THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF POST PREFIXES

Re-examining the symbolic and economic value of the artwork in a post-internet society

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Abstract

Over the past decade, the artworld has seen the emergence of various new art genres such as *post-internet art, post-media art,* and *Internet-aware art* to name a few. What these genres insinuate is an era of transition between us and digital media, between our online sphere and our offline sphere. This development affects all agents of the artworld, namely, the gallery system, the art-market and most importantly, how one measures the symbolic and economic value of the artwork. The Internet has enabled a new platform to democratize the artwork, and similarly a way for artists to take the marketing of their art and their artistic persona into their own hands, boycotting the middle man of the gallery space. As a result, the institutional gallery system has been compelled to restate - and justify its existence. Many artists and scholars have anticipated the downfall of the established gallery space and art-market in a new age, and yet, paradoxically, it seems to be thriving better than ever before.

Through qualitative semi-structured interviews with contemporary artists, this thesis rethinks the impact the Internet has had on artists' practice. It investigates how artists are coping with the terms and limitations of the established art-world whilst having access to the liberating possibilities of the Internet. Former research suggests that this development has enabled the artist to be completely autonomous and work outside of governing insitutions, yet the findings of this thesis refute those truth claims. Even though artists can publish and market their own material on the Internet, it comes with the price of the fabricated cult value surrounding the art-market.

This thesis questions prevailing discourse on the supposed democratizing impact the Internet has had on the art-world. Too much value has been put on the Internet as a source of autonomy, as well as a steering parameter in its relationship to contemporary art. The gallery system still works as the main consecrator of value within an artwork, and because of the easily reproduciblility of the digital image, the need to withhold symbolic value within an object due to its scarcity is more relevant than ever. The rules of art are still in power.

Keywords: *post-internet, art and value, art and the internet, art and media, digital art, time-based art, symbolic alchemy, gallery, art-market, rules of art, media malleability*

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

1.1 The perils of periodization

It happened once again. We have entered yet another 'post'era waiting to be defined by the near future of history. It has been suggested that our relationship with technology has evolved further, which has brought along fresh problems and opportunities to untangle.

According to various scholars within media, art and cultural studies (McHugh, 2011; Groys, 2008; Aranda, Vidokle and Wood, 2015; Vierkant, 2010, Gauntlett, 2011, Archey and Peckham, 2014) we can no longer pretend that our identities are split between the online and the offline, the virtual and the physical, the simulated and the real. It has been depicted as a blur, an overlap of identities, connections and circuits, leaving us perplexed and agog about our place within this system. To periodize this era within our current history has been attempted in the past years which can be seen in the multitude of new genres that have emerged in the discourse around technology and culture. From terms such as *post-digital*, *post-human*, *post-media* and *'within-media'* describing the change in our physical relationship with the Internet and media, to genres that directly concern new art practices such as *post-Internet art* (Olson, 2008; 2013)*, Internet-aware art* (Lonergan, in Beard, 2008)*, New-Aesthetics* (Cloninger, 2012), and *image anarchism* (Troemel, in Kholeif, 2015)*,* to name a few. Moreover, scholars such as Rosalind Krauss (1999) and Lev Manovich (2001) have mentioned the terms *Post-Medium Condition* and *Post-Media Aesthetics* in which Krauss uses her term to describe artworks' rejection of media specificity in a new age, whereas Manovich uses his term as a suggestion to categorize different art practices without focusing on the medium. What all these genres insinuate, is a mutual understanding of how our relationship with technology and art practices has changed rapidly in the beginning of the 21st century.

To facilitate, in this research the focus will be on the discourse surrounding the term *post-Internet,* yet that will be used to describe an *era,* and not a specific genre within the art-world. The reason for this is that whilst many artists and scholars have participated in this discourse, analyzing it as an era of transitions, the genre became associated with a small bubble of artists that, for a short period, were self-claimed post-Internet artists. This research does not focus on them specifically as genres are fickle and transient, and one cannot expect an era to coincide with a genre. Similarly, few artists adhere to the same genre for an extended period of time.

