and taste, self-consciousness, and communicability. Visual systems that are art carry the explicit reflection and reevaluation of valuation systems to an audience whose presence they anticipate. Those who are unsatisfied by the given offer of meaning, instead of new products, would have to build their own currency because, to establish realistic hypotheses, we do not need individual texts and messages but living, collective practices.

This exhibition does not stand in an empty space outside the one it formulates. It is a model for generating critical instruments, but it is also a commodity where it is isolated and appropriated as a positive externality or used to increase cultural capital. It is not a contribution to a critical state of discourse or part of a publishing public sphere; that would foster illusions that are only useful as counterrevolutionary instruments. Immanent critique recognizes itself as part of the problem and tries to use everything that is present unpredictably without ever taking possession of it as its own because it knows that nothing can escape being reappropriated. And it tries to learn faster than the opponent.

The film *Smart People* by **Hildegarde Duane and David Lamelas** begins with a tracking shot along the sunny freeway overlooking downtown Los Angeles. Just a few seconds after the title image of the video and the information about a "6.5 Richter Scale" earthquake, the camera moves into the shadows of the skyscrapers. Now color gives way to near black and white; even the music that had accompanied the beginning with the anticipatory enthusiasm of television series falls silent. Before it ends at a street corner, the tracking shot is now recording poor people, queuing and waiting. These people are "real" within the film's narrative, meaning they are at the mercy of their situation and have little leeway to shape it. Duane and Lamelas now make an appearance. They appear from around the corner pushing a shopping cart, limping and cursing; they are homeless people. Lamelas yells at the crowd, "What are you looking at?" as if there's nothing to look at when he comes around the corner as a homeless person. He thus immediately makes explicit the film's crucial ambiguity. For the audience present in the real situation in which Duane and Lamelas perform – the homeless – a theatrical situation becomes visible here, in which two filmed actors play at being people like them, living on the street. "What are you looking at?" in the sense of "There's nothing to see here, because I'm like you," becomes a paradoxical demarcation through alleged sameness that obviously does not exist; they do not have the same narrative credit worthiness. As for performers Lamelas and Duane's second audience, that is, us, who watch the video, the presence of an "authentic" audience within the film becomes the possibility to link two reflexive levels and to travel, as it were, on the middle strip between fictional narration and realistic documentation. But within the story that Duane and Lamelas now unfold in their monologues, new entanglements emerge. The two are an overthrown dictatorial couple from South America, set up by the CIA as friends of American presidents. They once had bunkers and diamonds, and they had airplanes full of Coca-Cola to Americanize their people. While the two, playing homeless people, pile a tower of car tires onto their shopping cart, with which they want to build a hut, they describe their palace and their rise and fall. It is a parody of both American promises of advancement and revolutionary romanticism. Here are poor people telling not of their hope to succeed – as dishwashers to millionaires or as revolutionaries to political emancipation – but, rather, poor people telling of their fall – from dictator to homelessness. Moreover, their rise is not down to either personal achievement, luck, or prowess, nor is their fall due to their own failure; it is attributable to the work of the intelligence of the CIA, which, as we know, has the means to script considerable

areas of people's political but also quite private and existential lives. How fictional is this reality? Thus, both within the parodic narration and in the filmed performance, the boundaries of fiction and reality blur in favor of a periphery that is productively interwoven and instrumentally differentiates them from one another. When the two homeless people are made to move on, driven away by a third party that claims the scene for itself, they are greeted by the feigning people on the street: "What are you looking at?" cries Lamelas again – as if there were nothing to see when the overthrown president arrives, as if the actor on the margins of his artificiality does nothing other than the people on the street who live in the hopelessness of *one* fiction.

