

# DICTIONARY

## **Art Worker and Labor Conditions** **Evgenia Abramova**

The term “art worker” refers to the relationship between art/creativity and work (with an emphasis on labor/working conditions), defining “art workers” as both the subjects of rights and social-labor relations. The use of this term implies that aesthetic considerations are not of primary concern. In “On Art Workers’ Labor Conditions in Moscow” we did not discuss with the interviewees whether they considered themselves “art workers” or not, nor how they understood this term. Two of the interviewees used the term “art worker,” but in the sense of not contesting this terminology, rather than identifying with it. Another person who took part in several art projects refused to give an interview, a decision motivated by the fact that he did not consider himself an “art worker.”

As for the term “labor (working) conditions,” it refers to the different types of employment (unemployment/stable employment), the different types of work (producing texts, objects, performances, events), payment (non-payment/official payment), forms of labor and social relations (the presence of absence of a contract), and social benefits (or lack thereof). Generally, the project was based on the political demand: “Any type of work must be paid!,” which was not reflected in all of the interviews, as the main purpose was to provide longer descriptions of art workers’ working conditions; for labor practices are deeply immersed in everyday experiences, where the borders between official rules and informality are volatile, depending on numerous factors, ranging from ethical to legal concerns.

## **Glut** **Gregory Sholette**

The glut of art and artists is “the normal condition of the art market,” Carol Duncan commented in 1983.<sup>1</sup> More than 20 years later a 2005 Rand Corporation study of visual artists in the United States updated her observations, describing an even more unsettling picture of the art world. Its key finding was that although the number of artists had greatly increased in recent decades, the hierarchy among artists, “always evident, appears to have become increasingly stratified, as has their earnings prospects.” The report goes on to add that although a few “superstars” at

the top of this economic pyramid “sell their work for hundreds of thousands and occasionally millions of dollars, the vast majority of visual artists often struggle to make a living from the sale of their work and typically earn a substantial portion of their income from non-arts employment.”<sup>2</sup> [...]

Like the deterritorialized flow of finance capital, all that is solid, and all that is intangibly social, has been reduced to a kind of raw material for market speculation and bio-political asset mining. It is the social order itself, and the very notion of governance, along with a longstanding promise of security and happiness, that has become another kind of modern ruin. Even if the MFA (Master of Fine Arts) is the new MBA (Master of Business Arts), as some neoliberal business theorists intone, mumbling the phrase like some magic formula, what exactly does enterprise culture gain from its seemingly tender embrace of artists and creative labor?

Perhaps, rather than an historic compromise between artistic creativity and the neoliberal economy, what has fixated neoliberalism onto the image of the artist as ideal worker is not so much her imaginative out-of-the-box thinking or restless flexibility as the way the art world as an aggregate economy successfully manages its own excessively surplus labor force, extracting value from a redundant majority of “failed” artists who in turn apparently acquiesce to this disciplinary arrangement. There could be no better formula imaginable for capitalism 2.0 as it moves into the new century. Still, what remains to be seen is how those lost bits and pieces of a ruined society and dreams of collective dissonance might be reanimated through some artistic necromancy by those not yet ready to give in to the disciplinary sirens of enterprise culture.

Gregory Sholette, *Glut*, originally published in “Glut, Overproduction, Redundancy!,” *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise culture*, Pluto Press, 2010

1 Carol Duncan, “Who Rules the Art World?,” in *Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, 172.

2 Kevin F. McCarthy, et al., *Rand Report: A portrait of the visual arts: meeting the challenges of a new era*, Rand Corp., 2005; [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND\\_MG290.sum.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND_MG290.sum.pdf)

## **What is Neoliberalism? Milena Placentile**

French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, described neoliberalism as a modern repackaging of ideas elites have always used to exert their supremacy, this time through the distorted co-optation of progressive language, reason, and science to justify the concentration of power in their hands. Presenting itself as both contemporary and self-evident, it contends that the market ought to be free, and any effort to contain it (i.e. assisting people through social programs) is archaic and

backward. Neoliberalism therefore champions a radical, unrestrained capitalism “with no other law than that of maximum profit [...] rationalized [...] by the introduction of modern forms of domination such as ‘business administration’ and techniques of manipulation such as market research and advertising”<sup>1</sup>. It furthermore seeks to undermine rights won by workers after decades of social struggle. Proponents of neoliberalism try to convince us that their worldview champions ‘liberated trade’ capable of freeing us from antiquated regulations and ushering in a new era of abundance. None of this is true.

Neoliberalism is therefore a movement founded by elites *for* elites as a way of reversing the modest expansion of human rights and economic justice achieved since World War II. It is from a sense of superiority and entitlement that it aggressively seeks to harm others through strategies that amount to nothing less than class warfare. With a sense of urgency, Bourdieu notes that neoliberal misinformation must be “fought with intellectual and cultural weapons”<sup>2</sup>. Some understand Bourdieu’s statement as an appeal to academics; however, it may also be read as a call for each of us, from whatever our point of experience or frame of reference, to embrace our collective capacity to harness arts and culture-inspired critical thinking as a way to reject capitalism as the singular vision through which to enact our lives.

1 Sapiro, Gisele, and Pierre Bourdieu. *Sociology Is a Martial Art*. New York: The New Press, 2010. 112.

2 *Ibid.*, 128.

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Milena Placentile (see pages 13)

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