Hence, this research investigates this era from a larger cultural scope, as it is a period that supposedly influenced structures within the whole art-world.

This era anticipated a dissolvement of art media-specificity with the emergence of the Internet, notably as the Internet became such a mundane extention of people's surrounding (Groys, 2008; Manovich, 2001; Krauss, 1999). In the case of media-malleability the idea of an 'original' copy of an artwork dissolves, and with it the supposed value of the unique. As the art-world has always been constructed around this discourse, this awaited transition period is said to have affected all aspects of it, namely, the gallery system, the art market, and the autonomy of the artist. Discourse around multiple authorships, copyright, appropriations and the power of the market arose again, vulnerable to fresh scrutiny in a new milieu. What needs to be revisited are outdated ideas on the relationship between the artist and gallery system, in a media malleable environment, the issue of symbolic and economic value in an era where the artist is supposedly not dependent on the gallery system anylonger, as well as the heavy discourse surrounding the signature of the artist. How does the discourse on contemporary art and technology corrolate with established truths on the structure of the art market, the gallery system and the signature of the artist? These ideas need to be re-examined in a new light to update pre-existing knowledge on the subject that may have been highly simplified.

1.2 Scrutinizing the simplifications

> One of the concerns frequently aroused by periodizing hypothesis is that these tend to obliterate difference, and to project an idea of the historical period as massive homogeneity.
>
> (Jameson, 1984, 55-56)

At first sight, prevailing dialogue on contemporary art's relationship to the Internet seems to reflect generalizations and simplifications in our attempted periodization of the post-Internet era. Thus, this research aims to scrutinize these assumptions, and cast a light on the contradictions that artists approach in their everyday artistic practice. It is important to mention that this research does not attempt to erase these contradictions, rather embrace them by highlighting the different and nuanced viewpoints and opinions of the artists working today.

In an era of circulationism, copy / paste culture and appropriations, the signature of the artists working within a post-Internet era becomes renegotiable, as is the value that is put on the artist as a sole creator. As the gallery system thrives on discourse surrounding the value of the 'unique' and the 'original', the effortless reproducibility of the digital image forces the gallery

to restate itself, as well as the art-world as a whole. This continues the century long hide and seek for the supposed 'aura' of an object, a metaphysical element surrounding and giving value to an artwork. A contested issue is whether losing the aura does not only mean losing symbolic value, but also economic justification in the price of an artwork. Within a post-Internet era, the aura of an original object seems obsolete and prevailing discouse on the subject suggests that we have no need for it anylonger as an alchemist of value; this era practices sacrilege on the fundamental factors that sustain the structures of the art-market.

The objective of this investigation is thus to understand how, or whether, the art-market has needed to adapt to a post-Internet era, and how this supposed change has affected the role and autonomy of contemporary artists working today. By answering the following questions, this research aims to highlight the nuanced relationship between contemporary artists and the market, as well as continuing the ongoing dialogue on the supposed persistence of the aura.

1. What symbolic and economic value can we put on the signature of the artist working within a post-Internet era?
2. How can we better understand the boundaries and limitations in the relationship between the institutionalized art-market, the gallery system and the autonomy of the artist?
3. Can the aura survive as a regulator of symbolic and economic value in a post-Internet era?

The project continues a century old dialogue on the artworld and so it is important that the argument builds on (and questions) a strong substructure of former research and abided truths. Investigating former research sheds light on the contradictions in arguments between artists and scholars, as well as perhaps unrefuted truths about the state of the art-world today.

To be able to question these established truths, it is important to go directly to the source, namely, the artists themselves. This is done by interviewing various artists, and not limit the research to self-claimed post-Internet artists, as mentioned above. Furthermore, by interviewing various artists, it is possible to gather knowledge on how they are trying to adjust to the hierarchial limitations of the art market and the rules of digital society, yet in contrast with the supposed horizontal possibilities of the Internet.

