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Quand passion et précarité se rencontrent dans les métiers du savoir

Passion without Objects. Young Graduates and the Politics of Temporary Art Spaces

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Résumé

This paper addresses the position of young arts graduates seeking to respond to the unequal access and precarity of jobs in the cultural sector by establishing artist-led temporary spaces. With the increasing dissemination of the discourse of pop-up urban uses in the United Kingdom since 2008, former genealogies of autonomous self-organised spaces intersect with the urban agendas of public commissioners and private actors. Following a long-established critique of the “creative industries” and recent studies of working conditions in the sector, this paper brings together critical textual analysis of specialized press and policy documents and a series of in-depth interviews with a young arts graduate collective involved in setting up a pop-up space in London. Our research shows how in the context of low-budget public commissions in affluent areas of central London artists are encouraged to translate their passion for autonomous, self-organised practice into dominant discourses of artistic “community provision” and place marketing.

Entrées d'index

Index by keyword : art graduate, artist-run, commission, gallery, London, passion, pop-up, precariousness, social engagement, temporary space

Texte intégral

I. Introduction

1 Within the sector of "knowledge professionals", culture and art workers have been heralded as paradigmatic post-Fordist precarious workers (Hardt/Negri, 2004 ; Virno, 2004 ; Mute Magazine, 2005). The flexible and networked dynamics of life and work in the cultural and creative sectors have been criticised for offering unequal access (Gill, 2002) and unhealthy work patterns (Banks, 2009). These generate particularly hard conditions of entrance for young arts graduates (McRobbie, 2007), who, moreover, are likely to receive lower salaries compared to graduates in other disciplines (BIS, 2011 :31)[1]. In such labour scenario, we want to focus on how young arts graduates increasingly constitute their own infrastructures by creating their own workspaces, projects and networks, often from very little (McRobbie, 2002), hoping that these kinds of efforts will generate more stable sources of income from both public and private sectors. Such autonomous organizational efforts involve not only the creation of social infrastructures, but more and more often the creation of spatial infrastructures in the form of non-profit temporary art spaces, which are understood and celebrated as autonomous from mainstream and monetised urban economies.

2 This article draws on the in-depth study of temporary art spaces in London to analyse the relationship between passion and precarity for young graduates in the arts and creative sectors, as well as the ambiguous desires and wishes for alternatives embodied by such spaces. Our discussion draws on ethnographic research and critical discourse analysis of representations in policy documents, calls for art projects, self-representation and in-depth interviews with young arts graduates involved in temporary cultural uses in London between 2009 and 2011.

3 We begin by outlining the position of young arts graduates through a discussion of recent histories of the imaginaries of "entrepreneurial" creative subjects able to mobilise their professional networks and "know-how" to establish low-budget temporary art venues. We identify the key narratives emerging around DIY artistic reuse (understood here as artist-led practices in vacant urban spaces, see for instance Edensor *et al.*, 2010) through the analysis of texts selected from a wide range of visual and textual materials, including online self-representation, media articles and hardcopy art ephemeras (Cooke, 2006). In the latter part of the article we focus our discussion on a case study of temporary reuse in London in order to analyse how the discursive framework of passion of young art graduates is taken up by different kinds of commissioning bodies and put to work in the service of a different set of interests.

4 Through a close reading of the discourses and conceptual frameworks used by all the parties involved in the case study, we want to argue that passion is a

new object of political contention under neoliberal policies of precarization and privatization. If for recent graduates entering the arts as young professionals, the language of passion is a demonstration of commitment to their creative practice beyond the material conditions that constrain them, for the under-budgeted public institutions that commission them, the rhetoric of passion corresponds to the ability to exploit the surplus labour and energy of a qualified workforce they would not be able to afford at a market price.

