

# WORKING BY THE NUMBERS: PERFORMANCE ART SHORT ON TIME PROPOSES A MATERIALIST AESTHETICS OF PRODUCTION

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## ABSTRACT

The performance artists Florian Feigl and Fjóra Gautadóttir engage with production conditions of artistic work through their ways of managing time in performances. Informed by Marxist and feminist theories on affective and reproductive work, and with references to the history of performance art, I demonstrate how, contrary to myths of inspiration and virtuosity, production conditions co-create artistic authorship. Thereby, I reexamine what traditionally is termed as the aesthetics of production. An aesthetics of production is, I suggest, not about natural talent and originality of the soloist artist genius but is founded on the interdependency of life and work, and what enables the artist to do work. Feigl and Gautadóttir's performances include what has been excluded as disturbances by idealist aesthetics of production: the sociality, temporality and economy of the artistic work. By proposing a feminist-materialist aesthetics of production, I claim that the artist's work is not only working by the numbers of the present production conditions, but is also performing and intervening within the infrastructures of art.

## KEYWORDS

Performance Art, Feminist-Materialist Aesthetics of Production, Artistic Labor, Maintenance Art, Infrastructure, Florian Feigl, Fjóra Gautadóttir

In a performance-for-video series *300* (2009 - ) the German performance artist Florian Feigl is doing one thing for 300 seconds, or five minutes: washing his hands for five minutes, sweeping the floor with a broom for five minutes, walking down a road for five minutes, fighting with furniture for five minutes, playing chess with his children for five minutes. *300* is a collection of time-limited artistic, bureaucratic, and domestic work that has been equated on a horizontal, accumulative line since 2009.<sup>1</sup> The form of the series exposes the modularisation of everyday activities of the artist as a father.

In the Icelandic performance artist Fjóla Gautadóttir's work, the rhythmised life of a student is exposed: she documents and measures her private life to the extreme in *The Masturbation Log* (2018). Raised within the economisation of artistic study through the Bologna Process, Gautadóttir has learned to record life as work, and she both exercises upon and comments on this demand, as she enumerates the seemingly "free" act of masturbation: "Third time today," "Real quick before school," or "Masturbated for three minutes."<sup>2</sup>

Both artists make an issue out of the measurement of time within the parasitic relationship between life and work. The artistic forms, the five-minute series and the logbook, portray and reproduce a rationale based on accountancy and an accumulative temporality of work. The temporality and rhythm in which the artworks are produced shape the distribution of time within the artwork itself. Both works are thereby determined by and contribute to a materialist aesthetics of production. But in which ways do Feigl and Gautadóttir reproduce measuring standards of production as a critique of gendered and capitalised labour? Rather than proposing a division of life and work, or "rescuing" leisure time from work time, both artists demonstrate how the life of the performance artist is subjected to the technologies of contemporary work: technologies of self-publication, value-production and measurement of time.

In the following, I will argue that Feigl's and Gautadóttir's works demonstrate how the organisation of time plays a measuring role in their artistic practices and in life. The two works show how the temporality of production predetermines ways of living as an artist, as well as the form of the artwork: both the subjectivity and the aesthetics. Oscillating in my analysis between performance theories and Marxist feminist theories on affective and reproductive work, I suggest that, contrary to myths of inspiration and originality, production conditions co-create the artistic output.

## A TIME OF ONE'S OWN

Since the 1960s onwards, the inseparability of performance art and the life of performance artist has manifested in blood, hair, cum, and physical pain. Thinking about canonical durational works in performance art history, such as the Taiwanese conceptual body artist Tehching Hsieh's five year-long performances, or the meticulous, time-consuming practice of writing diaries and schedules by conceptual artist Hanne Darboven, it is clear that making art happens while living life. The strictly timed and embodied *One Year Performances* of Hsieh—taking a photo every hour or being tied to the performance art colleague Linda Montana for a whole year—put the artist's subjectivity at the center of the artwork: he is subjected to the rules and scores he made up himself, such as hourly clocking in and out of work by means of self-documentation. Similarly, in her *Pocket Calendar 1966-2009* Darboven devotes her life to a daily practice of noting down everything she experiences, following the strategy of "writing without describing": "read Brecht," "Mom called," "Guggenheim," or "didn't take Bruno's apartment."<sup>3</sup> Almost compulsive in her writing practice, she systemises her work and life into schemes as one would write musical notation. Both artists are definitely in the conceptual and 'dry' end of the performance art spectrum and their chosen materials are photos, paper, calendars, and ink rather than blood or cum. Their works put on display "figurations of temporality through system and seriality"<sup>4</sup> and exercise an obsessive, austerely timed recording of life in and as art. They perform a kind of aesthetics of (self-)administration: the works are full of numeric accounts, working by the numbers as something that can be read both as critique of standardisation and over-measuring of work and as a driving force, a self-chosen rhythm of their practices.