Morgan Canavan has created an object that resembles a copy of the *Financial Times*. It lies on the floor, elegant and slightly bent. The object is made of laser-cut stainless steel and is UV-printed. Approaching the object to inspect it more closely, we can read, for example, the weather report, the recent stock market activity, errata, cooking instructions, parts of articles, and advertisements. The artist has reconfigured the texts and images, but the collaging interventions are minor and subtle. The newspaper's claim to be an index of everything in the world today seems untouched, at most a trace. The relationship between information and design and the familiar patterns of the *Financial Times* are also hardly irritated. If we look a little closer still, we notice the differences that distinguish the newspaper object from the work of art: at the creases, the paint has flaked off, and one can see the sheet steel. Inconspicuously, we can see the edges of the print where different newspapers have been mounted. These places of deviation seem to increase the density of the newspaper object. The sheet-steel newspaper's casual tension and elegance are perhaps what the paper newspaper achieves only in the imagination. At the same time, these deviations openly refer to the different production processes of newspaper and artwork, because this work is not about the deceptively real simulation but about the subtle irritation.

A newspaper's claim to offer information and relevance presupposes, on the one hand, knowledge on the part of readers and, on the other hand, the work of selection, contextualization, evaluation, and research on the part of newspaper makers. In this sense, there is no such thing as raw information. Newspapers can produce an informational worldview by

curating, anticipating, and speculating on the world. Intrigued by this, Canavan takes control of the finished product and subjectivizes it through his subtle interventions. He inscribes himself in the self-consciously presented public address, but without having a say in it, he thematizes the discourse. Without being subversive in content, Canavan makes imaginable in the irritation of the form what conditions this discourse: whoever agrees with its form may differ in opinion in terms of content, but whoever irritates or criticizes its form makes visible the hegemonic nature of the discourse, which is usually threatened with exclusion. What kind of form is this? It is a mediation between these two patterns: the informing material network and the informing expectant readership. This structure coincides with corresponding political and economic networks. Some call them the "market" or "public sphere." It is indirectly conveyed in the design of the newspaper object. The comparison of the form of the product with its material-semiotic process of production and consumption reveals how broadly the scope for design is interpreted and how intentions are either concealed or coveted. Through the transformation of this product into a work of art, not only the medium of the newspaper, its production of topicality, and the collective informational environment become reflectable, but also the medium of the work of art. What use value does the artwork as a commodity promise in comparison to the utility and relevance of the newspaper? What is the duration and topicality of art compared to the newspaper's time periods? Who provides the duration and topicality of art, and who produces it? What infrastructure and agents condition art and are involved in its use? And what is the relationship between the use of art and its value? What is the relationship between the hegemonic order, the specific mediation of value, and the processual form of an artwork? What reflexive information takes place?

In **Peppi Bottrop**'s paintings, a certain art-historically coded organization of line, plane, and space – 1930s and '40s Surrealism – is combined with the historicity of the material. One could call it a reorganization, a reconnection of that which was separated but lacked explicit connection. A journey through time that carries out connections that were missing in the past but are necessary to provide the present with explicative terms for potencies that exist now.

The Surrealist pictorial organization of the 1940s by Wolfgang Paalen, Max Ernst, Roberto

Matta, and others took up Marcel Duchamp's erotic machine images as abstract arrangements, sometimes imagining ruins (Ernst), sometimes imagining space travel in science fiction worlds (Matta). But the semiotic exuberance that twenty years earlier had effectively tattered the corpse of naïve realism was gone. The competitive community of Surrealists is shattered. Real horror has set in, and the perversion of the political world in the fascist 1940s in Europe can no longer be subverted or even heightened by sense-distorting images. The Surrealist, painterly spatial organization of these years has become abstract. In the paintings of Arshile Gorky and Willem de Kooning, it became a fundamental influence for Abstract Expressionism, with which the USA conquered cultural hegemony in the 1950s.

Bottrop embraces the abstract lines and spatial structures that create powerful epiphenomena of subjectivity – it is more a *sense* of ruins, bodies, machines, and synapses than their representation. Explicit, however, is his use of materials: coal, copper, graphite, rust, luminous paint – these are the materials that have always been familiar to him as the son of a mining family in the Ruhr Valley. The historicity of the material includes the organization of labor and its political function. The coal mines of the Ruhr were the industrial heartland of Germany because they were crucial for steel production and thus for the war. In combining the pictorial rhetoric of Surrealism and the conceptual use of the material, Bottrop reunites cultural expression and the effects of subjectivity with the political economy of a time that lies in its material processes – a synthesis that could be taken up in the present to trace the material conditions and effects of overpowering ideological programs.