II. Passionate and Precarious Creative Industries

5 In the UK as elsewhere, precarious and low paid employment is not only the condition of entrance but a structural characteristic of the field of artistic production. The common experience of cultural practitioners in contemporary Britain is marked by instability and poorly paid but labour-intensive temporary jobs, and by a constant need for networking and work-related socialising. A 2008 study by sociologist Rosalind Gill and geographer Andy Pratt defined contemporary "creative" work in the UK as characterised by :

> [A] preponderance of temporary, intermittent and precarious jobs ; long hours and bulimic patterns of working ; the collapse or erasure of the boundaries between work and play ; poor pay ; high levels of mobility ; passionate attachment to the work and to the identity of creative labourers [...] ; an attitudinal mindset that is a blend of bohemianism and entrepreneurialism ; informal work environments and distinctive forms of sociality ; and profound experiences of insecurity and anxiety about finding work, earning enough money and "keeping up" in rapidly changing fields (Gill/Pratt, 2008 :14).

6 Conscious of the specificities of the creative job market, career centres in universities, online arts platforms and publications advise young arts graduates to take personal risks such as applying for voluntary positions and unpaid internships in order to gain much sought-after work experience (Carrotworkers' Collective, 2009 ; Precarious Workers Brigade, 2012) in order to put a foot in the door and follow their passions. Within the last five years, among the many suggestions directed at young practitioners, a peculiar trope has emerged that appears worthy of attention, if nothing else because it is implicitly positioned, among the many myths surrounding creative careers, as the opposite of the more widely recommended internship. Instead of working for free for somebody else, the imperative of this new discourse is to become your own boss by "making" rather than "taking" a job (Gunnell/Bright, 2011) and opening up a low (or no) budget pop-up exhibition space (Artquest, 2012). Art practitioners are presented here as the ideal figures to engage in self-organised short-term re-use of vacant spaces through an "entrepreneurial" spirit that has come to redefine the role of the artist in relation to the cultural economy (Edensor *et al.*, 2010 ; Neff/Wissinger/Zukin, 2005).

7 A perfect example of this emerging imaginary for young creatives is a 2009 article from *The Art Newspaper/Frieze Art Fair Daily*, a free magazine distributed at the London commercial art fair Frieze. The tone of the piece, appropriately entitled *Do it yourself : pop-up galleries*, is explicitly "advisory" :

> What resources do you need to start up a contemporary art gallery in London ? You must have inexhaustible reserves of energy, a large helping of missionary zeal, and a healthy dose of chutzpah. A network of friends willing to help out on a voluntary basis probably helps. Surprisingly, though, you don't need much money. These are the consistent responses from a disparate group of young gallerists and emerging dealers currently active in London. [...] The minimum budget required to put on a show [...] is zero – provided you can beg, steal or borrow a space (Millar, 2009 :n.p.).

8 The "young gallerists" and "emerging dealers" referred to and interviewed in the article were all young arts graduates, average age twenty-five, apparently glad to be described as "doing it themselves" by taking personal risks and being entrepreneurial. Allegedly, these entrepreneurial art workers are "eschewing questions of finance altogether" by resorting to in-kind support and tapping into non-monetary economies. In the words of one of such entrepreneurs :

> [i]t depresses me when people spend their day writing funding applications. They won't do anything unless they have a big budget, so they're always waiting for money. It's much more interesting to just get on with things (*Ibid.*).

9 Once the space is granted rent-free, all social, economic and financial infrastructures required to run it are purportedly ready to fall smoothly into place through the "inexhaustible reserves of energy" of the artist-entrepreneur and her helpful "network of friends". The "missionary zeal" and the "dose of chutzpah", on the other hand, bear witness to the seriousness of the required passion for the arts, despite the lack of funding in the sector. It is worth paying close attention to the actual meaning of these last two expressions as they delineate a peculiar ideal character. Reference to the "missionary zeal" evokes not only the fanatic fervour of the religious proselytizer, historically an agent of instituted power governing populations (Foucault, 2009), but also a life of ascetic sacrifice and personal renunciation of life's pleasures in the name of a vocation. By contrast, the second expression, the "healthy dose of chutzpah", points to the profile of a brazen speculator interested in profit as a means of getting rich and enjoying a life that only money can buy. The Yiddish word "chutzpah" traditionally signified insolence, but was later adopted as a positive term used to describe an audacious, risk-taking attitude in business. The juxtaposition of the two figures used in the construction of the ideal attitude of art graduates thus hints at a strident ethical contrast between dedication and speculation, a contradiction that becomes fully apparent in the functioning of temporary art spaces themselves.