*Working by the numbers*, the title of this article, means to follow the instructions given with the greatest accuracy. Etymologically, the expression stems from a strict military formation in the American Revolutionary War where soldiers were trained to follow a protocol for positions of their rifles, one by one, numbered in order. Working by the numbers thereby means following a strict routine in relation to materials at hand and to the time. To be working by the numbers is to follow a schedule instead of being autonomous.

For each five-minute performance in *300* Feigl does one thing. He washes his hands until the soap disappears: five minutes are over. He lets his glasses defog for five minutes. He licks a

children's bicycle for five minutes. He licks a saw for five minutes. Time is set by an egg timer. Most performances-for-video in 300 are performed and recorded live in an art space, and some outside in nature, or at the artist's home. The materials used in the performances are domestic objects: hand soap, a vacuum cleaner, dust, waste, soil, a broom, sugar, tea, butter, oysters, toast, a tea cup, a coffee grinder, wine glasses, a dinner table, a wash bowl, a wardrobe cabinet, an armchair, a saw, a hammer, nails, a pair of scissors, a sledgehammer, a children's bicycle, a toy magic wand, a television set, a book, a rubber boat. Feigl takes everyday objects from the home and into the art institution. Sometimes he even performs with his children in the living room or in their bedroom: unpacking birthday presents for five minutes, playing with chess pieces for five minutes, or delegating the performance to them: for example, when a baby is trying to unpack some wool in a plastic bag for five minutes.

With the many household objects, his performance series appears as an extended encyclopedia of Martha Rosler's canonical performance-for-video *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975). Rosler's performance was, similar to Feigl's, a reexamination and denaturalisation of the everyday objects of domestic life through excessive use and acoustic retuning. A similar performance-for-video format was explored by feminist artists in the 1972 installation *Womanhouse*: as an accessible media, it was easy and handy to operate, and the performance could be repeated without the artist being present. They recorded everyday life and domesticity as an artistic manifestation of the personal as political, foregrounding the domestic relations as inseparable from artistic production.<sup>5</sup>

Where the repertoire of affects in Rosler's kitchen performance span from passive-aggressive to explicitly aggressive, Feigl's attitude in his performances seems apathetic, pragmatic, functional, neither aggressive, nor joyous nor excited. Is this a special kind of male affect to execute work in a seemingly apathic manner? Similar to the indifferent gaze of Hsieh in the photographs taken hourly in *One Year Performance 1980-81*, Feigl exhibits an attitude of executing an order, obeying a higher demand, as if compulsively. I think the reference to Hsieh is explicit in Feigl's work, in the way he makes time structure his practice, as well as in how he renders time itself sensible through the expansion of the *now*, beyond the event, by doing very little for five minutes, repeatedly<sup>6</sup>.

What is most significant about *300* is the format of five minutes. Obviously, the seriality invites a meditation on time. The simplicity of doing one action, possibly in a repetitive manner, makes me think of the time spent planning the choreographic precision of these five minutes: five minutes of performance, and behind each five minutes, the time for rehearsing and planning. For example, how Feigl disappears out of the frame when walking away from the camera down a road for exactly five minutes. The simplicity of the format and the limited visual cues direct the attention to what is outside the work of art: the temporality of Feigl's private life, the places where he spends his time, the practices, interests and habits he has off-stage, the social relations surrounding the production (family, friends, audience, programmers). The (mostly) cheap material or found footage which appear in performance art also bear witness to the proximity between art and life. Aligning with conceptual performance art history, he implicitly refers to the serial, repetitive and durational performances by Hsieh, and his tongue-in-cheek way of naming the pieces in series makes them sound like Fluxus scores: *Lick Pieces* or *Sound Pieces*<sup>7</sup>. However, just as Hsieh's *One Year Performances* were a way of documenting, justifying, and re-appropriating life by an artist in exile *sans papiers*, Feigl's five minutes are also a re-appropriation of a stolen life. He finds the five minutes for himself, five minutes for being a performance artist, in a period where he is a fulltime parent:

What makes a performance artist? For me the question was actually "did I move [away] from being a performance artist, which is was what I called myself, and now I am a father?" And these two things that exclude each other, thinking that what makes a performance artist, is his practice, like you do things; And continually doing things, you are a part of your artistic process. This became harder and harder at a certain time in my life, and in an act of self-defense, I thought there has to be something left: Five minutes a day! Beyond discussion. I cannot fight for it. This is something I need. I want this. And so, this was what I had out of that situation.<sup>8</sup>

The format of five-minute performance art per day comes from the time Feigl was working as a fulltime father at home with three children, where he did not find time for longer rehearsal periods and artistic collaborations. The declaration "Five minutes of time one should be able to spare"<sup>9</sup> on his homepage is, in that respect,

not meant as the time the audience should be able to spare for him, but that Feigl himself and the social institution of the family should be able to spare for his artistic practice.

