

Bobrikova & de Carmen

Insubordination
of bodies

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HotDock project space, Bratislava



INSUBORDINATION OF BODIES

In the heat of critical discussions on labor, value and alienation, Paul Lafargue denounced the repressive imperative of work, the all-invading and foundational basis for modern capitalist economies. He manifestes the necessity of establishing the right to laziness, situating this right outside of capitalist exploitation and apparatus of discipline: “to work but three hours a day, reserving the rest of the day and night for leisure and feasting”[1]. Among many other critical trajectories including the anarchist joy of refusing to work, supposedly Eastern-European idleness and non-productivity, critiques of over-production and reproductive labor have become part of a strong tradition of the abolition of work in political and artistic practices.

At the same time, with a transforming economic paradigm of late capitalist production, one can observe how capital and microtechniques of power has become embedded within most private zones of subjectivity: love, rest, dream and laziness, which originally existed outside of the disciplinary matrix of the eight hour working day. What happens when the right to laziness is being commodified in contemporary societies? How has non-productivity become inscribed into the economy, technologies of governmentality and creative production? This notion of subordination, normativity, and resisting bodies was the focal point of this exhibition by the artistic duo Martinka Bobrikova and Oscar de Carmen.

The exhibition presented two works: “Yes, I can (not)” (2014) and “Non-logic Devices in Logic Processes” (2018). “Yes, I can (not)” is a sound installation, consisting of microphones distributed on tripods in various dimensions. Two sets of microphones occupy the space of the gallery. One part of the installation arrests movement from one exhibitionary space from the other. The devices, which normally serve the function of voice amplification, are inverted as loudspeakers that, in different volumes, reproduce two sets of utterances in affirmative and negative forms in all persons, singular and plural, omitting only the first person in singular: yes, he/she/they/we/you can (not). The non-emotional voice belongs to a multilingual mechanic translation system. The construction of the installation could be seen as a metaphor for the nesting of power, both in linguistic and spatial terms. Mladen Dolar etymologically traces the connection between the act of listening and submission: “listening is “always-already” incipient obedience; the moment one listens one has already started to obey, in an embryonic way

one always listens to one's master's voice, no matter how much one opposes it afterward"[2]. Omitting the modalities of the self, microphones reproduce strong utterances of innate ability, permissibility, and agency. The microphones are also installed at different heights that do not respond to the human scale: one set is too low, the other one is too high.

"Non-logic Devices in Logic Processes" is a composition of six chairs, a backward inclined wall, and a rope marked with a black stripe in its middle and a set of two anti-disciplinary exercises, activated by performers at the opening and finnisage of the exhibition. The performers, students of art schools, were paid to perform nothing within the proposed protocol of inactivity. The signed contract assumed that performers simply agreed to do nothing and were paid 7.5 euro per hour. The protocol provided the possibility to change from a sitting position (exercise 1) at one of the chairs to the standing position close to the constructed wall (exercise 2), which partly accommodated the weight of performer's body. The sitting position also implied holding down a rope with one hand. Communication among both the performers themselves and the performers and the audience was forbidden. The collision of these two works produce supplementary meaning: it seems that the sound instructs the performers on the (im) possibility of their agency.

Observed in a two-dimensional plane, the installation might be seen as a performative illustration, in the form of anti-disciplinary exercises, of the first Newton's law. The first law of dynamics states that an object will remain at rest or in uniform motion in a straight line unless acted upon by an external force. The classical scholastic illustration is the game of tug-of-war: the arrows represent power which one group of bodies exercises, putting the kinetic system into a state of imbalance. The bodies as agents of kinetic power are inscribed into the normativity of scientific representation, naturalized and systematic. The position of bodies is static: an illustration can not represent the somatic and physical tensions. Copying this illustrative character, with the help of performers, Bobrikova and de Carmen try to stage equilibrium, despite the fact that visually this equilibrium is always violated with one hand pulling on a rope.

Physical power is normally represented as an arrow that actually relates to Foucauldian notions of modern power: anonymous, diffuse and secretive, performed through permanent mechanisms of supervision and control. Both of the works question the nexus of power and the possibility of insubordination: agency and subversion in its frame. As far as power is spread throughout social relations, resistance also should be diffuse.

Michel Foucault schematised the relationship between power and resistance as two important counterparts. This tension could be seen as a space for subjectification. Although power techniques could use resistance for reaffirming and re-establishing the system, "the elements or materials that power works upon are never rendered fully docile"[3]. Resistance is not also the "anti-matter" of power, it can be productive and affirmative. Focusing his attention on the body and the productive effects of power-resistance relations allowed Foucault to consider the idea of aesthetic self-creation, which he later termed the techniques of the self. Struggle against the imposed norms and forms of subjectivity was also central in this exhibition of works by Bobrikova and de Carmen.

The contemporary performance in an exhibition space is often described in post-Fordist vocabularies (plasticity, precarity, virtuosity). Bojana Kunst reveals this proximity and the tension of performance art and capitalism: "On the one hand, the work of the artist is at the core of capital speculations on art's value; on the other hand, by means of its work, art also resists the appropriation of its artistic powers"[4]. Bobrikova and de Carmen actually points out to this entanglement and question the relation of performer's body, the contemporary disposition of (non)work, and subjectivity.

Aleksei Borisionok

[1] Paul Lafargue, *The Right to be Lazy and Other Studies*. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1907. P. 29

[2] Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*. MIT Press, 2006. P. 76

[3] Brent L. Pickett, "Foucault and the politics of resistance," *Polity* 28/4, 1996. P. 458

[4] Bojana Kunst, *Artist at Work, Proximity of Art and Capitalism*, London: Zero Books, 2015. P. 18







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Authors & editors

Martinka Bobrikova & Oscar de Carmen

photo

Andrea Juneková, SaeJin Choi (pg.10),
Oscar de Carmen (pg.9)

text

Aleksei Borisionok

language corrector and proof reader

MaryClaire Pappas

design **Aurélia Garová**

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www.bobrikovadecarmen.org

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Martinka Bobrikova & Oscar de Carmen have been working together as an artistic duo since 2005. They have participated in several residencies such as AIR Krems, Sweet Home / Curators Network in Madrid, Arctic Art Institute in Arkhangelsk, Seoul Art Space_Geumcheon, HomeBase Saitama, KulturKontakt Austria, Nida art Colony or MeetFactory. Their works have been presented in venues and projects such as 5th Odessa Biennale, Fotogalleriet, Agrikultura Triennial, Seoul Art Space Geumcheon; the Saitama Triennial, Akershus Kunstnersenter, Tranzit.sk, 2nd Tbilisi Triennial, Prague Quadrennial, Centre Contemporary Art in Singapore, Høstutstillingen, ANX/ Atelier Nord, Skånes Konstforening, City Gallery Bratislava; Karlin Studio, Rake; Museum of Contemporary Art Roskilde, KURANT; Singuhr- Berlin; Center of Contemporary Art- Tbilisi, Röda Sten, City Museum of Gothenburg, Space Gallery. Since 2012 they run Nomad AiR, a Nomadic artist-in-residence program focuses on the notion of hospitality and the social relations between “host” and “guest” and in 2017 they co- funded the project / residency program Future Utopia Community Key which is dedicated to the activities in the rural village of Uddebo and the area.