III. Imaginaries of Alternative Spaces

10 In the "creative" rhetoric about setting up do-it-yourself temporary art spaces, notions of entrepreneurship ambiguously overlap with ideas of self-organisation and autonomy. Imaginaries of artistic and commercial success through the establishment of low or no-budget DIY spaces became popular in the UK during the 1990s in the context of the Young British Artists scene. For example, artists Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas, two protagonists of this movement, rented a former doctor's surgery in Bethnal Green for six months, renamed The Shop (1993), to make and sell solo and collaborative work. In late 2009, The Shop's ephemera were included in the Tate Modern exhibition Pop-Life : «Art in a Material World, which celebrated "artists' " public persona as a

product, and their relationship with commerce and glamour» (Tate Modern, 2010 :n.p.).

11 As observed by Isabell Lorey,

> Many of the cultural producers who have entered into a precarious situation of their own accord [...] would refer consciously or unconsciously to a history of previous alternative conditions of existence (Lorey, 2006 :n.p.).

12 Such history is well documented and the association between temporary spaces and “emergent” and “alternative” artistic practices is a recurring feature in the genealogy of contemporary art. The last century in particular saw a steady valorisation of the work of artists operating outside institutional cultural sites.

13 A genealogy of the use of alternative spaces traces back to avant-garde artistic practices in their rejection of traditional art institutions perceived as oppressive and «mummifying» (Brecht/Robinson/Fisher, 2005 :118). In the 1920s, Dadaists and Futurists, with different intents, first became interested in the aesthetic and political potential of cabaret type spaces (Appignanesi, 2004 ; Richter/Britt, 1997) ; a few decades later, in 1957, the Situationist International, channelling the interests and energies of other artistic movements formed after the war (Cobra, the Letterists, the Psychogeographical Society of London and the Imaginist Bauhaus), began to explore different uses for public spaces and to critique the functionalist modernist city (McDonough, 1994 ; Sadler, 1999). Shortly thereafter a similar exploration began on the other side of the Atlantic. In 1964, in New York, Andy Warhol established the Silver Factory, while George Maciunas opened the first Fluxus shop, called the Fluxhall :

> [...] a loft on Canal Street, which served as his residence, a shop where Fluxus editions and publications were offered for sale, and a performance space (Auslander, 1999 :113).

14 Also in SoHo, New York, in 1971, local artists Carol Goodden, Gordon Matta-Clark, Tina Girouard, Suzanne Harris and Rachel Lew co-founded FOOD, a restaurant entirely managed and staffed by artists, which was described both as a «community based business whose goal was to support and sustain the art community of downtown Manhattan» and, in Matta-Clark’s own words, as «a live ‘piece’» of art in its own right (Clintberg, 2011 :n.p.).

15 On top of these historical movements, the contemporary arts curricula inclusde a more recent body of critical work that is emerging as a reference point for art students thinking about the relationship between the temporary use of urban space and their artistic practice from a political perspective. American artist and theorist Suzanne Lacy was among the first critics to talk about a “new genre public art” (Lacy, 1995) to identify site-specific practices (Kwon, 2004) that reclaim the public use of urban spaces for cultural and political interventions (Doerthy, 2004). What remained consistent across all these artistic practices and movements was an understanding of the effort to self-organise and reclaim urban spaces as critical and alternative to the dominant modes of both artistic and capitalist valorisation. Projects were often realised without the consent and at times despite the hostility of policy makers.

