

Back to the Future: Grizedale Arts, Use Value and the Work of Art.

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Introduction:

On Monday 8th October 2012 Alistair Hudson, Deputy Director of Grizedale Arts, gave a talk, via Skype, to the 3rd Autonomy School which was taking place at Liverpool School of Art and Design. The purpose of Hudson's talk was to give both an introduction and overview to issues surrounding 'Useful Art' to students (from Liverpool School of Art and Design, Dutch Art Institute and the University of Hildesheim) who were about to embark on an intense project to produce a draft 'Manual of Useful Art' that would be distributed at a 'Mobile Art School event the following Sunday (as part of Liverpool Biennial 2012). Hudson, who was making his Skype call for Frieze Art Fair, was at the beginning of a set up for Grizedale Art's 'The Colosseum of the Consumed' project. Amongst the din and clatter of art fair installation and setup, Hudson raised questions about the status of the artwork, about the artwork as commodity, about the 'dual advocacy system of the arts' and about possible alternatives to this system – a world in which artworks and artists' projects could have multiple lives as artworks, experiences, events, legacies and useful activities; a world in which different people, from different backgrounds, could meet and intersect with (and through) art in different ways; a world in which artists, artworks and art institutions would begin to dissolve into their communities.

What distinguished Hudson's talk from the usual rhetoric surrounding the fall-out of a post-relational art world were his references to the work of Grizedale Art's itself. For over a decade, Grizedale Arts have worked on numerous projects around the world that have challenged artists and audiences alike to think themselves differently and, above all, to make themselves useful. More recently, these projects have played themselves out via the remarkable work that Grizedale Arts undertake in collaboration with their 'local village' and, more specifically, with the Coniston Institute. Once a working Mechanics Institute, funded in part by John Ruskin, the Coniston Institute has come to play a key role in developing the templates that Grizedale Arts offer for practical change. For my own part, I have had both the opportunity and the privilege to work closely with Grizedale Arts for the last eight years whilst many of the above projects and positions were beginning to develop. During this period my own thought, as well as my own approach to work and the job of art, has undergone a radical overhaul. What follows is simply an attempt to map out some of the territories that this period of collaboration and research has suggested. Part I 'Grizedale Arts, Ruskin and the New Mechanics Institute' begins with an examination and an analysis of the relationships between Grizedale Arts, Ruskin and the New Mechanics Institute. This is based primarily on Hudson's proposition of drawing a historical line, back through the bell curve of Modernity's rise and fall, and finding ourselves in the cultural landscape of the early

1800s - a period in which art, artists, and artworks served a radically different purpose in forming and forging a new civic identity. The result of this is a reading of Grizedale Arts' activities, and particularly their work with Mechanics' Institutes and the legacy of Ruskin, as a kind of time machine capable of collapsing past and present into a new reading of possibility. Part II Use Value and the Work of Art then goes on to develop this examination whilst referring more specifically to use value and the work of art. Here, the work of art is taken to mean the kind of job, or labour, that making art has (and is) now becoming. Part III Art, Life and the Job of Art develops some of these ideas further by looking at Grizedale Arts particular take on the relationships that still inhere between art, life and the job of art. More specifically, this section begins to look at some of the recent ideas developed by Franco Berardi on the job of art (also published in this library under the title of *Why Artists?*) Finally, Part IV The Uses of Art begins to offer ways of thinking through / considering the possibilities of making useful art and forging possible forms of autonomous practice, within the existing regime of neo-liberal capital, by referencing Jacques Rancière's use/analysis of a letter by the 19th Century floor layer Gabrielle Gauny. If anything, this article, in four parts, takes the opportunity offered to me by Grizedale Arts to review and consolidate a series of thoughts, ideas, discussions, projects and possibilities that we have worked on together over the last eight years. Also, as we will be continuing to collaborate for the next four years at least (via our joint collaboration with the L'internationale's 'Uses of Art' Project), I hope it can also begin to set the stage for further thought, speculation, analysis and proposition on use value and the uses of art.

I. Grizedale Arts, Ruskin and the New Mechanics Institute.

There is a photograph on the website of Grizedale Arts that depicts the organization's director, Adam Sutherland, mounted on a horse and wearing overalls. He is also wearing an oversized commedia dell'arte-style head of the nineteenth-century critic, thinker, philanthropist and social reformer John Ruskin. In his hand Sutherland is wielding a baton, of the type usually associated with mounted riot police. The baton carries the inscription 'Fors Clavigera', which was the name Ruskin gave to the monthly pamphlets he self-published from 1871 until 1884.¹ During his lifetime, a period in which art and artists were gravitating towards new ideas of autonomy and art for art's sake, Ruskin was concerned that art should remain firmly rooted within the society in which it was produced.² Consequently he came to be seen as a reactionary – a kind of Victorian King Canute, attempting to turn back the incoming tide of self-referential modern art. However, for Grizedale Arts Ruskin provides

¹ *Fors Clavigera*: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain were originally published monthly by Ruskin as a series of Pamphlets, the first of which was written on January 1 1871. Fors Clavigera were later published as Volume Sets.

² In letter 79 of *Fors Clavigera* (1878), Ruskin famously accused the painter James McNeil Whistler of 'flinging a pot of paint in the face of the public'. Whistler subsequently sued Ruskin for libel and won the case, receiving damages of only a farthing (Whistler also had to pay court costs which contributed to his bankruptcy). This case, which was played out in the public eye of Victorian England, came to be seen as a watershed moment, a move from away from the moral imperatives of Victorian art and towards the development of self-referential modernism. For a brief but telling account of this case and its implications, see 'Introduction', in Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism 1900–1939*, London: Allan Lane, 1981.

an unlikely rhetorical figure through which neoconservative reconstructions of history, as well as neoliberal reconstructions of work and labour, can be challenged and re-imagined. More specifically, Grizedale Arts are keen to resuscitate Ruskin's role as an activist in early workers' education movements, or 'Mechanics Institutes', as they were called, where art played an integral role in a multidisciplinary approach to learning and social improvement.

Grizedale Arts is itself based in the Coniston area of England's Lake District, where John Ruskin made his final home. Once a network of farming and mining communities, the Lake District is now a designated area of natural beauty and a precariously contested site of conflicting ideologies, interests, stakeholders and mythologies. The Lake District has a legitimate claim as the birthplace of English Romanticism: William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas De Quincey, Thomas Arnold and John Ruskin all made their homes there for periods during the nineteenth century whilst Percy Bysshe Shelley, Sir Walter Scott, Thomas Carlyle, John Keats, Lord Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, Felicia Hemans and Gerald Massey were also frequent visitors. By way of postmodern homage, the University of Cumbria now runs a Masters Programme in 'Literature, Romanticism and the Lake District'. Due to the rapid expansion of rail networks across the UK during the mid nineteenth century, the Lake District can also lay claim to being one of the world's first destinations for mass-tourism. Today, the Lake District is managed and fought over by the National Trust, the Forestry Commission and an amalgam of local councils, as well as local and national business interests and local and national environmental pressure groups. It is a place where a dwindling community of local farmers and agricultural workers now rely, often begrudgingly, on the income generated by a constant flood of hill walkers, mountain bikers, campers, pot-holers, rock-climbers, hang-gliders, sailing enthusiasts and the general flotsam and jetsam of city based day-trippers and weekend want-aways. The work of Grizedale Arts is consciously embedded within this complex and shifting network of local, national and international agendas. As a result of this, artists who work with Grizedale Arts frequently address issues of culture, the tourism and leisure industry, economic sustainability, employment and the relationships between art and social regeneration.