2. New media, new values

To be able to explore the tension between the contemporary artists and the market it is important to situate oneself within history, to further understand the background of this research. To start with, the conflicts surrounding the existence of the aura will be enumerated which will give the substructure for its justification in today's artworld.

Subsequently, the reader will be brought into the present, where this chapter attempts to untangle how former discourse has made its way into contemporary research surrounding the aura as regulator of value. Various new genres have emerged in recent years describing the tension that exists between the easily reproducible image of the Internet and the gallery space. These new genres all share the same suggestion of an era in transition, where the dissolvement between the online and the offline, has been brought into question. The aftermath of said discourse has spread its limbs into different agents that construct the artworld, for example the institutional gallery system, curatorial practice and the art-market. A contested issue is how important these factors are in preserving the aura of artworks, and deciding that which is meant to be seen as art and that which is meant to be taken aside.

Echoing an aforementioned statement, this research will limit itself to the term *post-internet* as a milieu that has been consciously targeting the issues mentioned above, whilst adhering to a great philosophical and historical background. In the following chapter this essay will illustrate more closely on the historical context from which this era has emerged, as well as the recurring tensions scholars and art theorists have contemplated on throughout the 20th century.

2.1 Debating value through history

In his classic essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935) Walter Benjamin identifies a dichotomy that has come to surround the work of art, namely, the subjective divide between cult value and exhibition value. The centrepiece of the essay is his use of the term 'aura', in which he describes the metaphysical elements of an original artwork that do not adhere into its mechanical reproduction. According to Benjamin, the copy can never be equal to the original, as the former lacks the aura of time and space, its historical context and cultural environment. This theory has become increasingly more relevant in the digital age where images, movies and music are circulated and edited on the Internet constantly. Benjamin states that even though reproduction has its benefits, for example by bringing the artwork closer

to the audience or in more quantity, it will be depreciated because of its distance to its original place. 'The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissable from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced' (4). This image fundamentalism takes the stance of the object having more value than the concept. Essence precedes existence.

Ripping an artwork away from its aura by mechanical reproduction is the result of prevailing discourse on the democratization of images, bringing the masses closer to the artwork and the artwork closer to the masses. In this sense, the aura is sacrificed to extend the artwork to everybody, at all times. This tendency has led to an increasing need to create scarcity within an artwork, to keep its original value intact, which one can see a great deal of examples of in our contemporary society. A good example of this is when photographers decide to print a limited number of copies of the prints they sell, marking it with their signature, to raise its symbolic and economic value. Furthermore, Erika Balsom (Kholeif, 2015) mentions that because of the democratization of the image, we have sacrificed authenticity 'in favour of hybridity, reproducibility, and purposeful unoriginality' (67).

In Fredric Jameson's "Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984), the scholar senses a postmodern transformation in the dichotomy between the object and the concept. The physical object, he describes, has become more of a text or 'simulacrum,' i.e., a code or concept to be interpreted by the receiver, as opposed to the object orientation of the hundred year old modernist movement and similarly the end of high-modernist culture. This shift in discourse led the way for what was given the name Postmodernism; describing the effacement of the great dichotomy between high culture and commercial culture. According to Jameson (ibid.), this effacement has forced both agents to restate itself; the high culture which embodies the unique and scarce, versus the commercial, which embodies the reproducible and ubiquitous. One can see obvious examples of this in Andy Warhol's replicable pop-art, and the synthesis between classical- and pop music in works by Terry Riley and Philip Glass, to name a few (Groys, 2008). This liquidity expressed itself in fascination with pop-culture, the 'kitsch', Hollywood movies and advertising. The discourse around postmodernism, Jameson states (1984), was a clear example of earlier sociological generalizations which anticipated the arrival of change in our culture and society. Echoing Marshall McLuhan's earlier words from 1964, 'the personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any extension of ourselves –

result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology' (19).