16 Vis-à-vis these heterogeneous arrays of antecedents from the near past, the first significant element of the current proliferation of temporary artistic spaces that appears worthy of note is their particular combination of an alternative and critical politico-artistic tradition with the rhetoric of entrepreneurial spirit discussed earlier. In recent years pop-up art shops and

temporary art spaces, drawing on a symbolic level on the mix of such self-made man [sic] mythologies and countercultural traditions, have not only become accepted formats for young and emerging artists, but have also been encouraged through national and local policies (Arts Council England, 2009), as well as through advice offered by professional arts organisations. A revealing example of this new, ambivalent policy rhetoric was offered at the height of the most recent recession by the online platform ArtQuest, an educational charity associated with the University of the Arts London and funded by the Arts Council England, in its definition of pop-up art shops :

> There is a well-established history of artists taking over empty shops for temporary exhibitions or community projects, and in the current economic downturn such activity is being actively supported both by local councils and artist networks (ArtQuest, 2012).

17 The "well-established history" mentioned in the text in fact refers to two very different and arguably opposed artistic activities in unused urban spaces. In the acritical juxtaposition of "temporary exhibitions" and "community projects", the history of the conflict between these two political and artistic approaches seems to disappear from the official imaginary, only to reappear over and over again, in the positioning and self-representation of temporary spaces within the artistic scene.

18 The ambiguity of this approach is apparent for instance in the recent outreach initiatives of a number of contemporary artistic institutions using vacant shop fronts in London for community-oriented projects. Between 2009 and 2011, several high profile public art galleries and cultural institutions, such as the Tate, the Serpentine Gallery and the Whitechapel Gallery (Steedman, 2012) ran a series of public outreach temporary shops, such as Tate Modern's Twenty For Harper Road, a 32-day «temporary creative project space operating out of a disused travel-agent» at 24 Harper Road, Southwark[2]. While engagement with local schools, community groups and residents usually develops over many years, many of the venues opened as part of these public outreach programmes tend to be short-lived due to the precarity of arrangements with landlords and despite their objectives of engaging local constituencies in growing and complex cultural experiences evolving over time.

19 This logic extends further to public art commissions from local authorities. In what follows, we will focus on the experience of the young arts graduate collective group+work with one such public commission based on temporary reuse of vacant spaces in London to demonstrate how the conflicted genealogies discussed above implicates very different forms of passionate commitment that are ultimately revealed as mutually incompatible.

IV. Group+work

20 Group+work is a London-based collective of young arts graduates that came together in 2010 around a shared desire to create time and a community in which to exchange and continue their individual and collective arts practices[3]. Upon graduation, all the group's members found part-time employment in sectors different from their degree subject, and shared a sense of frustration about the situation they found themselves in vis-à-vis their jobs and their art practice. As explained by a member of the collective :

> I graduated a few years ago now, and I mean, I feel [...] a kind of a frustration, I think this is what brought us together, this kind of shared sense of frustration at kind of opportunities not being available to us (group+work, group discussion, 6th May 2011).

21 This member found that he could find full-time work in a design studio, but decided to work part-time to «reconnect with his practice» (*Ibid.*). Other members had just graduated and were struggling to find employment they would find «fulfilling» and that they «could make a living from» (*Ibid.*). Out of this shared frustration and emerging awareness of conditions in the arts and creative sectors, in the initial period after graduation they began having «various conversations about trying to start something off» that would provide an opportunity to find «the space, time and resources» (*Ibid.*) to continue with their practice, as stated in the initial quote. It is important to note that the precarity of their conditions is very different from the kinds of conditions, at times described as "dole autonomy" (Aufheben, 1998), which sustained the arts community in London during the 1970s and 1980s.

22 In 2010 they successfully applied to an open call for a small public grant to propose and manage a new temporary artist-run space in the inner London City of Westminster. The grant was partly funded by Westminster City Council and partly by the Arts Council England through a creative development agency for young artists called Emerge, which describes itself as «a catalyst for the visual arts, to reinspire and reinvigorate» (Emerge, 2011 :n.p.). The commission, titled "Arts Activists" was for an

> ongoing or temporary project that would develop the skills of the organising artist or group as well as providing an opportunity for a public audience to engage with work in the artists' run space (Emerge Art Activist Commissions – Guidelines, 2010).

