Transparent (Support) Structures: On Visibility and Social Reproduction in Socially Engaged Art

Transparente (Unterstützungs-)Strukturen: Über Sichtbarkeit und soziale Reproduktion in sozial engagierter Kunst

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Abstract

Drawing on materialist feminist theory, this article discusses *Recleaning the Rietveld Pavilion* (2017) by Alina Lupu and its relation to Job Koelewijn's *Cleaning of the Rietveld Pavilion* (1992) and other important antecedents. In considering the ways in which maintenance work is articulated in the projects, and the people engaged in the realisation, I contend that it is possible to develop a critical analysis of how visibility is deployed in socially engaged art contexts. The argument focuses on art as a site of gendered labour and the subjectivities as well as forms of (social) work that it produces. Furthermore, the analysis explores the regime of hyper-visibility of contemporary art in contrast to the vast array of unrecorded economic activities, of which maintenance is an essential, yet not exclusive component, that ultimately contributes to reproducing an unsustainable system of work relations based on (self-)exploitation, reputational value and financial dependence.

Auf der Grundlage der materialistischen feministischen Theorie wird in diesem Artikel die Arbeit „Recleaning the Rietveld Pavilion" (2017) von Alina Lupu und deren Beziehung zu Job Koelewijns „Cleaning of the Rietveld Pavilion" (1992) und anderen wichtigen Vorläufern diskutiert. Indem ich die Art und Weise betrachte, wie Reinigungs- und Servicearbeiten in den Projekten artikuliert werden, und wie die Menschen, die an deren Umsetzung beteiligt sind, in den Blick genommen werden, argumentiere ich, dass im Kontext sozial engagierter Kunst eine kritische Analyse der Sichtbarkeit dieser Tätigkeiten stattfindet. Die Argumentation konzentriert sich auf Kunst als Ort geschlechtsspezifischer Arbeit und auf die Subjektivitäten sowie die Formen (sozialer) Arbeit, die sie hervorbringt. Darüber hinaus wird das Regime der Hyper-Sichtbarkeit zeitgenössischer Kunst in Kontrast gesetzt zur Unsichtbarkeit dieser haushaltsnahen Dienstleistungen, die wesentlich aber nicht ausschließlich mit der Instandhaltung und Pflege befasst sind und so zur Reproduktion eines nicht nachhaltigen Systems von Arbeitsbeziehungen beitragen, das auf (Selbst-)Ausbeutung, Reputation und finanzieller Abhängigkeit beruht.

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Introduction

In socially engaged art as a central paradigm of the contemporary art field, visibility is often deployed as an emancipatory tool. Visibility allows marginalised individuals and communities to bring their needs and urgencies into discursive context and be recognised as subjects. Yet, in neoliberalism as the globally hegemonic capitalist economy doctrine that defined the post-1989 period in which socially engaged art developed, visibility has served multiple aims linked to broader socio-economic issues. Furthermore, and regarding the art field, visibility as exposure feeds on the performative dimension of artistic labour in the production of social relations and events that support a system founded on the exclusion and exploitation of a mass of invisible workers (SHOLETTE 2011).

Two terminological clarifications regarding two key concepts in the paper, namely neoliberalism and visibility, are thus necessary before proceeding to the critical examination of socially engaged art proposed by this article. Since the 1970s, through a series of political and market-economy reforms, the economic doctrine of neoliberalism, characterised by deregulation, privatisation, and the reduction of the role of the government in favour of the global market, has been a key frame of reference to comprehend the geopolitical and cultural changes of recent decades (HARVEY 2005). Accentuating the role of free trade, finance capital, and individual entrepreneurship, at the expense of social justice and the welfare state, neoliberalism can be seen as a maximalist articulation of capitalism, which extends the drive for capital accumulation to every domain of life. A particularly important shift was the embeddedness of post-Fordism as a paradigm that aimed at overpowering the assembly-line mode of production in favour of greater delocalisation, flexibility and self-management, and the growth of the service and informational economy. This economic-cultural context must be considered in an analytical framework through which to discuss the work and the role of the artist in the last decades. The substantial economic and political changes—mostly defined as, or emanating from, the multiple, interconnected crises of existing capitalism—of the past few years have recently called into question the hegemony of neoliberalism (BERBERO-GLU 2020). Nevertheless, as this article entails a historical dimension over the long-term function of a central paradigm of contemporary art, neoliberalism and post-Fordism, as known since 1989, necessarily inform my analysis.