The title *300* in itself is numeric, consisting of three digits. Three zero zero, or three hundred. It is a sum pointing towards the number of seconds within five minutes. It is the smallest division of time, a dissection of the precious time Feigl has on his own, practicing being a performance artist who works with time. The format exposes the temporality of parental work as a fulltime occupation threatening Feigl's ability to be an artist. Two forms of unpaid or badly paid work—the domestic care work and independent artistic work—are competing for time in the life of the artist. Feigl invents an artistic format responding to the governing temporality in his life, which is the temporality of parenthood. The temporality of *300* is thereby political in two ways, first—in the tradition of feminist artists since the 1960s—by including essential, if unrecognised, work as something central to the identity of a worker, and second, by proposing a very short format, which exposes the precarity of independent artistic practice.

The shortness of the performance contradicts traditional expectations and habits within theatre. A theatre performance is expected to last between one and two and a half hours (including a break). As sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel has noted in his book *Hidden Rhythms* (1981), expectations of quantity (hours of entertainment, number of actors, volume of set design, etc.) are normatively set to match the price of the ticket.<sup>10</sup> Feigl's work ponders on the contexts of theatre institutions, fine art galleries and museums and, therefore, the format of five minutes is an inquiry into the production of the value of time, rather than a consequence of cheap ticketing. In fact, the seriality of the five minutes is potentially creating its own parallel economy: one could become a collector of these small performance-for-video units and classify them in themes. There is a certain financial logic in the material, a futurity, and a not-yet reached accumulation: the promised complete collection of 300 seconds times 300 is a congregation of Feigl's work over many years. It is a collection of hours spent. And the accumulation of spent lifetime produces value in itself.

Summing up, Feigl's work *300* both explores, and is subjected to, the time between the social institutions of the family and the art world, between the interests of the performance artist as a worker, as a father, as a producer. Feigl's personal experience of time is torn apart, modularised into units of institutional interests. Through the series of *300* he establishes a stretched

temporality beyond economisation and institutionalisation, and at the same time he accumulates his own personal temporal capital as an artist.

#### THE AESTHETICS OF NON-MATERIAL PRODUCTION

Karl Marx proposes in *Results of the Immediate Process of Production* (1863–66), a pre-study of *Capital*, a division of unproductive and productive labor.<sup>11</sup> Productive labor produces immediate surplus value and objectifies itself in concrete commodities. As opposed to this, Marx writes, unproductive labor is the work of the singer, the teacher, and the writer, as long as they do not produce explicit commodities. Similarly, he also promotes the idea of “non-material production,” the making of non-material products to be consumed, which is the work of service workers. Non-material production can be divided into two categories. First, there is the non-material production that results in “commodities, e.g., books, paintings, and all products of art as distinct from the artistic achievement of the practicing [sic] artist,” and second, there is the non-material production where “(t)he product is not separable from the act of producing.”<sup>12</sup> The second category of non-material production, according to Marx, does not function well in capitalist accumulation, since it cannot be delegated, passed on or resold. Marx gives an example: “I want the doctor and not his errand boy.”<sup>13</sup> The doctor does not produce his knowledge in one space and then sell it as a product for the market somewhere else. The doctor embodies his knowledge and cannot delegate his examinations of patients to unskilled helpers, nor can he ask somebody else to perform his personal style of confidence. The same goes for the teacher in the “learning factory,” as Marx calls the school,<sup>14</sup> who can never become more than a wage-laborer since he never increases anybody else’s wealth through delivering a product for circulation.

At first sight, the genre of performance art matches Marx’s category of non-material production within unproductive labor as something that does not objectify, but remains ephemeral: an encounter, a show (in German, *Aufführung*), an experience. As a genre, it is something that at first does not produce commodities. But within the last ten years, we have seen very concrete objectifications of performance art in solo retrospective shows by Marina Abramović and Yoko Ono, with reenactments, scores, documentation in photos and video, reliquial material traces from performances, and new objects made for exhibition and for sale. The commodification of immaterial work is theorised

in post-Marxist literature, and today both cognitive and artistic work can be viewed as productive labor, objectified as something one can privatise and sell, redistribute and gain from. In recent years, Marxist scholars actualised the categories of unproductive labor and non-material production in the notion of *immaterial labor* and its close relative *virtuosic labor*, which are both central to the analysis of contemporary artistic and academic practices. The notion of immaterial labor is promoted by Italian autonomists such as Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Maurizio Lazzarato, and Paolo Virno. Within performance art theory, Marx's twofold category of non-material production is very useful in order to delineate theoretical and descriptive nuances between more commodifiable and—at first glance—less commodifiable artworks of the so-called 'unproductive labor.' I am thinking about the traditional event of the unrepeatable ephemeral performance as ascribing to Marx's category of non-material labor, which cannot be separated from the act of producing. And I am thinking of the documentation within performance art—books, photographs, performance-for-video—as Marx's other category where the non-material production of performance art can be turned into commodities alongside paintings, sculptures, installations, which can circulate independently within the art market, separated from the artist's body.

