

# DON'T HATE THE BUSINESS, BECOME THE BUSINESS!

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This introduction to the panel investigates some of the interconnections between art, activism and business. "Don't hate the media, become the media" was one of the slogans of Indymedia. We are applying this critical hands-on perspective to the business framework to explore the concept of disruptive-innovation.

"Don't hate the media, become the media" was one of the slogans of Indymedia. In adopting the phrase, the idea is to apply this critical hands-on perspective to the business framework to examine how artists, rather than simply refusing business logic, are producing critical interventions from within. Indeed as the distinction between production and consumption appears to have collapsed, every interaction in the info-sphere seems to have become a business opportunity underpinned by informational capitalism and the perceived importance of the creative industries to the economy (the so-called 'creative economy', where creativity is effectively instrumentalised). Therefore, the creative intersections between business and art have become a crucial territory for re-invention and the rewriting of symbolic and cultural codes, generating political actions or social hacks that use a deep level of irony but also have unexpected consequences. The tactics demonstrate the permeability of systems — that these can be reworked — and more so, that radical innovation requires modification of prevailing business logic.

The backdrop of the Istanbul Biennale and the art world/market makes a useful reference point here as one of the markers along with art (trade) fairs in general for the commodity exchange of artistic production and the intention to boosting the local economy: "economic development and culture as part of a trade and investment portfolio" as Maya Balcioglu explains. In the local context, the almost exclusive model of private patronage rather than State subsidy for the arts indicates a growing trend for the art world as a whole, and its overt business orientation. But examining such trends are not new issues — as there have been many examples of artists making interventions into the art market and alternatives to commodity exchange — and we aim to discuss some of the recent strategies that have emerged from a deep understanding of informational capitalism with its enduring paradoxes.

More detail on the particularities of the information economy is what Elanor Colleoni provides with attention to its stress on the capture of social aspects and the pluralization of the concept of value. The mechanisms for generating value from intangible assets, or the ways in which it can be made tangible, takes new business forms and these are somewhat exemplified in the case of social media. The concern is how particular kinds of social relations are monetized, which sets the context for Dmytri Kleiner's notion of 'Venture Communism', an intervention that offers a model of workers' self-organization to allocate wealth using a peer-to-peer model, offering: "commons-based collaborative and shared forms of cultural production and economic distribution." Artistic interventions such as this, perhaps provide the "most innovative business models" as Christian Ulrik Andersen and Søren Bro Pold argue, but also reveal a "conceptual gap". There are many examples of new models but the central paradox is the focus here: that on the one hand, there are alternative or disruptive business models that derive from the art scene, often as critical or activist interventions, but on the other how these practices can be easily co-opted by proprietary business logic. The question is how to take this back: expropriate the expropriators.

The paradoxes are exemplified by the IT business idea of disruptive-innovation, where disruption is considered to be a creative act that shifts the way a particular logic operates and thus presents newfound opportunities for investment. If, in general, it appears that innovation has become co-opted, Paolo Virno offers a rather different interpretation (partly to avoid using the problematic term creativity) through his use of the phrase "innovative action," to describe the ways that humans demonstrate the ability to modify their forms of life. [1] He is developing the point that innovation both produces contradictory factors that reflect the human condition, its creative energies and their repression, but that it also provides opportunity for further reinvention. We propose to do something similar with the term business: and it is worth remembering that the term itself, business, simply indicates an occupation, and one undertaken with both care and anxiety (in its etymology) and is not pejoratively capitalistic.

If the economy is increasingly characterized by its linguistic characteristics and social cooperation, as Virno insists, language becomes the means for transmitting data and for innovative action. When it comes to digital work, there seems to be a changed relationship between conception and execution in this respect, in that the work is conceptual and is then enacted materially by the instructions that are produced by a machine. [2] Citing Virno, Christian Marazzi in *Capital and Language*, further develops this linguistic dimension as a mechanism of control: "Biopolitics exists where the foremost priority, in immediate experience, is given to what belongs to the potential dimension of human existence: not the spoken word but of the faculty to speak; not work actually done but the generic capacity to produce." [3] The goal of government becomes the generation of certain types of collective speech acts and competition within markets becomes an important foundation for a critique of social media and the ways in which the energies of peer production have been expropriated from the public by the market. In this sense, the vague marketing distinction between web 2.0 and web 1.0 is just another example of capital recuperating the democratic potential of a new technology for the privatization of public assets (as Kleiner also points out). [4] It sells the public what it already owned in the first place.

There are endless examples of platforms that extract value in this way from social creation but thankfully there are also others that try to hold on to it, further reinforcing the connection that Marazzi makes between financial markets and collective speech acts (as with P2P credit cards and other initiatives that speculate on the future of money). [5] The current austerity measures in global economies seems to underline the urgency for producing alternatives, as public services are eroded by the neoliberal logic of financial capitalism. The problem remains how to develop alternatives that do not simply function as innovation for capitalist renewal, how to innovate beyond the market?

Like innovation, disruption is a rather ambiguous concept. In the business culture, disruption does not mean only rupture, but innovation and re-design of behavioral tendencies. The concept of disruptive business represents a paradox because it demonstrates a process that interferes with business, but at the same time, it generates new forms of business. Since the avant-gardes, artists concentrated into the effect of producing the unpredictable, while generating new forms. Today, neoliberal business logic has embraced the unpredictable too, encapsulating disruption and co-opting alternatives. The paradox lives in the encounter of business culture and artistic disruption.

The intervention is to apply the business concept of disruptive innovation back again into the art field, and at the same time to develop a critical perspective on the concepts of disruption and innovation. The challenge becomes how to be aware of the business logics and mechanisms, introducing unexpected incongruities in the capitalist structure and provoking unpredictable feedback. In a scenario where business has largely co-opted the values of hacker ethics and social networks, and where the forms of criti-

cism tend to freeze as soon as they emerge, the way out from the impasse might be found within business itself. An examination of the paradoxes lies at the heart of this, in an inversion of old schemes of contradiction, and through the direct involvement of multiple and diverse subjectivities that react strategically and playfully from within. Art becomes business disrupting the neo-liberal marketplace.

The various contributions that follow explore these paradoxes and provocations: Does this mean that well-meaning critical strategies of artists and activists are self-defeating? How do we develop disruptive business models that do not simply become new models for business that ultimately follow capitalist logic? We maintain there is nothing wrong with doing business as such, it just needs to be better.

## References and Notes:

1. *Paolo Virno, Multitude: Between Innovation and Negation, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, and Andre Casson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents, 2008).*
2. *Christian Marazzi, Capital and Language: From the New Economy to the War Economy, trans. Gregory Conti (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 40.*
3. *Ibid., 156.*
4. *Dmytri Kleiner & Brian Wyrick., "Info-enclosure 2.0", Mute Magazine, Web 2.0. Man's best friendster?, Vol 2, No. 4 (January 2007).*
5. *For example, Paolo Cirio's P2P Gift Credit Card, [http://www.paolocirio.net/work/gift-finance/p2p\\_gift\\_credit\\_card.php](http://www.paolocirio.net/work/gift-finance/p2p_gift_credit_card.php) - also see the interview with Tatiana Bazzichelli, Digicult, [http://www.paolocirio.net/press/interview\\_p2p\\_gifts\\_digicult.php](http://www.paolocirio.net/press/interview_p2p_gifts_digicult.php)*

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