Conventionally, the term 'visibility' refers to the quality or capacity to see and be seen as well as designating various degrees of intelligibility. In politics, visibility is strictly connected to issues of representation, participation and agency and it is thus acknowledged as both a topic and a factor of political and theoretical discussion. As noted by feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser (2000), in the seventies and eighties, struggles for recognition (built on a politics of visibility) were very popular among feminist and other social movements for they were perceived as connecting emancipation to a more equitable redistribution of power and wealth. As will be discussed later, in feminist politics the question of visibility was closely linked to undoing the invisibilisation of women's labour and to recognising reproductive work as work (DALLA COSTA/JAMES 1975; FEDERICI 1975; FORTUNATI 1981/1995). Articulated through various strategies and forms of (self-) representation, the commitment to visibility represented an important terrain of struggle and contestation also for second-wave feminist artists, art historians and curators (ISAAK 1997; RECKITT 2018; DIMITRAKAKI/SHAKED 2021). Tapping into this tradition, visibility is at the core of the article. I have however chosen not to opt for a single operative definition of visibility but to use the analysis to explore the various connotations, functions and values that visibility acquires in relation to different issues and contexts.

By engaging critically with the rhetoric of visibility and transparency, my aim here is to discuss the economic and political implications of these notions (their political economy, in other words) in socially engaged art contexts. In exploring how visibility operates and contributes to shaping the art field in relation to neoliberal processes of (art) production, I consider in particular the relationship between the politics of visibility and art as a site of gendered labour. Operating within a materialist feminist theoretical framework, I discuss the role of visibility and representation, as well as their economic functions, in socially engaged processes as well as in neoliberal art production. Furthermore, I elaborate on some of the identified concerns through the examination of Alina Lupu's *Recleaning the Rietveld Pavilion* (2017) and its relation, constitutively present in the artwork, to Job Koelewijn's *Cleaning of the Rietveld Pavilion* (1992) and other important antecedents. While starting from quite different assumptions and methodologies, maintenance work, and specifically the act of cleaning, is at the core of all these art projects. After outlining the key issues that emerge through the analysis of these works, I investigate these issues in relation to the conditions of production that characterise

the art economy and pay attention to the power relations implicated in, and also upset by, claims to visibility.

Framing the Social Turn Through Social Reproduction

The social turn that occurred in art and curating in the 1990s has produced a significant paradigm shift in contemporary art production, intersecting with the fields of policy making, democracy, political activism and cultural action and questioning principles of autonomy and authorship in the arts. Articulating through process-based, open-ended projects, in which the key tools and aims are human relationships, exchange and cooperation between the people involved, socially engaged art projects seem to disregard traditional elements pertaining to representation in favour of other evaluative parameters such as social inclusion, impact and activation (BISHOP 2012; JACKSON 2011; KESTER 2011; KWON 2002; among others).

Despite socially engaged art's apparent departure from representation, I contend that in socially engaged art projects it is possible to observe a significant articulation of the tension between visibility and action that offers an interesting perspective on the subject. Visibility, within the frame of a quest for increased political recognition and relevance, stands as an important feature of these projects and their radicalism. The act of bringing people, and their desires, to the fore, so as to act upon perceived urgencies and needs, is a leitmotiv of most politically connoted experiences. As noted by art historian Grant Kester, this approach could be epitomised as a "sequential unfolding" (KESTER 2011: 104) of issues and/or hidden power structures brought about through the accumulation of experiences of communication, negotiation and resolution. The decision to collaborate with marginalised groups and subjectivities and to strive to bring attention to specific instances could be associated with a framing of visibility as inherently emancipatory. While contending that political struggles escape representation, political philosopher Oliver Marchart (2019) claims that representation as the staging of an antagonist event is a crucial step that has a prefigurative function which might agitate and thus foster real political action in society at large. Drawing on the work of political theorist Ernesto Laclau (1935–2014), Marchart (2019) identifies, in the openings produced through antagonistic representations, a space in which it is possible to bring previously hidden and

repressed issues and subjects to light in order to critically reconfigure the system as a whole.

Bodies and lives are thus made visible through a range of strategies connected to the formation of relationships and the initiation of processes of collaboration and co-production. In this context, the artist defines a space in which individuals and communities can enter the stage of artistic and social action, locally and/or internationally, depending on the scope of the project. Structured around competition and the exhibitionary format, recognition could be identified according to art historians Angela Dimitrakaki and Nizan Shaked (2021: 12) as "the default mode of politics" of the art field and neoliberal ideology, drawing on the rhetorics of diversity and meritocracy. Supposedly, greater exposure should produce greater familiarity with estranged subjects, resulting in an enhancement in representation in society and the expansion of their rights and protections through mechanisms of empathy and mutual recognition. Moreover, the presumed transparency and openness of socially engaged art partakes in the formation of a relationship of trust, with the public as co-creator of the work itself, making the visibility of production processes a key constituent of the creative act (KUNST 2015). However, as will be discussed later in this article, these principles often linger on a mere ideological or theoretical level, being functionally deployed to highlight some aspects of the work while concealing others, depending on the structure and aims of a given project.