I propose to define the two categories of non-material production as performance and post-performance respectively.<sup>15</sup> Performance is when the product is inseparable from the act of producing. Performance is a live event, the moment of *Aufführung* praised in Performance Studies as 'authentic' by Peggy Phelan (1993), and specific to this art form, by Erika Fischer-Lichte (2004). The performance is inseparable from the body and the lived temporality of the artist. Post-performance is the performance artwork that can be displayed in object form, distributed, reenacted by others, and circulated without the artist being present. Post-performance is, as an artwork with the artist absent, an immaterial concept, manifested and recorded in materiality. Post-performance can be perceived both as the artwork itself and its documentation. A canonical example of the ambiguity of post-performance is when Mierle Laderman Ukeles recategorised art as maintenance work and was photographed by her husband in order to document herself doing the ironing or looking after the children at home. The materiality of her maintenance work was documented and presented as a traditional art object, a photograph. The erosion that comes from performing at



home to objectifying maintenance in an object for display gave Ukeles conceptual troubles: “her photographs, not the labor, were conceived as ‘art.’”<sup>16</sup>

Summing up, I claim that the genre of performance art, as both productive and non-productive labor, can refrain from being commodified and, at the same time, can be objectified and create surplus value due to its twofold non-material character as both performance and post-performance. This has consequences when it comes to subjectification of an artist worker. The figure of performance artist has in recent years been criticised as living out a neoliberal work ethos putting flesh, mind, and sociality into investment and never letting a serious (personal) crisis go to waste.<sup>17</sup> Within performance art theory, the performance artist has been characterised as a very productive worker, exhausted by constantly being at work in inconstant structures. Similar to the doctor and the teacher, the performance artist’s work and production are inseparable from their life: the performance artist embodies their work, unable to distance themselves from their physical ‘products’ as opposed to other artists such as painters, sculptors, writers—even if at a later point, the post-performance can circulate with less affective and physical effort.

Performance theorist Bojana Kunst proposed a strategy, whereby the performance artist responding to a life in structural precarity and exhaustion should “do less, precisely when confronted with the demand to do more.”<sup>18</sup> In the Italian autonomist writings, resistance against occupational temporality of immaterial work is proposed in forms of strike, refusal to work and withdrawal. Doing less can be understood as a direct answer to late capitalist demands of constant productivity, competition, and individualisation. Doing less, striking, or not working at all, are ways to demand autonomy for life itself; or it could be a strategy of naysaying and, as Kathi Weeks says, paraphrasing Shulamith Firestone, a way to start thinking about a re-diffusion between what is love and what is work.<sup>19</sup> However, it is my argument that rethinking and reclaiming non-work is a way to try to separate life and work again, within a genre and in a time where inseparability has become the norm. In my regard, this separation of life from work relies on an antiquated notion of work where the private is an untouchable and institutionalised “outside.” Rather, I would argue, this “outside” must be politicised as always-already counting, even when—in earlier times—it was unrecognised. In the late 1960s, feminists, such as Silvia Federici and the Wages for Housework movement, started politicising this separation

of life from work,<sup>20</sup> and I take my lead from them. Feigl's *300* accounts for domestic work as a competing factor to the hours spent working as an artist: there is not a life that has to be rescued from work, because life at home, with the kids, is also work—and a possible source of material “inspiration” for, or rather *organisation of*, non-material work.

From the perspective of an idealist aesthetics of production where the artist is a genius with natural talent, the artist is seen as somebody who needs to be freed from economic and social dependencies. Is the ideal of artistic autonomy echoed in Feigl's need for at least five minutes a day of being an artist—not a father? Does he want to have artistic freedom, autonomy, undisturbed time, at least five minutes a day? Are the five minutes his justification as a true artist doing pure art? Rather than fighting for more artistic freedom from worldly production conditions, I see *300* as a plaidoyer for a materialist aesthetics of production: art is not a creation channeled by nature-given talent, it is a product of social, temporal, and economic conditions in the artist's life. I propose to depart from a materialist aesthetics of production in order to describe how non-material art is organised by its circumstances. It is precisely the inseparability of non-material art and life—the fact of being a parent, a worker, a money-earner, an application-writer and so on—that co-create the artwork. Rather than going on strike and nostalgically reclaiming lost life, as the Italian autonomists would suggest, the question becomes *how* the non-material artwork has been “infected,” or less negatively expressed, “informed,” and even co-produced, by its working conditions. How do the *parergonal* structures such as the family situation, the historical context, and cultural policies organise the structures of the artwork? Could one even say that what Kant would understand as disturbances for the artist genius, and what has therefore been excluded in his aesthetic theory, actually serves as material inspiration for the performance artist?