23 The organization offered advisory support by borough arts officers on empty properties and legal issues involved in setting up a space, as well as an overall budget of £1800 that, as explained by a member of the collective, «was like a research and development fund to start an artist-led space, rather than, say, a 'full fund' that would completely support us» (group+work, group discussion, 6th May 2011). The expected final outcome of the commission was that the artists would secure a venue and have a draft programme of six months' activity, which the collective stated

> [W]as something that we were quite keen to do, to have something with some kind of stability, rather than trying to just get a space for two weeks and do an exhibition in there, because [that would be] just at odds with what we want to do, like provide a sense of stability for the people involved, and also do meaningful work within the community (group+work, group discussion, 6th May 2011).

24 As young graduates in intermittent employment, commitmnet to a space and a six-month programme in itself appeared as a stable option, both for them as collective members as well as for the public audience the space was expected to engage. In response to the call, the group began to formulate a project that would fulfil the commissioners's requirements. Although at the beginning the proposal typically departed from a set of «vague, quite dream-kind of ideas» (*Ibid.*), the collective process soon developed them into a more focused set of ethical and organizational principles, which the group associated with a willingness to experiment with «less hierarchical» working models, «cooperative-like ethics» (*Ibid.*) and rotational roles. They wanted to «create a space where people could get professional development in some way, through a kind of sense of mutual responsibility, rather than 'you are working for

someone else'» (*Ibid.*). Moreover, group+work hoped that their space could evolve into a sustainable organization able to eventually offer a «form of payment or remuneration» (group+work, group discussion, 6th May 2011) to its members. Based on these principles, their winning proposal was thus centred on the creation of an artist-led exhibition and production space to support young arts graduates in their practice «in dialogue with local communities» (group+work, application to 'Art Activist' commission, 2010).

25 In the narrative framework used for their proposal, group+work related their passion to two sets of commitments. On the one hand, the proposal expressed a range of positive aspirations connected with the development of an artistic practice. These desirable conditions included an imaginary of commonality, reciprocity and mutual enrichment. The aim was to involve recent arts graduates «to re-connect and develop artistic practice through peer network support and review», to share their skills both with «other creatives and the public» (*Ibid.*). In addition, in the proposal the group clearly outlined these ethical and political principles of solidarity into a reflection about the arts, characterizing these values as significant elements of their artistic process :

> We see the project as exploring alternative modes of collective practice and art production. We are eager to explore co-operative models, wherein self-help, self-responsibility and democracy are cultivated, valuing common needs and aspirations. Exploring these possibilities for learning and working will encourage valuable relationships we consider important to art production today *(Ibid.)*.

26 On the other hand however, analysis of the proposal's discourse reveals a second set of passions, arising in response to a negative set of conditions this time. The second cluster of affects that animates the group's proposal is a response to the experiences of frustration and anxiety that these subjects associate with their struggle to keep their practice alive after graduation. Such disquiet is so strong that the group mentioned it in the opening sentence of their application :

> It is increasingly difficult for arts graduates to get opportunities and arts-related employment, whilst the demands of living in London mean it becomes almost impossible to find the space, time and resources to continue our practices (*Ibid.*).

27 The shared frustration over the lack of possibilities is what affectively grounds the group's inspirational and slightly idealist desires for a cooperative space in the concrete conditions that invest their lives in many complex ways, from the cost of life in London to making a living to preserving time and resources to dedicate to do what they love. Rather than a sign of naive vitality, in this second sense their passions become a symptom of their suffering, in keeping with the original Latin meaning of the term.

28 More negative passions emerge as the group described their target constituency, the people they wish to attract to the space, who they identified primarily as other recent art graduates who they hoped might benefit from a shared space, and whom one member of group+work described as

> [P]eople like us, who've just graduated, and feel a bit lost or frustrated, you know, because they can't get work in what they actually like, or the work that they like they don't get paid for, so it's a way to, as we say, gain professional development (group+work, group discussion, 6th May 2011).