To be seen and accepted in a traditionally exclusive context, such as the art institution, is a complex and conflicting process. To the extent that the economic and political implications of visibility are overlooked, it becomes apparent that the discourse around the topic of visibility-as-exposure will necessarily stand as incomplete, serving the reiteration of pacifying and enthusiastic narratives regarding its effectiveness and progressivism, especially in relation to socially engaged art contexts. Recognising the privileged position of an institution or an artist collaborating with diverse subjects (individuals or groups) is crucial to determining degrees of intervention and commitment that would allow everyone to feel seen and safe, even by opting out of exposure, and to avoid processes of commodification and co-optation. As argued by Dimitrakaki (2013) in relation to the limits of identity politics and feminism, representation today fails to be a relevant site of political subjectivation for it tends to lead to partial acceptance and tokenism while reproducing extant systems of exploitation and inequality. Therefore, I posit that it might be possible to better grasp the economic and political implications

of visibility and produce a more complete inquiry of the topic by analysing it through the lens of social reproduction.

Deduced from Marx, who used the term social reproduction to discuss the reproduction of labour power as external to capitalist production, the category of social reproduction entered feminist theory, and particularly Marxist feminist groups, in the 1970s to produce a complementary theory of labour exploitation that would take into account the complex network of social processes and relations that allows for the reproduction of human life and society (BHATTACHARYA 2017). Deployed with the aim of generating a more integrative approach, which would exceed the Marxist dichotomy of production versus reproduction, the category of social reproduction has taken on a multiplicity of meanings, encompassing the reproduction of a mode of production and the reproduction of life per se, as explained by art critic and writer Marina Vishmidt in an important article from 2017. The distinction between the "two reproductions" identified by Vishmidt (2017: 4-6) becomes increasingly ambiguous—and to a certain extent redundant—in the current system of biopolitical production which increasingly tends to subsume every aspect of life under capitalist valorisation. For the category of social reproduction originated within bourgeois economics to indicate the processes aimed at reproducing the existing social system, feminist philosopher and activist Silvia Federici (2019) rightfully argues that to speak of social reproduction from a radical feminist position means to discuss a large area of exploitation and capitalist extraction that was being completely overlooked up to that point—that is unpaid labour—and to discuss the wage as a means of social organisation and subjugation.

To analytically work from this perspective is particularly relevant in light of the so-called feminisation of labour and the ways in which neoliberalism appropriates and exploits elements of care and affective labour into daily working habits and protocols. Following David Staples (2007), I contend that a study of the relationship between post-Fordism and artistic output that ignores the latter's affective and material aspects, along with the major contribution of women's work and its historical socialisation, might fall short of providing a thorough comprehension of the phenomenon and its social and political ramifications. Hence, in my analysis, I align myself to a strand of materialist feminist art theory and history (DIMITRAKAKI/LLOYD 2017; HORNE 2016; KUNST 2015; VISHMIDT 2017) that recognises the archetype of post-Fordist production in the unwaged female worker and a privileged site of struggles and value extraction in social reproduction.

Through this paradigm shift, it is possible to look at visibility through the legacy of feminist politics and the struggle around the recognition of reproductive labour. Since the second half of the twentieth century, the deconstruction of the relationship between production and reproduction has been a crucial theme also in feminist art, where it is possible to observe different articulations of the tension between visibility, invisibility and political agency. Exemplary is the phenomenon of maintenance art, that is a form of art that engages with practices of maintenance and care labour, and which finds in Mierle Laderman Ukeles its most prominent interpreter. On July 20 and 22, 1973, Mierle Laderman Ukeles performed four different interventions within the context of her exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, which consisted of carrying out everyday maintenance and monitoring tasks, such as dusting the vitrine displaying an Egyptian mummy (*Transfer: The Maintenance of the Art Object*) or mopping the gallery floor (*Hartford Wash: Washing Tracts, Maintenance Inside*). All these interventions were then stamped as 'Maintenance Art Original', coding them as artworks and thus shifting the responsibility for their care to the curatorial team, thus overthrowing the value of maintenance and highlighting the fictional contrast between high (art) and low (waste) (RECKITT 2013). The principles underlying this connection between artistic and reproductive labour had already been anticipated by Ukeles in the *Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969! Proposal for an Exhibition 'Care'* (1969), which arose from the need to highlight and problematise the huge gap between the way art and art's autonomy were conceived and reproduced within its institutions against the invisibilisation and undermining of life-sustaining activities. This opposition mainly affects women artists, often making it impossible for them to pursue an artistic career and reaffirming the separation between productive and unproductive activities and the gendered and often racialised nature of this separation. Furthermore, Helena Reckitt (2013) points out the political nature of Ukeles' manifesto as it criticised the systematic invalidation within leftist revolutionary contexts as well as within the avant-garde work of maintenance and care that make them possible in the first place.