#### THE ACCOUNT OF AN IDLE DESIRE

Organising life into schedules, recording time, doing accounts of one's work are all things students have already been trained in during their study since the implementation of the Bologna Process (a 1999 educational reform) in European higher artistic education. As an example, students in Berlin in the bachelor degree course *Dance, Context, Choreography* learn to calculate hours of their project-related work outside school, and then cash in “credit points” for the hours spent doing relevant activities

such as writing applications, having meetings with future work partners, taking yoga classes, visiting exhibitions, or reading books. Altogether, they have to cash in 180 credit points within the three-year education, equating 25 hours of work times 180. In other words, the students train in economisation of their life and learn to account for all their activities.

The recording of hours can be seen as both a self-surveilling and occupational value production measuring of all the student's activities, but also as a feminist strategy of making visible all the hours of unrecognised work of artistic production. An artistic work which could be read as a direct reaction to the art student's recording of life as work, is *The Masturbation Log* by Fjóla Gautadóttir. Gautadóttir was a student on *Dance, Context, Choreography* in Berlin and graduated in the summer 2019. Her artistic logbook is a collection of handwritten pages recording and commenting on her masturbation practice:

MASTURBATION LOG ENTRY 48

REAL QUICK  
BEFORE SCHOOL

MASTURBATION LOG ENTRY 96

AT LEAST THIS IS  
SOMETHING I CAN  
DO

MASTURBATION LOG ENTRY 105

MASTURBATED FOR  
THREE MINUTES

*The Masturbation Log* (2018), entry 48, 96, 105.

What is masturbation? The act of masturbating is something done alone, or in company of a dear object, a pillow in the case of Gautadóttir. It is an act which bears no economic expenses. It provides immediate physical satisfaction and a short moment of distraction from one's responsibilities and obligations. It is regenerative and relaxing, while not providing any material outcome besides pleasure, leaving no traces or objects for others to consume or circulate. Masturbation is also an act of procrastination: it is unproductive and idle. Yet when one talks about one's masturbation practice, it is both transgressive (too private) and, when repetitive, creates a myth of a natural talent of pleasure-making, as well as an abject dependency on one's immediate orgasm. Female sexuality is traditionally associated with reproduction. Yet, the act of masturbation is literally non-productive, as well as non-material, and hardly something that can be categorised as work. Is masturbation, then, an individualist and even egoistic practice, not for making babies but only for personal pleasure? Or is there an act of resistance when one exposes the desire to escape the pressure of displaying the productive self, either as an active art student, original artist, or as a reproductive woman?

Whether Gautadóttir's documented masturbation is faked or not is irrelevant. Rather, the (imitation of) registration of such private moments into an artistic accumulative economy comments on a commodification of life. Each of the 64 pages in the artist's book of selected log entries are numbered and show—with numbers up to 121—that the book is a collection, perhaps a "best of" orgasmic events. The numeric account of her desire is similar to the everyday clocking in and out of work at night, which the students in Berlin exercise when collecting and counting reading hours in bed or regenerative practices at home compatible with credit points. Handwritten and numbered, copied on A4 papers, the book is both intimate, standardised, and "cheap." Consisting of an accumulation of private physical peaks, the work of Gautadóttir comments with wit and sarcasm on how she is interpellated by the logic of economic calculation. The mocking attitude demonstrates a critical stance towards the standardised, yet demanding expectations of quantification for young artists trained within the Bologna Process. At the same time, there is a fear of failing, as an artist and as a person, at stake: "Somehow I managed to masturbate despite paralysing fear of the days to come," "At least this is something I can do."<sup>21</sup> The pressure of professionalisation and the horizon of a life in structural precarity are the contexts of Gautadóttir's escapism when masturbating.

*The Masturbation Log* reveals the twofold nature of non-material production of performance art: the strategy to escape professionalised technologies of work through masturbation is performed in each description of the idle act, yet, in the aesthetic form of the accumulated, numbered log, the artist also turns the explicitly unproductive work into a post-performance product. The feminist naysaying to reproductive work, literally no to babies, is exchanged into an artistic value. The student's interpellation by rigid standardisation and self-measurement in artistic education is translated into a witty and sarcastic critique of numeric accountancy. Gautadóttir shows how to never let a serious institutional and personal crisis go to waste, and she thereby performs both critique of, and complicity with, the neoliberal rationale.

Gautadóttir's making the unproductive masturbation productive could be compared with performance artist Eliza Shvarts's exploration of self-insemination and self-induced miscarriages in the durational performance *Untitled [Senior Thesis]* (2008). For a whole school year at Yale University, rhythmised by her menstrual cycle, the performance art student Shvarts prepared her senior thesis: a presentation of her material and discursive examination of reproduction as installation and video. However, as the work started raising ethical debate, the Yale University administration censored the final presentation calling Shvarts's work a "creative fiction" and adding: "Had these acts been real, they would have violated basic ethical standards and raised serious mental and physical health concerns."<sup>22</sup> Compared to Gautadóttir's commodification of private pleasures, Shvarts's non-productive performance is extremely painful, but what both works have in common is that they examine the right to do something without any means to an end. Can counter-productive and even destructive reproduction count as work in artistic education? This might be a question of ethics, but first and foremost, both works point towards domestic "obstacles" that reduce the normatively acknowledged productivity and "threaten" the temporal economy of the student as a worker in present day capitalism.