Appropriately, in 1998, professor Arthur C. Danto declared the end of art history. By that he meant that as everything can be considered a work of art, there is no reason to keep the canon alive. It is a 'declaration of artistic freedom, and hence the impossibility of any further large narrative' (Danto, 1998, 128). According to Danto, the era of periodization was over and the art buffet free for all. However, viewing the storm of genres that have emerged in the past few years, one can see that the artist as well as the art market is still in dire need to identify itself in some way. Later that year, Bourriaud (2010/1998) vastly refuted Danto's statement by explaining that there will never be an end to art history because the rules of the art game are always changing. The past rules may be obsolete, but the new rules bring on a new discourse of art history. The new rules of the avant-garde do not give you permission to do exactly what you want, but force you to not repeat what has been done before. History hovers over you like a drone, whether you want to become periodized or not (Groys, 2008).

In Davis's "The Work of Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction" (1995), the artist and scholar continues Benjamin's former argument sixty-years earlier on the inevitable decay of the aura of an original copy and questions the terms usefulness in an age of digital reproduction. According to Davis, contemporary art has become physically and formally fluid when it comes to discourse around originals and copies and thus constantly changing in form and reception. With postmodernism's method of *deconstruction*, as mentioned by Jameson (1984) above, we were able to break apart elements of artworks and reconstruct them in our own subjective way, continuously creating new meanings and consequently, new artworks, which leaves the original / copy dichotomy under a fresh scrutiny (Davis, 1995).

Furthermore, Davis (ibid.) states that Benjamin (1935) made the error of ignoring all resistance, oppositions and contradictions against mechanical reproduction. Now, almost a century later, there is still undeniable tension between the aura of an original object and the spreadability of its copies. The art market is still well and thriving, the freeports in Geneva and Switzerland are full of 'original' copies and 'authentics' that nobody can see or touch (Heidenreich, 2016a/2016b) and The *Mona Lisa* is still somewhat hidden behind the selfie-sticks of tourists, prepared to capture its aura, and yet images, artworks, films and music are in constant circulation, subject to change by anyone who can get their 'hands' on a copy. Davis' (1995) argument is that the aura is still persisting, surprisingly, yet has been expanded to cover wider

aspects of our cultural life, which at the time the essay was written in 1995, was the dawn of the digital era. He questions what will replace the aura after its anticipated demise; 'Dematerialized idea? Symbol? Presence?'(384). These questions were impossible for him to answer, as he was in the midst of a digital snowstorm, yet one can still see this discourse alive and well in our current cultural environment.

Bourdieu (1996) sees the agents of the artworld as social constructs who sustain the aura by playing the game of belief. This belief creates value around art objects which in return results in higher economic capital. According to Bourdieu, the aura is simply a constructed element fabricated to suit the market. Like money, it is a system that only works when all participants play along. In that sense the aura will always persist as long as the agents pretend it does. However, a lot has changed since he wrote his text in 1996, and with the digitialization of the image and the emergence of file-based art, it has become increasingly harder to locate the aura, leading to the fact that the galleries and institutions have reinstated themselves as the sole carriers of the magic wand of consecration.

These debates demonstrate novel social formations in need of new rules and social, cultural and economical discourses. Postmodernism brought forth revolutionary ideas on value and authenticity, original copies and copies of originals. This chapter will now return to the present and expand on the era of *post-Internet*, situating it within present history and weave through main contradictions and tendancies in contemporary discourse.

2.2 Genre-trouble

For the past five years or so, the term *post-internet* has been on many artists' and curators lips. As mentioned above, this era can be looked at within the wider cultural scope of the post-digital era, where contemporary artists consciously choose to expand on what it means to be an artist in this current milieu. It seems to be quite hard to clearly identify this era, as each and every artist works first and foremost as an individual and has his or her personal way of dealing with it, yet it bows to certain philosophies and aesthetics.