Anne Imhof's drawings are formations of body-language ciphers. Poses performed by the bodies are represented by graphic gestures. The codes of the models' bodies are superimposed on those of the artist drawing them. The lines of architecture and inventory are interwoven with those of the bodies. The space of the drawing is a web of lines in which the bodies, the stage, and the requisites become equally bearers of expression, no less subjectified to each other, no less pervading each other as strangers. An arm with its gesture and the label on a can of Coca-Cola are both fetishes on a stage where form and content, inside and outside, familiar and foreign, become indistinguishable without being reconciled. Everything is equivalent to each

other as a commodity. All codes exchange values: body language as an expression of a feeling for life and the goods advertising themselves, whose aesthetics, split off from the manufacturing process, promise the buyer an upgrade if appropriation is successful. The persuasive messaging of the fashion label's advertising also needs appropriation and embodiment in the purchase; it becomes flesh, while the buyer's body is spiritualized in the purchase; he participates in the virtual nature of the brand product. But the sex of fetishized exchange values is brief: no sign, whether that of a gesture or of branding, is the place of a prolonged stay; they are but passages, transitions of body and spirit, which afterwards again are empty. Therefore, the process of transformation must repeat itself constantly. The embodiment of signs and the virtualization of bodies – bodies become money, money becomes affect – are not observed in a classical body-soul separation but in a permanent, unsustainable oscillation of being transported.

In his exhibition *More Heat than Light*, which took place at various locations in 2015/16, **Sam Lewitt** made an energy infrastructure visible through manipulative interventions in existing local systems, using the kind of image production that is employed in comparable systems to regulate them. In the Wattis Institute, San Francisco, the Kunsthalle Basel, and an Airbnb apartment in New York, he connected the existing power supply network used for lighting with oversized flexible heating circuits he produced himself, of the sort usually manufactured to regulate the temperature of technical equipment – from computers to medical equipment to satellites. The spaces, whose supply of energy intended for lighting was converted into heat, were then subject to real-time documentation by thermal imaging cameras of the type normally used to monitor and optimize operations, for example, in commissioning systems of factories. The exposed flexible heating circuits' aesthetic quality of archaic ornamentation contrasts with the imagery produced by the thermal imaging camera. Lewitt does not conceive of these images metaphorically; the analysis is metonymic, mapping a constellation of which it is a part: the constellation of material infrastructure, image programs of regulation, direction, and control, and the subjectivity and objectification of the bodies that enter the field of this imagery.

Normally, the live feed from the thermal camera is used to visualize the distribution of heat to monitor and optimize the efficiency of the production processes of the organization. Thus, the

images are usually integrated into a feedback loop of monitoring and control, which serves to continuously optimize efficiency. Color gradients serve as a measure of the areas of the production site that are most or least frequently used, data that must be transferred to a grid diagram that introduces parameters of relevance and with which the data of the diagram becomes interpretable, that is, evaluable. In these interlinked operational image spaces, one comparison of the organization of patterns proves particularly fruitful: the mediation between raster and gradient. In tracing the operationality of their measurement, their respective inherent evaluation becomes discernible, as does the specific quality of their production of meaning.

The representation of instrumental images is a model that cannot be separated from its control function, which in turn is command; that is, it is integrated into a circuit of production through evaluation, which is metonymically linked to the production of a world as a given political economy. The image does not serve to represent something preexisting but to produce something new. The grid diagram and its certain processes conform the things in the world, not the other way around. They do not correct themselves towards the world, but the world according to its own structure. Representation is operationalization. The questions raised by *More Heat than Light* go far beyond the functions and "affects" of the programs and infrastructures described. Its method can be transferred as paradigmatic to other convergent apparatuses of the production of meaning – and their readability.