29 The temporary space scheme the Westminster Council offered seemed able to present a viable response to both theese aspirations and fears. Based on the

premises motivating the group in fact, the commission seemed a good fit, as a similar mix of artistic possibilities and principles of social cooperation were present in the rhetoric of the open call. However, soon after the group secured the grant, the group found itself dealing with a number of requests from the commissioning bodies that directly contradicted the discursive framework of the call.

30 To begin with, the passions of the collective for “sustainable” artistic practices collided with the commissioning artistic body’s injunction to have some fast visible results. On this point, the young artists felt at odds with the agendas of one of the commissioning bodies :

> Emerge’s take on things and [their art consultant] is that… whatever it is, whether it comes to funding or just having a reputation, it’s better more often than not just to do small things that lead on to something else and something else and something else, [so] you are demonstrating that you are able to do it, so that people trust and give you a space in the future. […] the art consultant was in an artist collective in Shoreditch, Hoxton, Hackney in the 1990s […] and it was obviously [a] different kind of environment then. And her group did lots of ‘smash and grab’ kind of things *(Ibid.)*.

31 In their account of the experience of the officers advising them throughout the commission, histories and myths of the 1990s scene of temporary art venues shaped the commissioners’ expectations, and the artists felt pressured to “just produce something” such as a two-week exhibition or an event :

> [W]e were pushed to be temporary when, at the end of the day, we were not bothered about exposure and furthering our careers (*Ibid*.).

32 The pressure received by the artists in this episode openly contradicts the passion for artistic excellence and experimentation that is part of the mission of the art commissioning body. If the consultants from Emerge, in their mentoring position, encouraged the young graduates to cultivate their passions in some way, it should be said that the kind of dedication they solicited did not have artistic integrity as its subject (whatever meaning one might give to that notion), nor were they interested in the young artists’ sense of pride for a job well done. Instead, it was a passion towards an egotistic notion of the self that was presented as the key to personal success in the field. Rather than a passion for arts, the pedagogy of this exchange elicited a devotion to one’s reputation through mechanisms of self-branding.

33 Moreover, a second set of contradictions between the call’s objectives and the groups’ aspiration on one hand and the commissioners’ behaviours on the other emerged in the relation with Westminster local authority, the second funder. Here, the conflict between the collective and the public institution played out around the significance of “community outreach”. The authority’s officers pushed the artists to adopt a model of community engagement that would be highly visible and that could easily lend itself to a political instrumentalisation of the artists as surrogate, token service providers. As told by one of the members of group+work members :

> [O]ne of the other big things was the pressure from Westminster council to engage with communities and look for a space in a deprived area […] we’ve been thinking a lot about the role of artists and art groups to take on an empty property and jazz it up, and also, make life better for the people that live there in the community […] there was always that pressure and checking up on us to make sure that we were getting in touch with people in the community (group+work, group discussion, 6th May 2011).

34 The description of this double pressure clearly illustrates the tension between an entrepreneurial careerist art narrative and the promises of culture-led regeneration (Pratt, 2009). Regardless of their initial project proposal, the collective felt that they were expected to “make life better” for local people, which in publicly funded community-oriented art projects is often a shorthand for the most economically or socially deprived communities in a given location. Considering this episode from the point of view of passion, it could be said that the local authority pushed the graduates to regard their community work as a form of charitable intervention, to provide a service of relief to those in needs in the community, in a way not dissimilar from that “missionary zeal” already evoked in the Art Newspaper article – with other ends. What is more, both models of service provision and charity work conflict with the ethos and politics of that “activism” that the call explicitly referenced in its title, a term which directly points to a much more radical tradition of community interventions.

35 If the two commissioning bodies were in disagreement about the kind of passions they hoped to elicit with their respective discourses with the graduates – arts versus self-promotion, service or charity versus activism – their positions seemed to converge during the groups’ search for a physical space to rent or occupy. It was understood that the artist-run venue would be set up within the boundaries of the City of Westminster, a notoriously expensive borough in terms of residential and commercial rents, and with relatively few vacant spaces. The original commission had promised advisory support in searching for a venue, however the young graduates soon learnt that the management of most council properties had been outsourced to a private estate agency, with which the artists were encouraged to enter into direct negotiations in order to obtain rent-free access to a vacant shop. They were also advised to contact private landlords and other estate agents by walking around the borough and locating vacant shops or similar sites.