Within this already overdetermined milieu, Grizedale Arts have been developing a series of collaborations with the Coniston Institute, a community centre in the village closest to their base at Lawson Park Farm. Over the last decade, Grizedale Arts have worked closely with both the Coniston Institute and the villagers of Coniston in an attempt to 'make it a connected place' and to 're-work it as a contemporary arts facility in the village' by bringing in the participation of local inhabitants.³ For Grizedale Arts, the metaphor of the Mechanics Institute is central to the development of this practice. Initially formed by civic dignitaries as a means to provide education for illiterate workers, they often became sites of early Union organization. Many Mechanics Institutes became Universities that still function today. Others, such as the Coniston Institute, became early laboratories for progressive social engineering in the hands of radicals and reformers such as Ruskin (The Coniston Institute

³ From an interview with Adam Sutherland, director of Grizedale Arts, available at www.artplayer.tv/video/83/childs-play-written-composed-by-ray-davies (last accessed on 5 March 2012).

was itself originally built in 1878 as a Mechanics Institute with Ruskin's financial help).⁴ In the hands of Grizedale Arts, the Mechanics Institute provides both a model for re-thinking our current situation and a direct link to a previous historical point within which that re-thinking originally became possible. As Alistair Hudson, Deputy Director of Grizedale Arts has stated:

If we imagine ourselves on the downward side a parabolic arc of Modernity, we might draw a line across and meet the West in its ascendancy around the year 1800, a year in the midst of the Machinery Question and the year that George Birkbeck began his evening classes in technical subjects at the Andersonian University in Glasgow. These classes were set up to provide the working population (for whom the university was out of reach) with free lectures on arts, sciences and technical subjects. As the country moved from an economy of agrarian and craft based industries built on apprenticeships to mechanized production, the classes were seen as a way of educating the expanding population in the new sciences of industry; as a method of developing a workforce that was not only more productive but also more contented. The classes proved enormously popular and the idea spread quickly across the country, ultimately leading to the formation of the first Mechanics' Institute in Edinburgh in 1821, followed by Glasgow, Liverpool and London in 1823 and Manchester in 1824; all of which later became universities. By 1850 there were over 700 Institutes in the UK with equal numbers in the United States, Canada and Australia. Wherever there was industry there was an Institute to support and nurture its workforce and community.⁵

Seen as a contradictory and dialectical metaphor, the idea of New Mechanics Institute is central to a developing range of practices by which Grizedale Arts seek to engage and interact with communities around the globe. At the same time as this, the projects which Grizedale Arts are developing around the New Mechanics institute also allow them the opportunity to question the civic role and function of both art and the artist. In an age of social entropy and radical economic decline, what is at stake here for Grizedale Arts is the type of work, or labour, that the work of art can now become. Or to put this another way, Grizedale Arts would argue that if art or artists are to retain any useful role or function in the world then both the uses of art, as well as the use value of art, will have to be radically re-thought and re-negotiated.

As a means to begin this re-thinking, Grizedale Arts have sustained and developed a highly unique and cutting-edge commissioning programme - by simply asking artists what kinds of things they would do if they decided to make themselves useful. Far from opening the

⁴ Ruskin moved to Coniston in 1872. His house, Brantwood, is now a popular tourist attraction and is close to Grizedale Arts' base at Lawson Park Farm.

⁵ Alistair Hudson 'The New Mechanics', printed in 'Why I Love the Lakes – Grizedale Arts Selected texts from 1999-2014', eds Katrina Black and Grizedale Arts, Grizedale Arts p. 9.

floodgates to a stream of predictable utilitarian and applied art projects, this approach has led to the development of both short and long term experimental ventures by artists who have themselves fostered new lines of inquiry: What can artists begin to do as citizens? What would art look like if it were not reduced to monetary imperatives or the need to 'inform' the masses from the dizzying heights of culture? What would happen if artists didn't necessarily commit to producing luxury consumer goods for a London-centric art market? How do artists begin to meaningfully work with their contexts and communities? Often, the results of these enquiries see a wide range of artists and artists' groups, both established and early career, take the opportunity to work in very different ways and in very different environments to those that typically define their practices. For example, Grizedale Arts recently commissioned *Child's Play* (2011), a musical written by singer, songwriter and former Kinks frontman Ray Davis, which aimed to provide 'a commentary on the aspirations and disappointments through the decades of modern Britain since the Festival of Britain in 1951'.⁶ For Davis, *Child's Play* offered an opportunity to assess shifting class relationships in Britain whilst celebrating the role that community can still play in small villages and urban settings alike. Performed by a group of ex-students from the John Ruskin Secondary School in Coniston, *Child's Play* also forms part of a larger project (initially proposed by one of Grizedale Arts' artists-in-residence, Alexandre Singh) for artists to write and perform plays for children. At the time of writing, there are additional plays in development by Liam Gillick, Rita Sobral Campos and the musician Momus. For Grizedale Arts, the production of such projects, as well as their location within an ongoing reclamation of Ruskin's work, is part of an attempt to think beyond the current deadlock of social decline and to collaboratively re-imagine existing economic and ecological anxieties in ways that make a case for the use value of art in society.

Some of the complexities and implications embedded within this multilayered approach can also be seen in *The São Paulo Mechanics Institute*, an ongoing project which Grizedale Arts initially undertook in collaboration with Jeremy Deller for the 2010 São Paulo Biennial. The project consisted of three interrelated parts linking the locations of São Paulo and the Coniston institute to both their histories and their overlapping global futures. The first component of this complex triptych resides in Deller's film *So Many Ways to Hurt You, the Life and Times of Adrian Street*. This is a 'true-life' documentary about a transvestite bodybuilder, who ran away from his life as a miner in his native Yorkshire to seek fame and fortune as a professional wrestler – a picaresque narrative that mirrors the economic shifts occurring since the 1960s. In the context of Grizedale Arts, Adrian Street's story can be seen to reflect some of the ideas expounded by Ruskin on self-improvement through the life lived creatively. As Street travels, first to London and then to the US, his camp wrestling persona has a palpable influence on both glam rock and performance art during the late 60s and 70s, while his enduring business venture – making professional wrestling costumes that he sells online – reflects the shift from manufacturing to tertiary industry that many

⁶ See Grizedale Arts' web page for 'Child's Play', available at <http://www.grizedale.org/projects/child-s-play.1> (last accessed on 5 March 2012). The Festival of Britain was a national exhibition that celebrated the country's arts and culture in the immediate post-War period. It led to the creation of the South Bank Centre arts complex in London.