Alex Heilbron's paintings show patterns on several overlapping levels that seem to stand in an intermediate state of abstract emptiness and semiotic charge. Their superimposition in terms of content and form creates irritating effects, for example, by using the pattern of a *Sparkasse* – a network of banks – that is very unique to its German context. These banks, which in many ways are involved in the promotion of culture, have an ambivalent reputation among artists: through their cultural sponsorship, they distribute money and thus promote competition among artists according to their own corporate criteria and standards, thereby engaging in a certain distortion of the market. But the *Sparkassen* are rather small local players in the financial industry, which puts them at the double disadvantage among artists and vulgar critics of capitalism of neither being able to completely shed the reputation of legal organized crime that the banking system in

general enjoys nor having the ability to buy their way out of it by paying respectable amounts. Thus, the pattern acquires a realistic narrative that places art, design, and contemporary history in a relationship with "stupid money" that becomes palpable and can be experienced intuitively. Other layers of abstract or weakly representative patterns, tools of design, and advertising are placed on top. Their combinations create a powerfully affirming effect that transports the viewer into the sound of specific time periods. Heilbron does not start at the material origin of the images as illustrations or the media networks of their distribution, but at the myth, that is, their production of ideology. The creative contradiction her work encloses is the proliferation of metaphors that form over the images and their pruning through artistic montage, for images are productive as if by themselves, in that they circulate in an economy of images and evaluations and constantly take on new meanings. They take on the flavor of milieus, promise cultural capital, and harness the reality-distorting and reality-creating power of ideological speculation.

The codes of the images abstracted into patterns and ornaments charged with meaning form, in their superimposition, disturbances that are physically perceptible as optical effects, remixing the sound of the images. The resulting pictures, like playing cards or casino money, act like an implicit critique from inside the image bank.

In an ongoing series of oil paintings, **Fabian Ginsberg** uses commodities – branded products as providers of themselves – as alleged "real" objects to stare at without moving the eyes, to the point that nothing is any longer recognizable, neither the fixed point nor the surroundings. Everything dissolves, not only into blur but also into imagined spatial shapes or signs and colors that gray out toward the edges. In addition, the nose, eyelashes, and cheeks become visible. Of course, it's impossible to paint this because, without the movements that the eyes make in microseconds, no synthetic image can be constructed for the brain. Yet, because the eyes nevertheless twitch back and forth a bit and the brain projects something, an image still results. Then the hands of the artist are tasked with painting the perception – not pretending that this is normality – because this, of course, is also impossible, at least in as much as it is impossible to paint the "real" at all or to "perceive" anything. It must be translated, therefore, and in translation there are also immediately style components for what is not recognizable. A

psychedelic semiotics emerges: images that are simultaneously physically phenomenological and yet preserve the advertising image of the commodity that Marx called that "very tricky thing, […] full of metaphysical sophistry and theological muckraking"; images that place the split-offness of the commodity fetish in tension with its embodying perception.

Ginsberg's "Karlshorster Studio," located in the ruins of what was once the most modern, computerized shelf warehouse in the GDR, became for him, in the early 2010s, a model of the transformative exchange between the general political economy of those years of neoliberal reform in Germany and his artistic production, which was inextricably tied to this place. The "Karlshorst Studio," where there was no running water or heating and where the power grid broke down continually, developed into an indexical mapping of the necessary infrastructures of the production and reproduction of body and subjectivity in shaping the organization of "life" and work. The motto "I as method, rather than content" meant not reappropriating and reifying subjectivity but conceiving it as epiphenomena of the organizing process that is external and extensive; that is, to not produce the products the apparatus intended but to embody the apparatus as an index of its existing content. A standpoint of implicit critique that was organless and metonymic had to make the system externally undisplayable and concretely non-displayable so long as it was functioning. It was not until 2020, at the end of the decade and after the building had been demolished and the "Karlshorst operation" had ceased, that its metabolic economy was presented in book form.

Hidden behind a door, the exhibit includes a reconstruction of part of the "Karlshorst Battery," a 32 x 7 x 3- foot wall cabinet full of plastic bottles filled with urine and wired with copper and magnesium that would be able to generate enough energy to charge a cell phone.