As it draws on the visibility of the relational and care work and the interdependence that sustains the reproduction of art system, and even more so social practices, maintenance art might offer a significant perspective in interpreting socially engaged practices from a materialist and feminist point of view. As noted by performance art scholar Shannon Jackson, Ukeles' position as a wife and mother, actively engaged in

repetitive reproductive work, puts her in a specific social and political position in the art system, that is "the side of supporter and maintainer rather than on the side of the genius artist" (JACKSON 2011: 78). This allows her not only to approach a structurally devalued type of work but to engage and challenge its bureaucratic and administrative structures. The commitment to maintenance work, in fact, exceeds the domestic realm and extends to society as a whole as in the late seventies, Ukeles proceeds to take on an unpaid artist-in-residence position for the New York City Department of Sanitation and realises larger-scale works on public cleaning and sanitary services (*Touch Sanitation: Follow in your Footsteps*, 1979-1980 or *Touch Sanitation: Handshake Ritual*, 1979). To the extent that the separation between art and life is overcome—both in art and in the production system—reframing maintenance as art unsettles the division between medium and support and exposes the processes and the labour that allow for the existence of art objects and projects (JACKSON 2011). Furthermore, with her performative acts, Ukeles questioned the hierarchy of roles and tasks, derived from the separation of intellectual and maintenance work, that is restated inside the art institution in which different jobs have different degrees of visibility with regard to the public and the other workers (JACKSON 2011).

As socially engaged art projects promote processes of emancipation that rely on performative political actions, while often overlooking the economic infrastructure that underlie the maintenance of such projects, I propose to develop a materialist analysis of the use of visibility in contemporary art production through the lens of maintenance art, identifying the act of cleaning, the key exemplifier of reproductive labour, and the socio-economic and technological structures that mediate it.

The Extractivist Nature of Visibility in Neoliberal (Art) Production

Cooperation and the possibility of observing and actively taking part in the production of socially engaged art projects are largely acknowledged as fundamental components of the practice. Collaborative processes are often captured and displayed through photos, videos or other documentary forms and their exposure is an integral part of the production of meaning and value. In her analysis of Relational Aesthetics, philosopher and performance art theorist Bojana Kunst (2015: 58f.) speaks of "pseudoactivity of the contemporary subject" to indicate a type of creative tension supported by art institutions and aimed at generating the illusion of

political engagement and negotiation in the participants while defusing possible forms of antagonism and dissent. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's reflections on the relational processes of spatialisation discussed in *The Production of Space* (1991), Kunst contends that the embracing of social practices by art and its institutions can only be achieved to the extent that its stability, and that of the political-economic system which supports it, are preserved and its political function fulfilled through surrogate actions.

> An important part of these changes is the illusion of the social transparency of artistic spaces that constantly invite collaboration, multiple goings-on in various spaces, discussions, eating and temporary lodging in these spaces. New spaces of art must be entirely and constantly visible – they must create the possibility of participation and free activity. […] Today, these social relations are at the core of generating value, with manners of production connected to the exploitation of these relations. At the same time, the dematerialisation of objects and the fetishisation of open procedures and transparent relations are at the core of post-Fordist shifts in the understanding of work and production. (KUNST 2015: 58f.)

Analysing the economic function of visibility is thus key to contextualising the mechanisms at work in the art system and the ways in which they influence the development of art projects. On the one hand, it is used to promulgate a naturalised idea of social engagement; on the other, it becomes currency in the reputational transactions that regulate the field of immaterial labour, a term employed by various post-Operaist theorists such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2001) and Maurizio Lazzarato (2010) to describe the subsumption of all the intellectual, affective and social capacities of the individual by the post-Fordist regime of production. Exposure is strictly connected to power and reputation and plays a crucial role in the configuration of the (art) system.

The strategic function of visibility in network-based forms of production is examined by sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005) on various instances. They discuss the role of hyperpresence in shaping the behaviour of the individual/worker as well as the continuous acts of self-monitoring and self-policing she has to put in place to avoid potential conflicts or disaffiliations that might cause her exclusion from the labour market (BOLTANSKI/CHIAPELLO 2005). The fundamental role of visibility is also stated by curator and writer Kuba Szreder in the homonymous entry in *The ABC of the Projectariat* (2021), in which the public presentation or enactment of ideas and actions are deemed crucial in determining their authorship, value and assert recognition by the system. The tension between visibility and artistic work thus depends on a need for peer-recognition, and

on the requirement to properly carry out a representation of one's work that aligns and feeds into the broader art field. As contemporary (art) work has to be performed in front of and be judged by other people, Kunst identifies in visibility "the principal technology of its production" (KUNST 2015: 145-146) that conceals, behind the aura of the art system, the informality of the relations of production and the social and experiential nature of work as well as the material and affective resources that are necessary for its realisation and sustenance.