European economies are presently undergoing. The second component of the project, *An Extended Lecture on Twigs: A Preter-Ruskinian Education*, was an educational programme held at Grizedale Arts for Portuguese-speaking pupils of the Lilian Baylis Technology School in London. This also sat within Grizedale Arts' continual re-thinking of Ruskin's legacy, providing an opportunity for a group of inner-city youths to spend a week drawing in the Lake District. The work that the students produced during this project was shown alongside Deller's film in the third component of the São Paulo project, which consisted of the construction and installation of a working Mechanics Institute at the Biennial. Deller's film was mounted on the external wall of a purpose-built classroom, whose interior was based on the original Coniston Institute and set into a mural by local graffiti artist Raphael. As already noted, the Coniston Institute had originally been intended by Ruskin to be a social and educational environment within which artworks would function as transformative tools rather than simply as objects in their own right. Grizedale Arts intended the Institute's twenty-first century São Paulo manifestation to be a live working environment, one that would be used to explore ground-up initiatives and the impact that individual and group self-organizations can have on society. School groups, societies, clubs, community groups and adult education centres were invited to give demonstrations and lectures at the São Paulo Mechanics Institute on topics of their choice. These included how to make a recipe, how to grow plants, how to edit in html, how to upload videos and how to use mobile phones. A dedicated YouTube site was set up to allow children to produce and upload educational videos, which would in turn form an alternative teaching resource and laboratory. Thus Grizedale Arts worked with the inhabitants of São Paulo but avoided presenting any single piece of work that researched, referenced or responded to the city as a vague concept. Instead, the idea was to collaboratively produce a project and to materialize a context that could work alongside the aims of the São Paulo educational team, one that would have applications and a legacy beyond the Biennial itself; providing use value as a means to re-think the role and function of art in a shifting global economy. According to the press material furnished by Grizedale Arts, this kind of project 'picks up the baton from Ruskin and applies it in our information age, the new craft as digital media, the new tools to self-improvement through homespun skills, with all the embedded misfirings and accidents along the way'.⁷

By re-evaluating Ruskin's legacy and the Mechanics Institute in this way, Grizedale Arts are insisting on the historical reclamation of a complex body of work that prefigures many of the issues that now surround social reform, environment, ecology, capital, aesthetics and politics. Ruskin's original project, alongside those of the Mechanics Institutes, unfolded against a backdrop of nineteenth-century industrialization and notions of art for art's sake - in many ways seeking to re-connect art and education with the politicization of the rural, the ecological and the peripheral. By encouraging artists, critics, historians and thinkers to re-work both Ruskin and the Mechanics Institute as contested sites of historical struggle Grizedale Arts are beginning to offer new insights into the role and function of

⁷ Grizedale Arts, 'São Paulo Bienal', available at www.grizedale.org/projects/sao-paulo-bienal/the-sao-paulo-mechanics-institute (last accessed 28 March 2012).

contemporary art. It could be argued that Grizedale Arts' commitment to use value offers the possibility of subverting those forms of critical evaluation that, as Bishop has pointed out, tend to rely on the overly simple bifurcation of aesthetics and ethics.⁸ In the commissioning activities of Grizedale Arts, ethics are never simply reduced to the moral imperative of doing good, nor is history simply reduced to the operation of uncovering possible antecedents for our current situation. In projects such as *Child's Play* and *The São Paulo Mechanics Institute*, grass-roots forms of social organization become means to test accepted histories and frameworks of power, through processes of collaborative re-imagination. In *Child's Play*, Davis was offered the opportunity to use his skills as a musician to reanimate a period of radical social change. In *The São Paulo Mechanics Institute*, local activists were given the opportunity to share knowledge and practical solutions to daily problems within the structures of an international art biennale. The use value of both of these projects functions for Grizedale Arts through the re-location of art as a Ruskinian tool for social transformation within the broader framework of education and social activism. In both cases, the physical and ideological function of the New Mechanics Institute operates as a complex time machine, allowing for an uncovering and re-evaluation of concrete historical situations whilst, at the same time as this, acting as a vehicle for re-contextualizing and re-evaluating the practical relevance and use value of contemporary art production.

II. Use Value and the Work of Art.

But what kind of role can art really play in the reconstitution of a socially autonomous body as epitomized by the re-imagining of the Mechanics Institute? How can artists, curators, critics and intellectuals usefully contribute to the development of a constantly shifting network of micro self-reliance and resistance? How can we even begin to consider opening up the cracks and fissures that are emerging in the surface of globalized neo-liberal capital? And what, if any, are the meaningful strategies for releasing the work or labour of art from the straightjacket of financial instrumentalization? Through their work with the Coniston Institute and the New Mechanics, Grizedale Arts have begun to reconfigure their relationship to their local and global communities. They have done this by envisioning themselves as residents with a particular skill set, as opposed to being curators or artists in the commonly accepted sense of the terms. This approach has led to a collective repurposing of the Coniston Institute; modelled on its earlier life as a place of production and sociality – rather than a place for the consumption of art. The consequences of this simple remodelling have been unexpectedly far reaching. As Hudson has argued, it has become apparent to Grizedale Arts that:

⁸ Claire Bishop, *The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents*, *Artforum*, vol.44. no 6, February 2006, pp. 179-85. Bishop was a trustee of Grizedale Arts at the time, though Grizedale Arts are absent from the 'catalogue of projects' with which she begins this article.

[...] the future of our organisation lies not in the endless expansion of its premises and infrastructure, but in dissolving the institution into the community; in effect to make the community (or civic structure) and its resources become the institution. Central to this has been a progressive shift over recent years towards art or art-like projects that were an enhancement of existing conditions and a preference for artist projects that have an effect, and which can also function outside of the value systems of the established art order.⁹

With this in mind, to ask what kind of work is the work of art is not necessarily to lapse into an ethical refusal of art's possible aesthetic autonomy. Neither is it to lapse into what Bishop has correctly identified as the simple equation of the Christian good soul promoting naive models of anti-capitalism. Nor is it an attempt at maintaining art's identity by singling it out as a particular type of activity that is somehow distinct from all others in capitalist society. Instead, to ask the question what kind of work is the work of art is an attempt to identify how artists, curators, writers, radicals etc are endeavouring to open up spaces of critical and radical autonomy, however short lived these spaces may be, within the current confines of a free market economy.