The works of Feigl and Gautadóttir in many ways adopt the aesthetic category of *the zany* proposed by cultural theorist and feminist scholar Sianne Ngai in her book *Our Aesthetic Categories* (2012). The zany is a complex aesthetic category emerging out of a late capitalist work paradigm, where the performer is occupied by—as in infected, haunted by—their role in a condition where life and work intersect, and, as I have argued, have become

inseparable.<sup>23</sup> The role is characterised by permanent performance, the constant and undifferentiated chaotic activity of doing too many odd jobs of affective work, which Ngai locates both in feminist performance works by Linda Montana in the 1970s and in popular movies like *The Cable Guy* (1996) and *The Full Monty* (1997). However, the notion of the zany dates back to commedia dell'arte theatre in Italy in the sixteenth century: a kind of theatre initiated by actors working in self-organised and precarious troupes. Interestingly the figure of the *zanni* in the commedia dell'arte genre was an itinerant servant, whose life was formed by nature catastrophes and low conjunctures, and thus, similar to the commedia dell'arte actors themselves, a temporary and precarious worker—or as Ngai writes: “a character defined by a specific kind of labor or relation to labor.”<sup>24</sup>

There is obviously a connection between the *zanni* character and the zany freelance performance artists today, and that is the self-definition through precarious labor. “The zany is not just funny but angry,” Ngai writes,<sup>25</sup> as the zany aesthetics faces the working conditions. Despite Feigl and Gautadóttir’s charming critique of life being short on time due to societal, private, and institutional demands, they are also attacking the exploitation and the pressure, and with many contradictory affects. The zany performer is both desperate and compensatory in their acting out, Ngai states, but also exposes a post-Fordist in-betweenness of “gender as a point of uncertainty.”<sup>26</sup> Feigl using his parental role to fight back for his right to work is both a feminist demystification of domestic work, and also perhaps a patriarchal claim for the right to be a “real worker,” an autonomous artist, for five minutes a day. I read his five minutes as both a feminist achievement proposed through the act of making visible the reproductive work in the domestic institution, and at the same time, as a nostalgic reaching out towards a lost ideal: the solitude of the free (male) artist genius. Here, two temporalities collide: the occupational, domestic time of parenthood, and the independent work time, if really short, of the autonomous artist. Is Feigl performing a mixture of what feminist Mierle Laderman Ukeles proclaimed in 1969 as female “maintenance artist” and of the autonomous male figure of artist genius?<sup>27</sup> Similarly, several and possibly contradictory gender agendas are at stake in Gautadóttir’s work. She is employing feminist strategies of alienation and denaturalisation by dedicating her attention to female intimacy and structural vulnerability. But Gautadóttir also transforms the unproductive, non-material acts of masturbation into a post-performance

artwork for circulation, participating in the professionalised economy of “original” artworks based on personal crisis.

#### TOWARDS A FEMINIST-MATERIALIST AESTHETICS OF PRODUCTION

When reflecting on Marx’s distinction between non-productive and productive labor, both Feigl and Gautadóttir are making the non-productive work of the performance artist productive. Through the materiality of their post-performance works, the performance-for-video-format and the printed book, and unlike the historically non-material, ephemeral performance, both artworks can be repeated and circulated; both works can and do accumulate value beyond the temporality of the event, beyond the presence of their bodies. In that respect, both artists have made anti- and non-productive work productive through post-performance.

Bojana Kunst calls for contemporary artists to explicitly make their particular—not generalisable, nor universal—production conditions visible in order to complicate the norm of the artist’s life as a role model in capitalism: “In this, it is extremely important to make visible the exploitation within one’s own methods of production—to work in a way that makes the production conditions visible.”<sup>28</sup>

The works of Feigl and Gautadóttir show how production conditions such as economy, sociality, and temporality co-author the artistic creation. Feigl works through the conditions of being parent and artist. Gautadóttir works through the self-managing technologies fostered in the Bologna Process, where the student is trained to keep an account of life and work. Structural precarity, whether gendered, as a result of educational policy, or due to neoliberal professionalisation, are echoed in contemporary artistic works: I see an occupation with numbers and a quantification of life. I see a longing for more time and a restructuring of time. I see cheap materials in poor times. The works of Feigl and Gautadóttir can be understood both as an exposure of the artistic production conditions in our historical present, as well as a critique of a lack of time, an increasing demand of self-accountancy, and outsourced responsibility.