36 After weeks of unsuccessful phone calls and visits to local estate agents, they decided to develop a “property pack” with information about their project and what they aimed to achieve. In order to argue for a rent-free, short-term lease, they used the economic benefit argument of “increasing footfall” that belonged to the rapidly spreading official discourse of artistic pop-up shops. One of the artists felt particularly strongly about the implications of having to negotiate their intentions directly with real estate agents and landlords, and having to deploy a language that they felt was «really problematic» :

> [We were] constantly degrading what [we] wanted to do, in a way, because you say ‘oh, actually, it’s going to be good for you because [...] you are going to increase footfall, you are going to make the area more desirable for future investors and businesses’ and so on. It’s really, really horrible to say that kind of things... ! (group+work, group discussion, 6th May 2011).

37 The practical need to draw on the place marketing logic in justifying an art project through the value it may bring to an area in the form of real estate property value increase elicited strong and passionate reactions. The language of negative passions used to describe this experience thus revealed a crucial point of friction between the ethical positions of the collective and the paradoxical injunction, by the commissioning public bodies, to represent the project as beneficial within a logic of constantly increasing property values, particularly given the collective’s original proposal for a space to experiment with alternative models of artist-run spaces.

38 In the end, after two months of fruitless negotiations, the most honest piece of advice and an astonishing compliment, attesting to this group of young graduates' commitment and passion, came from an estate agent who – after hearing their proposal and intentions – told them, off the record, that they would be "better off squatting". Although meant as a joke, the remark brought to the surface once again the historical traditions and cultural and political associations between squatting and radical art practices that once informed the relationship between art and community-oriented alternative urban spaces.

V. Conclusions

39 Through the case study of group+work, we have shown how the critical analysis of the rhetoric of passion mobilized in the commission of temporary art spaces reveals all of its inconsistencies. Not only are the objects of passion in contrast with each other, but through the commissioners' "practical" advices, each is revealed for what it is : a rhetorical tool masking a radically different mechanism of valorisation. The commitment to artistic integrity and the development of emerging artists' practice was replaced by a push to visibility and self-promotion, in a careerist logic unconcerned with the ethics of care and collective support proposed by the group. The appeal to public engagement activities, understandable in a public commission, was revealed as an instrumental push to liaise with a "community" defined as the low-income residents in the pockets of deprivation within a largely affluent and exclusive borough. The very notion of "art activism" evaporated into "activation" and art-based place marketing, to the benefit of real estate agents and landlords.

40 Finally, even the passion of the artists as entrepreneurs, with their "missionary zeal", the "dose of chutzpah" and helpful "network of friends" is ultimately exposed as unattainable and unrealistic. The commission's risible amount of funding, meant as "a research and development fund", undeclaredly expected the mobilization of other income sources in order to establish and sustain the project. The group however was adamant not to «finance [the project] ourselves, like, out of our own incomes» from other jobs, as that would have conflicted with their aim of creating a space that would be sustainable for themselves and other young graduates in a similar situation. The ability to create a self-sustainable artist run space that could provide a form of income for its participants, a legitimate proof of success of any entrepreneurial operation was never even allowed to enter the discussion but remained for these graduates a future dream :

> [S]ometime in the future, in the very far future, we would love to, if we had a fixed space, [to] be able to generate money that could then be used to pay people for any work that they do towards the organisation [...] we are aware of time-banks systems, or alternative economies where people swap skills, [they are] great and everything, but we are also aware that we have a tendency to just work so hard for nothing [...] [that is] something that I worry about but also [that] I would really love to work towards, it's how to generate autonomous modes... autonomy and money (group+work, group discussion, 6th May 2011).