In discussing the economic benefit of visibility, it is therefore equally relevant to examine what remains hidden and the motivations behind such concealment. The regime of hyper-visibility of contemporary art, in fact, relies on a vast array of unrecorded economic activities of which maintenance is an essential, but not exclusive component. In exchange for an increase in status and relational value, such activities are continuously performed by a heterogenous group of seemingly interchangeable individuals; a situation that is quite reminiscent of the functioning of the platform economy. Artist and activist Gregory Sholette has grouped the mass of amateurs, activist, informal, or unofficial artists who actively contribute, with their work, to the reproduction of the system, while being systematically disallowed by it in the analytical category of "dark matter" (SHOLETTE 2011: 4). Similar mechanisms are also discussed by the *Centre for Plausible Economies* (Kathrin Böhm and Kuba Szreder) by means of the visual metaphor of the "iceberg economy" (2020: 2) drawn from feminist economist duo J.K. Gibson-Graham. Implementing the concept within the art system, J. K. Gibson-Graham aim to account for all the invisible short-term assignments, affective and maintenance work, non-monetary exchanges and informal forms of collaboration and support that nurture and sustain a small but "glossy" sector (*Centre for Plausible Economies* 2020: 10). Differently from Sholette's model, I contend that the icebergian description of the economic structure of contemporary art manages to explicate the interdependence characterising the system and the position of social reproduction labour within the process of production.

In the following, I expand on the political, social and economic implications of visibility in socially engaged art contexts, and the reputational economy that characterises cognitive capitalism, using the analysis of Alina Lupu's *Recleaning the Rietveld Pavilion* (2017) and its link to Job Koelewijn's *Cleaning of the Rietveld Pavilion* (1992) and VALIE EXPORT's *Transparent Space* or *Kubus EXPORT* (2001-ongoing).

Recleaning the Rietveld Pavilion (Twenty-Five Years Later)

On March 16, 1992, as part of his graduation show for the Bachelor in Fine Arts at the *Gerrit Rietveld Academy*, Job Koelewijn produced *Cleaning of the Rietveld Pavilion*, asking his mother and three aunts to clean, by hand, the glass structure, while wearing traditional dresses from Spakenburg, an area in the Netherlands renowned for its Calvinist cleaning culture. Named after the architect Gerrit Rietveld, who is among the founding members of the De Stijl movement, Rietveld Pavilion, a modernist room-sized steel and glass structure, is situated in front of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie. That latter is the university of applied sciences for fine arts and design, founded in Amsterdam in 1924. Standing in the courtyard of the university—whose building is also made up of glass, iron and concrete—the Pavilion has strong sculptural and symbolic value recalling the modernist principles of rationalism, functionality and transparency as well as the inter-permeation of the inside with the outside world.

Originally conceived to mark the end of Koelewijn's formative period and the beginning of a new phase in his life, *Cleaning of the Rietveld Pavilion* presents irony as deeply intertwined with religion. The artist exemplifies this with a quote from Saint Teresa of Jesus, included in the artwork's booklet: "a woman who cleans does not lose her senses" (KOELEWIJN 1992: 22). The ritual of cleaning, in fact, has a significant role in many religions assuming a purifying, and thus moral function. Specifically, in Calvinism the care work performed by women is part of the overall ethic of hard work, which was considered a necessary duty for earning divine grace and proving oneself to be among the elect and the virtuous. Furthermore, as observed by critics Carel Blotkamp and Sjoukje van der Meulen (1999), the Dutch word for cleaning–*schoon*–adds a further layer to the analysis of the work since it incorporates beautification as part of the process and suggests the idea of beauty as a measure of a person's goodness and worth.

The dematerialisation of architectural and artistic work acquires renewed materiality in the cleaning effort of the four women, generating a major dissonance, which is further amplified by the absurd overlap of the modernist element and the traditional dresses. The apparent paradox is yet exceeded or not properly unravelled in Koelewijn's work as the sobriety and functionality of the Rietveld Pavilion effortlessly merges with the integrity and industriousness of the Spakenburg women, establishing a conceptual space that reaffirms the virtuosity and the joyfulness of housework, along with the separation between the creative and the maintenance act, delegated to unskilled female figures who are only defined by their

affective relationship with the artist. The entanglements of identity politics, local economies and modernist culture seem to dissolve in the work, and especially in its photographic documentation.