Put another way, our current structures of politically institutionalized culture have become lodged somewhere between the Scylla of functional economic necessity and the Charybdis of art's alleged civilizing value. For Alistair Hudson, this rhetorical binarism (i.e the financial essentialism of the art industry, coupled with its own founding mythology of art's a priori apartness from society and culture) simply overlooks the key question of art's practical and everyday use value. For Hudson:

The current state of art galleries and museums is still determined by the framework marked out by economic and truth values; where value is ascribed to works of art based upon their operation within a market system and their perceived ability to reveal or lead us to seeing the world as it really is. In this scheme (from around 1848 onwards) the third value of art, based upon its utility or usage, has been largely suppressed, or diverted into the arena of craft, activism, politics and so on.¹⁰

Under these conditions, Hudson argues that art institutions are continually drawn into a "dual mode of exhibition and advocacy – displaying works of art according to a consensus of what constitutes a work of value and then of advocating this value to the museum or gallery's constituency". However, Hudson is also clear on the potential complications of circumventing, escaping or even attempting to break these forms of consensual advocacy. Instead, he argues that:

⁹ Alistair Hudson 'The New Mechanics', printed in 'Why I Love the Lakes – Grizedale Arts Selected texts from 1999-2014', eds Katrina Black and Grizedale Arts, Grizedale Arts p. 8.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 8

[...] the support structure for artists is so well bound in the structures of cultural capital that the gravitational pull of the market and the appetite for 'meaning' allows the momentum of the romantic model to be maintained that little bit further. Any attempt to escape this gravitational pull results in a life outside the performative frame of art, which could be argued as no bad thing, but perhaps a missed opportunity for art and artists to stake a claim for currency in society.¹¹

Grizedale Arts' revisioning of the Mechanics institute is, above all else, an attempt to re-open a territory within which the complex relationships between art's ethical and aesthetic functions can be understood as forms of interaction. These forms of interaction are no longer played out through the dematerialization of the art object into various forms of process based or participatory activity. Instead, they are now most commonly played out through the working practices of artists themselves. Such practices, which were once dissimilar enough from the working practices of blue and white collar workers to appear special, are now shared and understood by the majority of people who go to galleries or assist artists in the production of their work. Looking at this another way, it could be argued that the very procedures neo-liberalism deploys to produce the false freedom of the creative economies, also implicate artists within the very regimes of capitalization that they try to resist. As the artist Liam Gillick has put it:

The accusation is that artists are at best the ultimate freelance knowledge workers and at worst barely capable of distinguishing themselves from the consuming desire to work at all times, neurotic people who deploy a series of practices that coincide quite neatly with the requirements of neo-liberal, predatory, continually mutating capitalism of the every moment. Artists are people who behave, communicate and innovate in the same manner as those who spend their days trying to capitalize every moment and exchange of daily life. They offer no alternative.¹²

Gillick's concerns, over the shifting role and function of the artist and the kind of work or labour art has become, are also clearly echoed by Grizedale Arts' deputy director Alistair Hudson:

Grizedale Arts is a broad and dispersed network of activity which connects concentrated points of sociocultural change. The purpose of this is ultimately to make art and artists useful and stop standing around at the edges smoking roll ups and talking about defining/describing space. In order to help its own community in the Lake District it is necessary to relate this and interact it with the current global conditions, and to see rural places such as its own, as

¹¹ Ibid, p.8

¹² Liam Gillick, The Good of Work, e-flux Journal [online journal], issue 16, May 2010, available at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/142> (last accessed on 17 October 2014).

part of a contemporary complex that is shaping the way we all live and work.¹³

By embedding artists within a community as citizens with different skill sets, Grizedale are simply pointing out that being an artist no longer makes a difference in terms of how one might live out a life or construct a livelihood. The romanticized idea of the free, self-determining Bohemian—most succinctly characterized by the image of the artist with a folding easel strapped to his back who is greeting a collector in *Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet*—has long since given way to the image of the artist attached to her laptop, mobile phone in hand, inquiring about a recent residency or funding application whilst waiting for the latest video edit to render.

As a result, Grizedale Arts' insistence on positing the work of the artist within the re-constitution of a common sociality also places the work they commission firmly within a lineage of artistic and political radicalism. As Fredric Jameson recently reminded us in *Representing Capital*, this lineage (which he traces back through Morris and Ruskin) has its origins in Marx's attempted separation of use value from commodity value in *Capital*. In the early pages of *Capital Volume I*, Marx was keen to bracket off use value from exchange value in any evaluation of the commodity form, arguing that use value did not matter to the capitalist who wished to sell commodities. Instead, Marx claimed that the capitalist would only ever utilise a perceived / projected value as a means to the profitable sale of units. As Jameson points out, this argument belies a more fundamental and metaphysical distinction in Marx's work between quality and body on the one hand, and quantity and mind (or soul) on the other. Marx tended to equate quality with the body and physicality – as a positive term in the materialist sense – and quantity with the vagaries of the mind – in a negative and idealist sense. For Jameson:

Use value is therefore quality; it is the life of the body, of existential or phenomenological experience, of the consumption of physical products, but also the very texture of physical work and physical time [...] Quality is human time itself, whether in labour or in the life outside of labour; and it is this deep existential constant that justifies that Utopian strain in Marxism which anticipates the transformation of work into aesthetic activity (from Ruskin to Morris, from Marcuse to Paulo Virno's notion of virtuosity), a tradition somewhat different from the Hegelian delight in activity and the more orthodox celebration of work or productivity as a central human drive.¹⁴

Seen in this light, it could be argued that the foregrounding of use value in Grizedale's Mechanics Institute project works simultaneously on two corresponding levels. On one, Grizedale Arts attempt to release the latent use value held within the social radicalism of

¹³ Alistair Hudson, 'Happy Stacking Theory' [blog], 22 July 2008, available at www.happystacking.tv (last accessed on 17 October 2014).

¹⁴ Frederic Jameson, 'Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One', Verso, pp. 19-20.

Ruskin and Mechanics Institute – where their legacy is conceived as an aggregate of possibilities for the consideration of contemporary social transformation. On the other, Grizedale Arts’ non-utilitarian reconsideration of use value – as a necessary component in the production of an art that is capable of having a useful role in a rounded and functioning society – becomes key to imagining a way beyond the ‘gravitational pull’, as Hudson would have it, of an art world that is still caught up in the dual advocacy of material worth and autonomous aesthetic value. Here, a complex re-configuration of use value – as well as of the relationship of such forms of use value to the kind of work that is now the work of art – becomes an open-ended line of resistance to the commodification and delimitation of contemporary art practice within a globalized neoliberal economy. This re-imagining of use value through the Time Machine of Ruskin and the Mechanics Institute also allows for a fully dialectical revisioning of the work of art – one that insists on re-thinking the relationship between art and everyday life, and of the art object to the labour or work of art production, without demanding that art should exist beyond the frameworks of its own commensurability. In this sense, the use value of Grizedale’s commissioned artworks resides in the continual process of re-articulation through which they encourage artists to challenge established forms of art production whilst simultaneously addressing their relationship to traditional power structures. This, in turn, allows for the artists they commission to question the role and function of their own work, or job as artists, and in doing so to re-circuit dominant impositions of fixed meaning and power. Grizedale’s re-imagining of the role of art and its continual productive capacity within society also points toward new ecologies of living, which, like the Mechanics Institutes of the past, view art as an integral component in any attempt to construct sustainable, autonomous communities. It could also be argued that the curatorial programme of Grizedale Arts subverts the relationship between the work / labour of art and commodity value, a relationship which insists that art’s primary measure of quality, be it aesthetic or otherwise, is inevitably reducible to its market value. Grizedale Arts does this by insisting that the potential use value of art remains a multiple and contested existence, partially and temporarily releasing it from the signifying chain of capital.