In *300* and *The Masturbation Log*, the inseparability of life and work—parenthood and institutional standards that define the temporality and enforce numeric accountancy in the artistic practices—is both a production condition and a theme, revealed in content and form of the artworks. However, I wonder whether

the fact that Feigl and Gautadóttir expose their tight temporal constraints of production is a way of proposing a re-installment of the separation between life and work? Do they actually still, nostalgically—like in the Kantian idealist aesthetics of production—believe in, and long for, an artistic practice freed from economic, social, and temporal restrictions? Or are the works of Feigl and Gautadóttir first and foremost a feminist plea for a materialist aesthetics of production, in the sense of conceiving the artist not as a (male) genius, but as an artist-as-producer deeply dependent on and always-already in artistic dialogue with time, economy, and sociality?

It is my argument that not only do the works of Feigl and Gautadóttir expose and thereby criticise their production conditions, as already proposed by Kunst. They also intervene in, shape, and re-form those production conditions through the artworks. Most explicit is Feigl's invention of the parent-friendly format of five minutes as a temporal frame for his performances. The five minutes redistributes time both on the side of production and of reception. The temporality and rhythm in which the artwork is produced—in five-minute units—shape and re-appropriate the management of time within the artwork itself with the series of five-minute performances. As for Gautadóttir, she performs a practice of inclusion: she includes taking time off as part of what should and must be recorded as work. She is making her masturbation part of the time sheet and thereby installing leisure-time in the equation of contemporary work.

With this reading of how artists intervene in and reorganise their own production conditions, I propose a theoretical reexamination of what is traditionally termed as the aesthetics of production. Aesthetics of production is concerned with what enables the artist to make work. Since the ancient times, a disgust towards manual and wage labor has paved the road for an exclusive and excluding position of the artist as genius. Following Immanuel Kant in his third Critique, the artist genius is not—and should not be—disturbed either by social or economic interests, but has a nature-given talent for creating original works.<sup>29</sup>

One of the most key twentieth-century texts is Walter Benjamin's *The Author as Producer* (1934)—a text that relocates the focus of production from the Kantian genius to the sociality and apparatus, or infrastructure, in which the artist works. Benjamin writes in times of the Great Depression. His ambition is to pay attention to the material circumstances of precarious artistic production and to the performativity—he did not employ this



word, but would probably refer to transformability (in German, *Änderbarkeit*) as did Bertolt Brecht—within these conditions. Benjamin links the aesthetics of reception to the aesthetics of production when he insists that artists who understand themselves as political—those who fight on the side of the proletariat against capitalism—must “never merely work on products but always, at the same time, work on the means of production.”<sup>30</sup> The artist and writer cannot just provide political messages and stay content in their writing—this is counter-revolutionary<sup>31</sup>—but must identify as a producer who is able to change how art is made. Benjamin is deeply inspired by the Russian Socialist writer Sergei Tretyakov’s distinction between the informing writer and the operating writer. In *The Author as Producer*, when referring to Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre, Benjamin distinguishes between representation and organisation within the artwork. The importance of operation within and organisation of the means of production is that it is a solidary act. The solidarity with colleagues starts when the means of production and the individual specialisation are shared. Today, we could reformulate Benjamin’s concepts of operation and organisation as an insistence on an open source of techniques and a redistribution of resources: not as a mere way of sharing but also as a way of showing each other how to change the apparatus. Benjamin refers to Brecht’s notion of “*umfunktionierung* [functional transformation]:”<sup>32</sup> the transformation of the production conditions in solidarity with other producers.

The interest in and theorising of the aesthetics of production from a materialist and feminist perspective has increased in recent years with certain focus on the recognition and inclusion of domestic labour and maintenance work.<sup>33</sup> The particular feminist contribution here is the act of inclusion and can be understood as an opposition to Kantian aesthetics of exclusion. Where the artist genius must be alone, undisturbed, freed from interests, the feminist artist includes their reproductive, regenerative, and affective work in their practice. Whereas Walter Benjamin as a materialist would look at techniques and organisation of artists, the materialist-feminist perspective insists on the expansion of the understanding of ‘production conditions’ to also include care work outside the art institutions. Proposing a feminist-materialist rather than an idealist aesthetics of production is a political reading of the artwork as something that is not a reflection of one’s ideas, but rather resides in the interdependency of life and work.

In the two works analysed, Feigl’s restricting parenthood and Gautadóttir’s useless masturbation are given time and attention.

Through my reading of their performances and post-performances, I present the concept of a materialist-feminist aesthetics of production as an act of inclusion: rather than dividing art from other forms of work, rather than separating art and life, a feminist-materialist aesthetics of production conceives artistic creation on the basis of interdependency. Time, sociality, and economy in the artist's production conditions are the actual sources of what was earlier conceived as nature-given inspiration.