While formally staging a similar action, Alina Lupu's re-enactment *Recleaning the Rietveld Pavilion* (2017) entails a major shift from the domestic to the platform economy as the artist relies on external collaborators, initially hired through an online cleaning service, for the actualisation of the work. According to the original idea, which the artist was not able to fully realise, family ties would thus be replaced by an algorithmic and wage-mediated relationship.

Before delving into the analysis of the work, it is important to reflect for a moment on the process that led to the realisation of Lupu's performance, which is recounted in its accompanying booklet (LUPU 2018). In order to better understand the inner mechanisms of the platform, the artist herself worked for two months as a cleaner in the same company from which the cleaners for the project were hired, and this led to a first obstacle. When trying to create a customer account, the artist was denied access, exposing a significant inbuilt bias of the app: either one pays or is paid, either one is a consumer or a worker. Furthermore, when the artist proceeded to hire the four on-demand cleaners, they got immediately contacted by company representatives and were discouraged from accepting the job, even though the artistic intentions had not been clearly expressed in the advert. The supposed neutrality and automation of the algorithm, and the freedom that this should entail for gig-workers, are thus called into question as they were denied, via direct calls from the management, the free decision whether to accept the cleaning task listed in the app. In this sense, I contend that the platform economy is revealed for what it is, that is an outsourcing system for highly structured and hierarchal companies with rules and monitoring procedures to which workers must comply. After a few more failed attempts, in the days leading up to the event, the artist finally decided to take a different path and hired four Rietveld students, paid the equivalent of two hours of work within the platform economy, plus the platform fees. All wearing the same green shirt, recalling the idea of a worker's uniform to convey a sort of corporate identity, the performers collectively cleaned the glass structure, generating an additional conceptual shift in which the formal distinction between the artistic and working act was further blurred.

In her artistic practice, Lupu reflects on the new forms of labour and art-world precarity in post-Fordism, emphasising the multiple identities and roles artists are increasingly required to take on to support themselves,

and try to make their way into the art system. Throughout and after her academic path, Lupu has carried out a number of jobs, largely in the service sector. Such experiences are shared by many cultural workers, who are required—in order to sustain themselves and their practices—to take on multiple side-jobs, which are then often concealed in their professional self-narrations. The decision to make them openly visible, and indeed let them inform the art practice, is thus related to a political approach for which the precarity of living and working are not merely addressed as performative experiences, nor content, but as field of political action. In fact, along with getting involved in, and supporting campaigns for fair working conditions and the right to housing, as of 2020 Alina Lupu is part of the Board of Platform BK, an organisation founded in 2012 to support cultural workers, improve working conditions and art policies, and to research the relation between art, politics, and society.

In *Recleaning the Rietveld Pavilion*, as in other later artworks by Lupu, the gig-worker perfectly embodies the condition of the creative worker in neoliberalism—an apparently autonomous worker whose survival is linked to an infrastructure regulated by ratings, unwritten protocols and reputational value. Founded on temporary and task-oriented projects, which become the basic units of art production and circulation, the artist-entrepreneur is required to take on a series of roles and responsibilities to allow for artistic reproduction and that of the system:

> As work becomes an increasingly autonomous task, platform mediated, similar in that sense to the apparent autonomy of artists, it also tends to become invisible yet again, engendering division and bringing about an impossibility of understanding its mechanisms when one looks at it from the outside. This results in an inability to value it appropriately. In both the case of cleaning and art making, actions should matter more than the image that they make. (LUPU 2018: 2)

While acknowledging the subsumption of intellectual and affective capacities within biopolitical capitalism, the focus on a key maintenance task that informs *Recleaning the Rietveld Pavilion* counters the further invisibilisation and marginalisation of social reproduction and the emphasis placed on its communicative-relational component reiterated in the rhetoric of immaterial labour, which might risk reinforcing a hierarchy between jobs and tasks. Koelewijn's clean break from university and entry into the labour market was brought about by the same family members who took care of him throughout his life. In Lupu's work, this is carried out by people with whom the artist shares a similar fate and that she needs in order to do her job.