Julia Eichler dedicates her video works to seemingly mundane phenomena of fashion and youth culture. In her film *Shaping*, she explores the work on the self that shapes the body and mind, as happens in fashion, sport, and therapy. On the one hand, these are paradigmatic examples of neoliberal subjectivity: self-optimization, the self as the object of labor, fetishization of the sense of life and ever further external differentiation of individualism, the

extension of competition to the improvement of the psyche, of feeling, of communication, and the need for therapy of deviance. The hope for healing in a perverse society can only be compensatory. Its promise is subject to the same logic of exchange values as other commodities. But critique leaves unsatisfied those trapped in the automatism of the social subject of capitalism if it does not also recognize the forms of embodiment being committed as possible moments of distancing and cognition, just as, on the other hand, emancipatory critique in turn devolves into commodity form. Eichler takes social phenomena seriously and accepts the irreducible distress of the people who undergo optimization through therapy and body design as a possible, real improvement. This results in video works that allow an empathetic view of the aliveness of reification without, in turn, fetishizing "life." Eichler is specifically interested in how people manage life, how they try to master it, and how they *use* the promises of emancipative critique and offers of commodified optimization and improvement for themselves.

Solomon Anaya operates *Scobybaby* as a commercial kombucha company that produces fermented products. The promotional text on the company's website reads:

> Salomon started Scobybaby in New York when his fermented drink had been a success at his gallery openings with Submerged Art, even though, for him, it was just a by-product when making SCOBY to use as sculptures. He seized the opportunity to start selling the drink and simultaneously made it his conceptual art piece. Not only would the audience/consumer look at and experience his art, now they would be bringing it inside of them. Knowing that kombucha is made with live bacteria, Salomon experimented with caring for his scoby and kombucha with beautiful music, love, and great produce in the hopes of the drink carrying this with it as it was consumed.
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> Scobybaby Kombucha followed him to Los Angeles, where it was sold in places like Ace Hotel, Bikram Yoga, and Sage Bistro. As well as trips to Russia, Japan, Iceland, and Mexico, where he would share his culture, often in combination with art gatherings.
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> In the spring of 2020, Scobybaby got a fresh start in Sweden, this time together with Charlotte in the small town of Brösarp, right at the entrance of Österlen, an area famous for its farm-to-table food culture. Scobybaby brought flavors inspired by all the places it had traveled as well as

> making use of local produce found in the area, like lavender and rose hip. Scobybaby is in Sweden to stay and can now be found all over Skåne, Stockholm, and Copenhagen.

In the exhibition *The Californian Subject*, Anaya reintegrates his commercial product into an art context. This confronts the artworks and critical concepts, which are always also commodities, with those products that are advertised and designed as commodities but also have an explicit use value, for example, as food. At the same time, the strong charge of subjectivity and liveliness that Anaya gives to his product is apt to reflect on the momentary relationship between use value and exchange value, content, and form in general. In particular, in art, the question arises: to what extent do exchange values influence the quality of the goods themselves? The cultural goods business lives, after all, among other things, from the claimed incompatibility of its products with their commodity form. The formal subsumption of the products art and criticism produce (that is, their external form as commodities) is an external evil but does not determine their content. It would have to be reflected upon instead of assuming in false immediacy that there are critical, for example, less commercial points of view *within* capitalism that could be withdrawn from it. On the other hand, art and critique should not allow themselves to be subsumed in real terms, in which exchange value begins to transform their form- and surplus-critical content into advertising, persuasion, and speculation on surplus. In that case, criticism and art would not have sales strategies like a brand or company and would refuse the corresponding "presentation" as a mere commodity to be sold and consumed. Critics predicted, however, that the abstraction of value and the split-off relationship, the speculation on surplus value, and the search for exploitable externalities would at some point devour the intellectual content of the cultural good. The laws of the market would penetrate the substance of works of art and become immanent in them as a law of design. Like the branded product, they would be persuasive providers of themselves, not representatives of a content, because the content is always already predetermined by the apparatus of capitalist exploitation.

How, then, would form and content, formal and real subsumption, be distinguishable in art understood as a theoretical model? What does it mean to preserve critical content in the face of a new exchange value: intelligence, creativity, or feeling? What practice of researching, learning and teaching would be able to stay ahead of its appropriation as a positive externality of the capitalist market? It would be necessary to produce a practice that is ahead of its real

subsumption under capital and its coagulation as a commodity form without denying it – by generating itself as an audience that always consumes its own critical content a little faster than it can be subsumed. The point is not to make concessions in terms of content – not to become part of the shimmering bubble that positively describes the abyss of the new exchange value, the black hole between past and future.

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