III. Art, Life and the Job of Art

Such operations, of reconfiguring meaning and uncovering complexity, are central to Grizedale’s commissioning and curatorial practice. As we have already seen, their long term project to re-invent the legacy of John Ruskin and the Mechanics Institute can be viewed as the production of a complex time machine; uncovering and releasing the latent possibilities held within the contested site of art’s use or use value. In this sense the projects undertaken by Grizedale Arts, as well as their insistence on artists ‘making themselves useful’, should not be read as a simple surrender to neo-liberal rhetorics of instrumentalized social emancipation. Instead, they can be seen as a means to sabotage accepted chains of signification through the collaborative production of connection and possibility. In this way, the staging of projects such as *Child’s Play* and *The São Paulo Mechanics Institute* become a

means to systematically undermine and cast doubt on the logics and impositions of neo-liberal economics. As such, the work that Grizedale Arts undertakes with the Coniston Institute, and their reconfiguration of John Ruskin's living legacy, is simply the praxis of imagining and producing futures which are themselves capable of becoming sustainable; of re-connecting and re-combining social, political, ethical and aesthetic imperatives in the production of a new *socius*.

For Grizedale Arts, this is the kind of job or labour that has now become the work of art – a production of art that is both flexible and dialectical enough to enable us to imagine ourselves otherwise. Such a job would also entail the active recoding of circuits of power on the micro levels of community in an attempt to undo, at least partially, the radical alienation of instrumentalized culture. As we have already seen, a commitment to this kind of job or work of art puts Grizedale Arts firmly within an established tradition of artistic radicalism, commonly underpinned by the struggle to reconcile the relationship between art and life, which traces itself back through Morris and Ruskin to the Marx. However, the time machine of Grizedale Arts' Mechanics Institutes also allows us to break with the simple linearity of such hereditary narratives. Instead we can fold back the current role and function of art onto its historical precedents and, in doing so, revivify the separation that Marx attempted to make in the early pages of *Das Kapital* (between the bodily/visceral quality of use value and the mental/quantitative machinations of commodity value) as an urgent historical legacy. Such a task of re-negotiating use value (as the most crucial function of art) is now even more pressing within the kind of post-relational landscape/artscape that we now occupy; an endlessly shifting and connective environment in which it has become truly difficult to decide what is, or what should be (or even why should we produce) art anymore. When former right and former left both argue over the same neo-liberal territory of the forever now, the once vaunted gift of the avant-garde (its self-proclaimed ability to step outside the rut of everyday life and confidently point toward progressive utopian solutions) becomes little more than the hollow political rhetoric of deregulated 'Big Society'. Because of this, the job of the radical, connected and socially engaged artist is now far more complex than that of providing a bridge of sorts, or aesthetic bulwark, between the once separate spheres of art and life. Within the rapidly developing technosphere of modern information based capital, the artist now functions as just one more nodal point, or operator, within the highly regulated economy of the culture industry. As Franco Berardi has recently argued in his article 'Why Artists?'

In the sphere of semiocapitalism, artists are directly involved in the process of semioproduction. They are producers of symbolic prototypes that semiocapitalism transforms into mass-production objects, they are exploited by the industry of info-production and subjected to precarious conditions of work and salary¹⁵

¹⁵ Franco Berardi, Why Artists, available at <http://www.grizedale.org/projects/coniston-institute-library/the-new-mechanics-library> (last accessed on 17 October 2014)

The harsh realities of this relatively new historical situation have led, more often than not, to a kind of neo-conservative 'X-Factor' mentality in which the continual manufacture, reproduction and positioning of familiar looking contemporary art objects/installations/happenings/concepts seems somehow capable of sustaining 'art as we knew it', by feeding a high-end, gallery based market with more of the same. On the other hand, an equally neo-conservative (and far more tempting) opportunity to stake a claim for art's autonomy - by simply declaring its difference to, or separation from, a crude identification of the 'art market' as a high-end triumvirate of gallery/auction-house/art-fair – does little more than return us to the now outdated and outmoded 'dual advocacy' model of art already identified for us by Hudson. Caught, once again, between the Scylla of functional economic necessity and the Charybdis of civilizing value, the art world continues to respond, like a rabbit frozen in the headlights of its own media success, with the bland repetition of the familiar and ready to hand. This, in turn, is a problem that now runs endemically throughout the art world infrastructure, from art schools to biennial and beyond.

In fairness, most people already know this - but the full ramifications of this increasingly obvious elephant in the room could perhaps do with more careful consideration. As Franco Berardi has also pointed out:

Art has been the space where the experiment of precarious life, labour and language has been developed. The history of the Vanguard in the 20th Century was an exercise in life and creation in a time of precariousness. The loss to the centre, the uncertainty principle, the random relations between meaning and enunciation – these are traces of precarization of the late modern soul, prophesized and transformed by aesthetic perception.¹⁶

If this is the case, then it could also be argued that the job or work of art is no longer encapsulated within the historical over-identification of an artist's precarious role as the enlightened harbinger of a potential future. Instead, it now lies in negotiating the very possibility of radical and alternative action in a post-monopoly landscape, that is already dominated by the terms and conditions of precarious labour on every level. As Berardi argues:

[...] the subsumption (or inscription) of mental work into the cycle of capitalist valorization has given a new dimension to the activity of artists in the social sphere: artists are cognitive workers whose activity is subjected to the rules of market exploitation, but simultaneously they are expressing a permanent refusal of the capitalist rule, as their job is creation of meaning, while semiocapitalism provokes a separation of semiotic production from meaning, whilst at the same time the information overload provokes a cancellation of meaning.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Under the conditions of radical precarization and deterritorialization ushered in by the age of neo-liberal globalization, the new role and function of the job or work of art becomes one of disidentification. This is now crucial, as the condition of continual uncertainty finds us increasingly retreating and withdrawing into national, religious and ethnic identities whilst at the same time, an inherent need to belong runs perilously close to fuelling neoliberal cults of competition and new forms of fascism. For Berardi, artists are now those people who “travel in uncanny territories of cultural contamination; they exercise the suspension of the need to belong”. Far from returning us to a simple re-run of the 20th century’s vanguard obsession with separation, alienation and disjunction, Berardi argues that these new forms of disidentification offer radical forms of alternative community and belonging:

As the process of deterritorialization impacts on the relations between territory, community and the social sphere, artists are trying to heal the suffering that comes from this continuous and painful eradication. Those who call themselves artists are actually creating the Ultimate Internationale: the international unarmed army of non-identifiable people, of those who are escaping identification.¹⁸

If Berardi is right, then there is simply no more interior to, or exterior from, the fluid forms of economic instrumentalization through which semiocapitalism codes us to the roots of our DNA. And art, as we know it or knew it, offers no alternative to this. However, what Berardi is beginning to theorize here in his call for a new Internationale of disidentification, and what Grizedale Arts are beginning to offer through their insistence upon artists making themselves useful, are new ways to imagine and activate forms of resistance and critical autonomy as the kind of use value that is now the job or work of art. But, as we have already seen, this new job or work of art comes at a cost. The very process of re-evaluating the use value of art, under the present conditions of neo-liberal instrumentalization, immediately forces us into asking a difficult and fundamental series of questions. Just how, or even why can we even begin to produce useful art without collapsing, once again, into those common forms of socially engaged practice that do little more than propagate the current neo-liberal status quo? And how is it possible for us to participate in build an Internationale of disidentification when the very processes of deterritorialization and disidentification would seem to negate its possibility? After all, it is one thing to re-think, re-imagine and re-vision the use value and job of art, it is quite another to escape the gravitational pull of an instrumentalizing neo-liberal economy. Just how does one begin to even think of producing, or participating in the production of sustainable, autonomous micro-communities of resistance, when all alternatives appear to be occupied, commodified and foreclosed? And in the light of this, how does one begin to re-imagine the possibility of emancipation when any attempt at alternative organization seems immediately complicit with the work of deregulatory capitalism? What these questions open up and force us to confront, is that the new work or job of art is to find ways of rewriting and renegotiating the fundamental

¹⁸ Ibid.

relationships between mind, body, labour, art and politics in ways that can begin to make art useful again.

IV: The Uses of Art

Some ways of beginning this new **job or work** of art – of rewriting and renegotiating the relationships between mind, body, labour, art and politics - can be discovered, once again, by drawing a line of inquiry that extends back through the bell curve of Modernism's rise and fall. If we are to do this, as Hudson has already pointed out, we find ourselves embedded within the re-negotiations of aesthetics, autonomy, work, labour and citizenship that took place in the first half of the 19th Century; a time before the limitations of art's possibility that we currently operate within had become fixed and ossified. More specifically, this period of continual European-wide political, religious, economic, agrarian, industrial and ideological revolution also gave rise to new blueprints for individual and collective resistance that can be re-envisioned and reactivated today. A key example of this can be found in Jacques Rancière's analysis of a story written by the nineteenth century joiner and lifelong prolific writer Gabrielle Gauny, which first appeared in one of the many journals that sprang up during the 1848 revolution in France. This story, which was the only writing to be published by Gauny's in his lifetime, describes the work of a jobbing floor layer. More importantly, the story is also used by Gauny to describe the complex attitude of a skilled worker who believes that he is less exploited than a day labourer. In Gauny's narrative the skilled worker, who is more or less allowed to get on with his job in his own time (as long as the outcomes are perfect) feels himself to have more ownership of his own arms than the unskilled labourer who is constantly monitored by his bosses. This gives the floor layer a delusory sense of freedom and emancipation – delusory in the sense that he knows that his so called freedom is won at the expense of spending more time and effort over his labour than is necessarily required. Conversely, the skilled labourer in the story derives a real and secret pleasure from a delusory emancipation that is won at the cost of his own exploitation. In the light of this, Rancière argues that texts such as Gauny's do not merely represent everyday experience through description; instead they reinvent the everyday through the reframing of individual experience, within the redistribution of the sensible. For Rancière, the distribution of the sensible means:

[...] a relation between occupations and equipment, between being in a specific space and time, performing specific activities, and being endowed with capacities of seeing, saying, and doing that “fit” those activities. A distribution of the sensible is a matrix that defines a set of relations between sense and sense: that is, between a form of sensory experience and interpretation which makes sense of it. It ties an occupation to a presumption.¹⁹

¹⁹ Jaques Rancière, *The Methods of Equality: An Answer to Some Questions* in Gabrielle Rockhill and Philip Watts (Eds.) *Jaques Rancière: History, Politics, Aesthetics*, London: Duke University Press, 2009, p. 275.

As such, Rancière argues that the delusion in Gauny's story represents "both a tiny shift and a decisive upheaval in the understanding of the relationship between exploitation and delusion"²⁰.

What would seem helpful here is that Rancière, via Gauny, is offering a way of thinking beyond the current neo-liberal fixity by which any forms of oppositional practice seem condemned to the instrumentalized logic of the commodity. Rancière is also offering to open up a new understanding of the Marxist concept of ideology and its relationship to political art; an understanding crucial in addressing the false separation of use value and art that has plagued us since the latter half of the 19th Century. Whereas classical Marxist theories would see ideology as a delusional misrepresentation of the truth in the interest of a ruling class – with the concomitant proviso that uncovering the ideological misrepresentation of exploitation would ensure the revolutionary uprising of the proletariat – Rancière argues that the "schema of knowledge and ignorance, reality and illusion, actually covers up a mere tautology: people are where they are because they are where they are, because they are incapable of being elsewhere"²¹. In other words, people do not occupy specific roles and functions because they either ignore, or are simply incapable of perceiving, the reasons why they occupy a specific position – people are incapacitated simply because they occupy those positions in the first place. "The point" argues Rancière "is that those who have the occupation of workers are supposed to be equipped for that occupation and for the activities that are related to it. They are supposed to be equipped for working, not for peripheral activities such as looking around and investigating how society at large works"²². The acceptance of inequality, or the schematic organization of occupations, is resolved for Rancière through the "egalitarian mode of the story" which at once ties empirical fact to "belief" whilst enabling this belief to be worked out through the common-sense rhetorical mechanism of "as if". Rancière's key example of this are the two reasons Plato gives for why workers should remain in their place. First is a temporal and material argument; workers should remain in their place because they have no time to go elsewhere - their time is taken up by work. Second is a mythological reason – the gods mixed iron in the constitution of workers and gold in the constitution of all others whose job it is to deal with the common good. By combining muthos with logos, fiction with fact, a particular distribution of the sensible is established and maintained for Rancière as "a set of relations between sense and sense: that is between a form of sensory experience and interpretation which makes sense of it. It ties an occupation to an assumption"²³.

For Rancière, the worker in Gauny's text begins to invert the logic of his allotted place, not through the revolutionary rupture caused by a sudden understanding or knowledge of his position, but by becoming "less aware of exploitation and pushing aside, thereby, its sensory grip"²⁴:

²⁰ Ibid, p. 275.

²¹ Ibid, p. 275.

²² Ibid, p. 275.

²³ Ibid, p. 275.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 277.