Unlike Koelewijn's work, *Recleaning the Rietveld Pavilion* draws from the principles of maintenance art and directly addresses art as a site of labour and in connection to the sustainability of art infrastructure. On the Academie's website, the Pavilion is presented as a platform for students and alumni "to experiment, to discuss and to learn by making use of the autonomous space. The aim of the pavilion is to keep the space active and alive, and to bring students together to exchange ideas and to support them in collaborative projects." (*Gerrit Rietveld Academie*). This emphasis on autonomy and exchange takes place within an institutional system in which each interaction acquires economic value and in which activities are fully integrated within the Academie's artistic and educational curricula, contributing to enhancing the programme and the value of the institution. As she expands the analysis of the relation between art, capitalism and the social field, Vishmidt (2013) discusses how emancipatory practices, as art, within the boundaries set by institutions—which are in turn regulated by capital—end up strengthening the boundaries of capital itself, becoming a significant channel of governance and financial, as well as social, accumulation. Hence, while examining emancipatory practices inside and outside the art context, it is crucial to explore not only the theoretical apparati that inform these projects but also the affective and material conditions that support their functioning. Within this framework, visibility becomes the currency through which the institution extracts resources, skills and content from students while not being transparent about the support it provides, except for experience (as required by the experience economy). Furthermore, spontaneity and openness are regulated by bureaucratic procedures, which manage the use of space and decide which individuals and which messages can have visibility in that specific place.

By selecting the glass pavilion, Lupu directly engages with the politics of visibility that is often employed by a number of progressive public projects and institutions, exposing its biased and narrow scope as well as the maintenance work required to support it. With the help of the booklet, the uniform and the payment, Lupu tries to clearly frame the act of cleaning, which is at the core of the artwork—as work—and not as performance art. In this way, she taps into the broader critique concerning conditions of production and reproduction in the art sector.

As observed by curator and writer Elke Krasny in relation to the publicly installed artwork *Transparent Space* or *Kubus EXPORT* (2001-ongoing) by VALIE EXPORT, the politics of visibility implemented in projects of public art and social inclusion often operate by means

of "exclusionary mechanisms of *selective* visibility" (KRASNY 2017: 140) that select the bodies and instances that may be more readily absorbed and exploited by the system, and further erase and disregard already marginalised subjects. Visibility, or what Krasny calls the "visibility-recognition trap" (KRASNY 2017: 140-141), might thus result in mechanisms of exploitation that effectively make certain groups, individuals and struggles more visible but without questioning or acting on the material conditions necessary for their reproduction and sustenance. On the contrary, the exposure of specific instances and groups may further endanger already vulnerable subjects or perpetrate oppressive forms of (mis) recognition, while not establishing the necessary infrastructures of support and protection.

Similar to Lupu's work, *Kubus EXPORT* consists of a large, room-sized Modernist glass cube. Commissioned by the municipality of Vienna, and specifically by the City of Vienna Women's Department, the work was part of a broader project of urban regeneration and cultural outreach that intended, among other things, to make women visible. It was conceived to host feminist exhibitions and events. Over the years, although the maintenance of the structure has been officially entrusted to different municipal departments, it has been the various artists, practitioners, and users of the space who have had to take care of it (KRASNY 2017). As noted by Krasny (2017), the transparency of the structure and the ongoing upkeep required for its proper operation serve as a good illustration of the tension between representation and reproduction, asserting the importance of shifting the focus of the feminist analysis from representation to the gendered conditions of production and reproduction underlying artistic labour in neoliberalism.

In EXPORT's public work, as in Lupu's *Recleaning the Rietveld Pavilion*, the tension between representation and reproduction is well exemplified by the full transparency of the two glass structures and in the requirement of the maintenance activities necessary for their proper functioning (KRASNY 2017). Yet, the way this is achieved, and the relationship to visibility, are quite different. In EXPORT's work the hidden character of maintenance is reasserted, as it only becomes visible through the use of the space or through the critical analysis of the artwork. In contrast, in Lupu's work, cleaning is a constitutive and evident component of the work, as the cleaners take over the entire space of the glass box with their bodies, their voices and their labour.

The allure of visibility, as noted by Kunst (2015), is determined by the widespread fetishisation of a specific lifestyle and imagery willingly

performed and reproduced by the artistic subjects. In the way in which work is performed and made visible, it is thus relevant to produce a different aesthetic of work that counters the idea of the overworked-successful-artist, making evident the precarious and exploitative conditions of production that characterise the field and its relation and interdependence to the broader sphere of production (KUNST 2015). While remaining in the realm of representativity, it might be said in *Recleaning the Rietveld Pavilion* Lupu seeks to deconstruct the specific joyful performance of artistic labour, redirecting the rhetoric of visibility against the institution itself. Moreover, although not explicitly positioning itself as a socially engaged art project, and not aspiring to develop other models of sociality or community, the artist succeeds in reflecting on the relational dimension of (art) work, emphasising its transactional value and rematerialising its traces through money. What is made visible, in fact, is not only the cleaning but the whole process of production, from the ideation to the selection and hiring of cleaners and the terms of their working agreement.