41 In conclusion, the process of learning and reflecting upon their position in relation to the commissioners and the different types of expectations was a cause of frustration, but was also accompanied by a strengthening of the members' passion and desire for forms of financial sustainability that do not

rely on unpaid exchanges. The «passionate attachment to work and to the identity of creative labourers» (Gill/Pratt, 2008 :14), often seen as an element in the subjection of cultural workers to the logic of precarity, can also be accompanied by a critical ability to discern and reflect upon conditions of unpaid/precarious commissions. Not all creative knowledge workers are naïve. In the critical encounter with the material conditions of work, it is crucial to attend to the details of how, through a commitment to the arts and a passion for ethical practice, individuals and collectives undergo a learning process as they negotiate, critique and challenge expectations.

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Annexe

Structured summary

This paper addresses the position of precarious young arts graduates who respond to the unequal access and precarity of jobs in the culture and art sectors by establishing artist-led temporary spaces. With the increasing dissemination of the discourse of pop-up urban uses in the United Kingdom since 2008, former genealogies of autonomous self-organised spaces have arguably been intersecting with the agendas of public commissioners and private actors. Young graduates in London thus find themselves having to navigate and negotiate the discourse of passions as it is mobilized in the name of different – and at times contrasting – sets of interests.

As "knowledge professionals" with little prospect of secure and paid employment, culture and art workers have been heralded as paradigmatic post-Fordist precarious workers. Drawing on the critique of the "creative industries" framework and on recent sociological studies of precarious working conditions in the sector, this paper aims to reflect on the mobilisation of passions in the constitution of precarious labour subjectivities and in young art graduates' relationship to the temporary occupation of urban spaces. By taking into serious consideration the artistic genealogies evoked in discussions of artist-led temporary spaces, this paper compares the politics and positions of artistic practices which established alternative spaces as an autonomous gesture of critique of dominant cultural institutions to the politics and position of the recent phenomena of institutionally-backed pop-up spaces.

Our discussion draws on the critical study of the emergent discourse of artistic and cultural pop-up shops artistic and cultural temporary shops in London between 2009 and 2011. Through textual analysis of selected articles appearing in specialized press, we argue that pop-up galleries and temporary spaces have been presented to young arts graduates as a viable alternative to seeking employment in the sector. In the second half, the article focuses on the case study of a collective of young arts graduate and their attempts to set up a pop-up art space in central London. The experience of the art collective group+work has been investigated through semi-structured in-depth group interviews and through discourse analysis of the policy documents that framed their collaboration with a London local authority in the context of a commission called 'Arts Activists'.

Our research has shown how in the context of low-budget public commissions in largely affluent areas of London, young art graduates are encouraged to translate their plans for autonomous and self-organised practice into dominant discourses of artistic "community provision" and place marketing through pop-up practices. The rhetoric of "passions" evoked in relation to artistic agency in the name of both public and private interests is revealed as a key element for the masking of the discrepancies and inconsistencies between different sets of values of the stakeholders involved in the process of creating the artistic space, ultimately placing young graduates in an untenable position.

Through the analysis of our case study we argue that the rhetoric of passion mobilized in the commission of temporary art spaces reveals incompatible "objects of passion" and mechanisms of valorisation. On the one hand, young graduates are encouraged to seek visibility to promote their own artistic careers, even if this does not coincide with

their stated aims ; on the other hand, the passion for their practice is summoned with the aim of minimising the inherent precarity of their situation. The divergent imaginaries of artist-run alternative spaces and their intersection with discourse of pop-up urban practices come to play an important and arguably new role in the political economy of the contemporary city.

Notes

1 According to a study commissioned by the UK Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, which oversees the functioning of higher education institutions, students graduating in creative arts and design are likely to earn only 6.3% a year more than if they had entered the labour market without a degree, a percentage that plunges to negative (-1%) if considering only male graduates.

2 The shop acted as a platform for twenty projects in April 2010 and offered free workshops and activities «for people to assemble and talk, think and make creatively. Young artists, architects and musicians will each be programming a day of free events, activities and workshops in the space» as declared on their Facebook page http://www.facebook.com/twentyfor?sk=info (accessed 10th November 2011).

3 Website : http://www.group-work.org.

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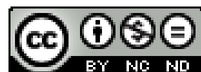

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