The *post* in Post-Internet has brought up a lot of confusion and even frustration among art theorists, scholars or artists working within contemporary art because of its seemingly obscure definition. Artist and theorist Marisa Olson, noticed, among many others (Olson, 2008; 2013, McHugh, 2008; Steyerl, in Aranda, J., Vidokle, A., and Wood., B. 2015; Vierkant, 2010; Clonginger, 2012; Bewerstorf, 2008; Arcangel, in Cornell, 2006, Price, 2002, Troemel, 2013a)

a transformation in her relationship with the Internet as an artistic medium, which did not fit well with former contemporary theories on Net.art or Internet art theories.

By coining the term Post-Internet, Olson (2008; 2013) wanted to stray away from old discourse around Internet-art or Net.art, i.e., the Internet used as a 'tool', the artists brush, and towards more philosophical approach where the Internet and the art were in constant tension and relation, hence, could not exist without each other (ibid.). Artist Hito Steyerl (in Aranda, J., Vidokle, A., and Wood., B., 2015) even goes so far as to state that the Internet has moved *offline,* articulating that images work as energy sources that can mould our environment, from social to political systems. Its active and alive.

McHugh (2011) mentions that the term can both be defined by its accentuations to the artists' relationship to the Internet, as described by Olson (in Cornell, 2006; Olson, 2008) and artist Guthrie Lonergan (Beard, 2008), but simultaneously as the Internet's emergence into mass and commercial culture, consequently adhering to neoliberalism and easier to be absorbed by the institutionalized art market. From this, one can depict a noticeable tension between various interests, namely, the artist's autonomy and the intent of the institutions and between the avant-garde and the market; a dichotomy that ows its development to the tension between the dichotomy of the object and the concept.

As a matter of fact, many artists and scholars (McHugh, 2011; Droitcour, 2014; Olson, 2008, Vierkant, 2010) do agree that the post-Internet era is obsessed with commercial media. Possibly, as Aranda, Vidokle and Wood (2015) suggest, because advertising, celebrity culture and social media have taken hold of our language and thus change the way we see and interpret the world. This mirrors Jamesons words (1984) on the postmodernist effacement between high-brow and low-brow culture. Similarly, art critic Goldstein (2014) suggests that the Internet has affected the market in a sense that it has changed its hierarchial structure. 'We go from a hierarchial system that is controlled from the top to a system that is more like a beehive'. However, Vierkant (2010) explains that whilst the avant-garde has always managed to situate itself against commercial-media, we have now become both its subjects and producers, or as Gauntlett (2011; 2013) terms it, 'prod-users', or 'pro-sumers', describing a change in how we have become both producers and consumers of our media, creating new ways of distribution and consumption. According to artist Kevin Bewersdorf (2008) the significance of the aura has thus moved from the original object and towards the act of its creative process. It is not *what* was created but *how* it was created, that controls the aura.

2.3. Democratizing the white cube

> Distribution is a circuit of reading, and there is huge potential for subversion when dealing with the institutions that control definitions of cultural meaning.
>
> (Price, 2002)

McHugh (2011) states that the post-internet era bridged the gap between the Internet and the contemporary artworld. Internet art of the late 90s / early 2000s, was for the most part created to stay within that space, to live and die on the 'online'. Working 'on' the Internet created new opportunities in exhibiting artwork, as well as a change in the power structure between the curator and the artist, the institution and the artist's signature. This created complications with documentation, where the 'artwork' was not available in a material form. Subsequently, the rapid obsolescence of their technology became a problem. However, in a post-Internet era, contemporary art is capable of walking out of the screen and into the white cube, resting on a strong philosophical substructure, yet intermingled with craft, something that Internet art was not capable of (Wallace, 2014a).