Finally, I want to briefly address a last issue concerning the politics of cleaning and visibility that does not immediately appear in the projects discussed so far but which is crucial in the analysis of the global restructuring of reproductive work. Decolonial feminist theorist Françoise Vergès explores the connections between cleanliness and dirtiness and their clear-cut separation in terms of visibility in the neoliberal organisation of society for which "the world is segregated through a division of the clean and the dirty, which rests on a racial division of urban space and the environment, a division that also exists in the Global South" (VERGÈS 2021: 77). This is primarily done at the expense of a multitude of racialised bodies that support the reproduction of the system through their care work while being exhausted and disposed as waste, and whose exposure is thus perceived as a breach in the broader socio-economic system (VERGÈS 2021). Although Lupu's work does not delve into the racial component of cleaning, which is central to feminist decolonial analyses, this still represents a valuable theoretical lens, for it touches on the tension between the performativity required by the neoliberal entrepreneur versus the wearing out of the oppressed subject.

In the work of Koelewijn, cleanliness and cleaning work acquire a high moral value that is being automatically linked to healthy and loving bodies, whose presence is cherished and celebrated. On the other hand, Lupu exposes the precarious nature of maintenance by framing it within the contrivances of the gig-economy, which is not represented as something

external, but as part of the same productive paradigm of which art labour is just another variation. On the one hand, the exposure of these bodies holds very different implications, both from an economic and a political standpoint. On the other, both works endure a similar degree of performativity. Due to the obstacles posed by the digitally mediated relation, the people involved in Lupu's performance are young students of the art academy. Not having detailed information regarding the performers, it would be incorrect to make assumptions concerning their economic conditions and their cultural and social backgrounds. However, it might be argued that the possibility of accessing and studying in a North European academic institution, and dedication to cognitive work, puts them in a relatively privileged position. The different economic and cultural positionalities, and the related imbalance of agency that coexist in socially engaged art projects, cannot be simply adjusted through a greater representation or inclusion of marginalised subjects. But it should entail a reconfiguration of the existing power relations and work distribution. Hence, in the analysis of socially engaged art practices, it is crucial to critically address how gender, ethnicity and class interact and how they influence the definition of care, the allocation of social reproduction labour, and the degree to which these distinctions are rendered visible in the public domain.

Conclusion

Since the second half of the twentieth century women and feminist artists have mis-appropriated, or re-appropriated, symbols and gestures of work to problematise the invisibility of reproductive labour and denaturalise its gendered vocation. As the process of dematerialisation and casualisation of work—often referred to as feminisation of labour—expands into every field of production and society in post-Fordism, it becomes even more critical for artists, critics and curators, among others, to examine and challenge the subjectivities that get reproduced in contemporary capitalism, including in its art system. An important step in this direction is to pay closer attention to methods of assimilation and co-optation as well as the function of visibility and representation in these processes.

In her analysis of the risks related to the struggles for visibility by marginalised groups in the 1970s and 1980s, Fraser (2000) discusses how the quest for recognition has often resulted in the marginalisation or

displacement of redistributive instances and the perpetuation of the reification of group identities. However, she acknowledges the emancipatory capacity of recognition, especially in the cultural sphere, to remain an important terrain of negotiation, to the extent that this is combined with struggles for redistribution (FRASER 2000). Following Fraser, Dimitrakaki and Shaked contend that it is crucial to start accounting for class divides and politics of redistribution in order to rethink recognition and address extant forms of exploitation and exclusion in the art field "for it would indicate that the distribution of positions of power in the highly prestigious realm of art (traditionally bearing a privileged class stamp) might become unmoored from class privilege" (DIMITRAKAKI & SHAKED 2021: 17).

With the institutionalisation of socially engaged and critical art discourses, art institutions have assumed an increasingly ambivalent role, presenting themselves as sites of critical debate and progressive experimentation, also with regard to capitalist exploitation, whilst serving as key sites of extraction and precarisation. The analysis of the integration of social practices into traditional institutional frameworks suggests that a conjunction of values and concepts (recognisable in more politically informed, more inclusive and discursive programming) often does not translate, by default, into more sustainable and equitable material conditions of productions, or even in a positive impact on the local community. As emphasised by Kunst (2015), the preservation and exhibitionary functions of contemporary art institutions have given way to the absorption of subjectivities and relationships, governed by regulations and protocols that tend to be concealed by ideals of openness, cultural democratisation and transparency.

Through the critical consideration of the meaning(s) and uses of visibility in contemporary art production that I attempted in this paper, I wanted to move beyond politics of visibility, which are limited to greater representativeness within the system, and to try to investigate the infrastructure that underlies artistic production, the distribution of work, and how it affects the people involved.[1]

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