It is a subversion of a given distribution of the sensible. What is overturned is the relationship between what is done by one's arms, what is looked at by one's eyes, what is felt as a sensory pleasure, and what is thought of as an intellectual concern. It is the relationship between an occupation, the space-time where it is fulfilled, and the sensory equipment for doing it. This subversion implies the reframing of a common sense. A common sense does not mean a consensus but, on the contrary, a polemical place, a confrontation between opposite common senses or opposite ways of framing what is common.²⁵

This reframing of common sense allows Rancière to do two things. First, it allows him to map out what he sees as the key relationship between aesthetics and politics - if politics is about polemical re-framings of common sense then it is, above all, an aesthetic affair. Second, it allows him to remind us that the generalized idea of the worker's voice is derived from a continual and complex aggregate of multiple reframing operations that take place within and across the distribution of the sensible at a given historical period. And, as with the example of Gauny's letter, these activities are primarily accomplished through common forms of reading and writing. Reading, for Rancière, is not simply the passive activity by which pleasure and knowledge can be gained from a fixed text; it is a form of the redistribution of the sensible traditionally activated through writing. Writing, in turn, is an activity in which words or signs are continually released from narratives of mastery, from fixed social structures that would seek to impose consensual forms of meanings upon them, and become available to anybody. What Gauny does, in a further letter to his friend Ponty, is to recommend reading as a means to secure freedom. "Plunge into terrible readings. That will awaken passions in your wretched existence, and the labourer needs them to stand tall in the face of that which is ready to devour him."²⁶ Reading, in this sense, becomes for Rancière a means by which the labourer can steal some of the symbolic gold, formerly mixed only in the souls of his masters, and thus contribute to a redistribution of power. The activity of reading and writing does not simply make messages or representations available, it makes passions available. In turn, Rancière argues that it is the triggering or arousing of these passions, and not simply the messages imbued in literature by particular authors, that makes the activities of reading and writing political. By "breaking the rules that made definite forms of feeling and expression fit definite characters or subject matters"²⁷, literature was able to contribute to the production of the aesthetic as a new form of experience. This shift in aesthetics was itself made possible by a redistribution of the sensible that occurred during the rise of the bourgeois epoch - as emblems of power and religious iconography began to lose both their original purpose and location, they became available to all as a new recombinant resource within the new symbolic forms of museums and art histories.

By critically shifting the role and function of political art away from its traditional role of providing revolutionary propaganda – the provision of information to the masses which

²⁵ Ibid, 277.

²⁶ Ibid, 277.

²⁷ Ibid, 279.

seeks to reveal the true conditions of their subsistence under the yoke of capitalism – Rancière opens up a more complex and sufficient framework for the relationship between aesthetics and politics, whereby art represents a means for a subversive redistribution of the sensible on a micro-political level. Art, in this sense, produces a politics of its own. But, as Rancière is careful to point out, this does not mean that there is a straightforward relationship between art and politics. They do not appear as two separate and pre-formed realities nor is there a simple relationship of cause and effect that inheres between them. Rancière's methodology is instead to hold the two most familiar outcomes of theorizing the relationship between art and politics - i.e the production of a new community in which art and politics combine, or the necessity to maintain a separation between art and everyday life – in critical tension. Rancière finds the entwinement and emplotment of these two aesthetic logics at work in the aesthetics of Deleuze. On one hand, Deleuze looks toward a break with the traditional predication of aesthetics on a subject/object split proposing, instead, a world of plenitude and becoming. On the other, Deleuze maintains that art should be careful not to suppress itself in the production of a new society suggesting, instead, that it already provides the political building blocks and percepts of a people to come. For Rancière, however, the tension in Deleuze's system reappears through his embodiment of literary politics in characters such as Bartleby, the scrivener who prefers not to do. In Deleuze's hands, Rancière argues that Bartleby becomes a Christ like brother to us all, a hero whose activities would seem to run counter to the calls for collective enunciation which underpin much of Deleuze's own aesthetics. However, Rancière argues that this contradiction is in-keeping with a broader meta-politics of aesthetics that would hope to establish a new configuration of community, one beyond the current dissensus of superficial political reframing.

Before being a brother to us all, Bartleby, the activist of nonactivism, is the brother of the Marxist revolutionary leader who lets the productive forces break, by their own dynamism, the chains of the old world, before deciding the right moment when the sleight of hand of an uprising minority performs the task of the break with the new world. This brotherhood comes as no surprise, since the political performance of the literary character, as Deleuze conceives of it, and the revolutionary performance in Marxist theory spring from the same source. The Marxist idea of Revolution and the Deleuzian view of Art are both rooted in the meta-politics of the aesthetic revolution.²⁸

What Rancière offers us, though his readings of Gauny, is a means by which it becomes possible to conceive of a mirco-politics of resistance that is both worked out and worked through a myriad of redeployments, or repositionings, within the structural fabric of political consensus. Within this model, Gauny's 1848 article acts as an example of the emancipatory potential held within new models of art and aesthetics, such as Grizedale's reworking of Mechanics Institutes and the activism of Ruskin, which enable an active re-imagination of

²⁸ Ibid, 286.

previously fixed positions and modalities. In this sense, the political content of art is no longer identical with, or reducible to, its aesthetic content. Nor is its potential or impact dependent upon identifying and uncovering false-truths which belie the real conditions of subsistence and exploitation. Instead, the writings of Gauny share a new common fabric of enunciation, and a new common language of previously fixed signs and symbols, which can be recombined and re-distributed to form new meanings, precepts and possibilities. This process, this simultaneous working of and contribution to the new aesthetic, can happen within an uneven and unequal distribution of power and control. Gauny's floor layer is all too painfully aware of the true conditions of his own exploitation whilst, at the same time, he is able to willfully carve out the space within which he can truly begin to imagine the condition of his freedom. This delusory state, which offers the real possibility for material change, is not brought about through the sudden realization of ideological misrepresentation. Nor is it prompted by art which reveals a state of inequality that would otherwise remain incomprehensible to those caught in its grip. Instead, it is brought about within a lived experience of inequality and by a shift in the aesthetic which enables the possibility for altering the spatial relations of power and control through the use value of art.