Through the works of Feigl and Gautadóttir we can see how the production conditions of parenthood at home or self-administration in higher artistic education help create art. This is not to say that there is no such thing as creativity or sensible intuition. Yet, my argument is precisely that the traditionally categorised disturbances from sociality, time, and economy co-create and re-organise artistic formats such as parent-friendly five-minute performances and zany time sheet recordings of private moments. The works are not just—in obeying a late capitalist demand—producing “the new,” but become political through an infrastructural performance: not only are Feigl and Gautadóttir working by the numbers of parenthood and neoliberal quantification, they are also making the numbers themselves move.

- 1 Florian Feigl, *300*. Durational performance and performance-for-video. (Berlin 2009 - ). Website for documentation: <https://www.florianfeigl.com/> (accessed 1.10.2020).
- 2 Fjóla Gautadóttir, *The Masturbation Log* (Berlin: 2018), 8, 12, 41.
- 3 Hanne Darboven, *Enlightenment – Time Histories. A Retrospective*. Edited by Okwui Enwezor and Rein Wolfs (Munic: Prestel Verlag, 2015), 56.
- 4 Adrian Heathfield, *Out of Now. The Lifeworks of Teching Hsieh* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), 14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528160903319687>
- 5 See the documentation of the first Womanhouse exhibition centred around the domestic spaces in 1972 on <http://www.womanhouse.net/> (accessed 1.10.2020).
- 6 Feigl also explicitly refers to Hsieh's work with time as material in the performance lecture *Die Enzyklopädie der Performancekunst* by Wagner-Feigl-Forschung (2006).
- 7 Here I think of Yoko Ono's scored *Clock Pieces* and *Sky Pieces* in the artist book *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings* (Yoko Ono under the name Wunternbaum Press, Tokyo:1964).
- 8 Florian Feigl in conversation with Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt, "Views on Dance 5.6.2013," video documentation <https://vimeo.com/67818033>, min 0:14:06–0:15:57 (accessed 1.10.2020).
- 9 In the introductory text about *300* Feigl writes: "Five minutes of time one should be able to spare, and 5 minutes should suffice for literally everything. Five minutes cannot be too much to ask," <https://www.florianfeigl.com/> (accessed 1.10.2020).
- 10 Eviatar Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1981), 6.
- 11 Marx writes about unproductive labor in the pre-study to *Capital*, "Results of the Immediate Process of Production" (1863-66), published post-mortem in German and Russian in 1933.
- 12 Karl Marx, "Results of the Immediate Process of Production" in *Capital*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 1048.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 The category *post-performance* has also been used to describe a generalized state in contemporary culture, albeit vaguely theorized, for example around the exhibition *OVER-EXISTING* at Alt\_Cph 18 25–27 May 2018, at Fabrikken for Kunst og Design in Copenhagen.
- 16 Shannon Jackson, *Social Works* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 91. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203852897>
- 17 Here I am paraphrasing the quote "Never let a serious crisis go to waste" by American Democrat Rahm Emanuel, who proposed to look for the endless opportunities right after the financial crisis in 2008. It is also the title of Philip Mirowski's book on neoliberalism after the financial crisis, published in 2013. The artist worker is a figure that promises creative speculation nurtured by personal crisis, as has been pointed out by, amongst others, Bojana Kunst in *Artist at Work* (New York: Zone Books, 2015), 193.
- 18 Kunst, *Artist at Work*, 193.
- 19 Kathi Weeks, "Down with Love: Feminist Critique and the New Ideologies of Work." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 45: 4 & 3, (2017), 37–58, 55. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wsq.2017.0043>
- 20 See Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework* (Bristol: Power of Women Collective and The Falling Wall Press), 1975.
- 21 Gautadóttir, *The Masturbation Log*, 20, 34.
- 22 Alizia Shvarts, *Untitled [Senior Thesis]*. Performance. (Yale University, 2008). Documentation [https://alizashvarts.com/2017\\_posters.html](https://alizashvarts.com/2017_posters.html) (accessed 1.10.2020)
- 23 Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 204.
- 24 Ibid, 193.
- 25 Ibid, 218.
- 26 Ibid, 110.
- 27 Maintenance for Ukeles includes domestic labor, gardening, affective work, and cleaning of art institutions, see Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969! Proposal for an Exhibition 'CARE.'" in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*. Edited by Alberro, A. and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), 122-123.
- 28 Kunst, *Artist at Work*, 150–151.
- 29 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgement*. Transl. J.H. Bernard (London: 1914 [1793]), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/48433/48433-h/48433-h.htm#s44> (accessed 1.10.2020), §43.3, §46.3.
- 30 Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer" in *Selected Writings 1931–1934*, Bd. 2, vol. 2 (Cambridge: The Harvard University Press, 1999), 777.
- 31 Ibid, 772.
- 32 Ibid, 774.
- 33 For a greater theoretical contextualization of aesthetics of production within materialist-feminist theory see Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt, "An Aesthetics of Production" in *Everybody Counts* (University of Copenhagen, 2019), 110-128.