Conclusion

The kind of work that is now the work of art is characterised by the struggle to open up spaces of critical autonomy; spaces within which it becomes possible to re-imagine the ways in which we live our lives. In a neo-liberal global economy, the difficulties of this task are immediately apparent – how to make work in a world in which all culture is already instrumentalized to its roots? A world in which the shock tactics and tacit withdrawals of the avant-garde have now become the food and drink of international advertising agencies? A world in which any traditional role for art has been lost? A world in which both the working patterns of artists and the tools that are available to them to make their work are now shared with their audiences? A world in which the longstanding dream of the political avant-garde to marry art and life has become the nightmare of the endlessly interchangeable commodity? For Grizedale Arts, such questions have provoked a long term strategy of creativity, commissioning and production which has fundamentally challenged artist's assumptions of themselves as well as their relationship to their work, their politics and their community. On one level, all forms of artistic practice are, of course, socially engaged – if all art is produced within a specific context, and not some kind of social, political and economic vacuum, then how can it be anything else? On another level, the historical circumstances within which our current understandings of what art can and cannot be were formed at a time in which notions of autonomy, use value and citizenship were at stake politically. As art, and more specifically the aesthetic, became a way of imagining emancipatory futures and of working through the possibility of secular political identity and citizenship, the now familiar notion of autonomy (as a non-social apriori expressed thought the logic of art for art's sake) began to take on its current association with romantic forms of disensus and refusal to conform. However, as Grizedale Arts have insisted, this is precisely the time when a non-utilitarian use value for art began to be lost. The result of this has been the familiar bifurcation that we live with now, between a moral and ethical insistence on a fully

integrated and socially engaged art practice and an aesthetic insistence on the possibility of socially disengaged autonomy.

As a means to address this impasse, Grizedale arts have turned to the political and aesthetic potential that lies latent within the historical concept of the Mechanics Institute. Formed in the early 19th Century as a means to provide free education to workers, Mechanics Institutes initially developed as an ad-hoc, patchwork solution to the growing problem of a predominantly illiterate workforce in an increasingly industrialized workplace. Many subsequently became Universities that still run today, some became hotbeds of self-organization and early Union activity, most sought to teach art as an essential component of a rounded and full education. For Grizedale Arts, it is this initial conception of art as a functional component within the development of a rounded and educated citizen that is crucial. If art can be re-imagined and re-envisioned in terms of its use value, Grizedale Arts argue, then we stand a chance of being able to conceive of an art which neither stands apart from, nor disappears into, a generalized social milieu of semicapitalist exchange. As we have seen, Grizedale Arts have spent the last decade beginning to address this conundrum through an innovative curatorial and commissioning policy which insists on asking the artists they work with to make themselves useful. More specifically, they worked closely with a local community centre, The Coniston Institute, in developing a range of collaborative initiatives. By working closely with the local community to develop sustainable projects, Grizedale Arts are helping themselves, as well as the artists they work with, to re-imagine both the use value of their work and the kind of work, or job, that the work of art has now become. Here, the figure of John Ruskin looms large. Ruskin's personal input into the development of the Coniston Institute (originally a Mechanics Institute aimed at the mine workers who used to populate the village in the 19th Century) has provided Grizedale Arts with a further means to go back to the future, to re-visit the legacy of an often controversial figure as a way to radically re-think the role and function of art and art practice today. By opening up a direct critical, theoretical and practical timeline to the historical source of arts current dilemma, Grizedale Arts are attempting to produce a series of sustainable projects which fundamentally challenge or conception of what the work or job of art can be or become.

One of the key outcomes of this process so far has been the provision of an alternative model for re-thinking (and re-making) the role and function of art in terms of use value and usage. However, as we have seen through examples such as Ray Davies' *Child's Play* and *The Sao Paulo Mechanics Institute*, this is a complex, multilayered and continual process – it simply cannot be anything else. To reduce the process of re-defining the job or work of art to commonly held templates of object production or socially engaged practice is to run the risk of immediately falling back into the 'double advocacy' system of Contemporary Art which, as Alistair Hudson argues, relies almost totally on propagating the complicity between arts economic/commodity value and its civilizing or cultural value. Yet, as Hudson has also argued, the gravitational pull of this system is so strong that it remains difficult to locate any work outside of this conceptual framework and for it to still be commensurable as art. At the same time, the traditional specificity of the artist's role and function has all but

disappeared. As Berardi has cohesively argued, the precarious lifestyle of the alienated and rootless modern artist is something all of us now experience within an endlessly flexible and deregulated market place. Furthermore, this global rootlessness is currently underpinning the production of new nationalistic, quasi-religious and frequently fascistic collective identities. Berardi's solution, like Grizedale Arts, is one of collective dissidentification – of finding ways to make work, and of re-defining the job or work of art, that resist the politically deregulative fantasy of the Big Society. It is here, once again, that the Time Machine of Grizedale's Mechanics Institutes serve us so well. By going back to the future, by continually revisiting, reimagining and recoding the historical points of rupture in which art's assumed use value could help guarantee a better version of the society we now inhabit, we can more successfully imagine our way beyond the current fixity and impasse of our economically instrumentalized present. In the light of this complex process it becomes possible, once again, to imagine the production of individual and collective organization that could contribute toward an alternative, sustainable and possible future. It is also possible to imagine this practice as both the job or work that the work of art has become as well as its new social and political use value. As Rancière has argued through Gabrielle Gauny's story of a revolutionary floor layer, the real work of revolution becomes one of sustained and modest resistances to an unnatural and unworkable order – but such resistances can only come at the cost of accepting that this order will not simply disappear because of grand revolutionary rhetoric or utopic refusals to engage. It is an order that can only be challenged and changed through the constant use and re-use of its own languages as a means of renegotiation and change. The overarching meta-narratives of neo-liberalism, stolen from the once liberatory rhetoric of 19th and 20th century artistic dissent, now provide the very tools through which new futures have to be re-envisioned and re-created. Going back to the future allows us to re-pick up these tools, such as Mechanics Institutes and the use value of art, in their nascent form, still imbued with the revolutionary potential for change, productivity and creativity.

So, to ask the question 'what kind of work is the work of art' is to set in motion a complex, interrelated and often contradictory inquiry into the terms and conditions of art practice today. On one level, it is to ask fundamental questions about the kind of activities that now constitutes the practices of art making. This question is not limited to the specificities of media or genre, nor is it limited to the physicality, or otherwise, of the material or immaterial art object. It allows us to look at how a range of physical, spatial, temporal, political and ideological factors and agendas are worked and reworked into forms of oppositionality and resistance. On another level, to ask what is now the work or job of art is also to demand that art results from the manifest struggle to open up spaces of critical autonomy and inquiry. This demand for a purposeful kind of activity is the historical opposite of assuming that either art, autonomy or any attendant aesthetic experience are a priori or given – instead, to ask what is now the work or job of art is to tacitly accept the social producibility and reproducibility of the terms and conditions which now govern arts production, distribution, exhibition and evaluation. Above all, to ask what is now the work or job of art is also to demand the production of an art practice that is dialectical enough to comprehend its own contradictions as complex forms of interaction. Such a process of

inquiry will itself enable the possibility of thinking through aesthetics and ethics politically. It will also enable the re-evaluation of art as work, and art as a form of use value, that is capable of subverting the common notion that an art which is useless can somehow escape the frameworks of commodification. It is also the only way in which we can begin to imagine a future for art, in our neo-liberal age of relentless cultural instrumentalization, which is not co-dependent upon the assumption that art must somehow remain separate from, and irreducible to, the culture in which it is produced.

John Byrne 10/11/14

Edited by Katrina Black

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