Artists working within a post-internet era seem to be stepping away from their former generations' fascination with technology and looking at the Internet in relation to a wider cultural sphere, untangling an outdated dichotomy between the online and the offline, object and concept. Instead of looking at the Internet as a tool, it is a limb; instead of being a 'cyberspace', it is a continent. 'The all out Internet condition is not an interface, it is an environment' (Steyerl, in Aranda, J., Vidokle, A., and Wood., B., 2015, pg. 17). Wallace (2014a) mentions that this crossover between online and offline, simulation and reality, is one of the great differences between the post-Internet era and the former generation of Internet art. As a result, the gallery space has found a new purpose, creating new opportunities and problems for exhibiting, representing and marketing contemporary art.

Artist Kevin Bewersdorf (McHugh, 2008) states that the gallery space has become a place of deceit and denial, where the audiences, curators and artists view the artwork but refuse to define it as what it truly is: A product they pretend is not a product, within a corporation they pretend is not a corporation. Additionally, he describes how hard it is for contemporary artists to force their information goods into a material object, just to be able to finance their art. By the same token, art consumers have a hard time accepting non-material art, i.e. where the material

property is of less value than the idea (ibid.). Likewise, Artist Cory Arcangel stresses that the tables have turned and it has become the artist's role to format the artwork to fit the gallery space, and not the curator's responsibility (McHugh, 2011). Art writer and curator, Gene McHugh, doubts however that it can be so simple because not only has contemporary art had to alter and modify itself to fit into the white cube in recent years, but it has also altered the concept of 'art', which has changed curatoral practices. The post-Internet era does not just bend itself to perform as 'art', it also changes the markets conception of 'art'' (13-14).

According to media theorist, Boris Groys (2009), the contemporary avant-garde protest of the institutional gallery space is not about aesthetic democratization, but on the contrary, of stabilizing prevailing aesthetics; to gather what is circling around us, filtering through it and creating symbolic and economic value. In the blinding information storm of the Internet, the gallery space becomes an attempt to stabilize an artwork, to freeze the 'now', so to say, before it is overturned by something newer. Breaking away from the museum is no longer a manumission from commercialization, but the museum, on the contrary, secures the value of one's artwork. The installation *installs* that which usually circulates (the image), and prevents it from being appropriated by commercial mass media and drowning in unfiltered images (ibid., 2009). In this sense, the avant-garde has changed, or maybe neoliberalism just overcame it.

Groys (2008) explains that by freeing oneself from the art market one can stop mirroring art history, in trying to build on top of it or stand against. Without the art market, artists get to step off the giants' shoulders, and build their own ladder. However, this is an endless paradox, he states, because the museums similarly demand that which is 'new', 'alive' and 'real'; terms that are highly subjective, abstract and vague with no fixed meaning. Hence, if one wants to be documented, one needs to do exactly that; try to transcend art history, to hopefully become part of it.

2.4 The artist as the brand, the documentation as the artwork

Contemporary artist and scholar, Artie Vierkant (2016) sees medium malleability as emblematic of the post-Internet era, where the importance of the artwork does not lie in its original copy, but in the various ways it is represented. Out of each representation a new original is created. An object can be represented in a gallery, yet simultaneously on the Internet or as a print publication. These artworks change accordingly with every de-contextualization, creating new versions of themselves, and if the idea thrives, it does not matter where the original is, 'for

objects after the Internet there can be no "original copy"' (5). An example of this is artist Seth Price's (2002/1998) method of creating multiple versions of the same idea using different media, by which he questions the value of the original copy. Similarly, artist Oliver Laric creates artworks that focus on multiple ownerships, showing the viewer the intertextuality of all images, blurring the boundaries between 'real' and 'fake', 'original' and 'copy' (Wallace, 2014b).

When dealing with medium fluidity, the artwork will never become obsolete because it can be recreated with different tools and media without losing its core value, its 'idea'. Instead of viewing the artwork as a singular object dripping of aura, the audience can view it as a set of instructions, ready to be re-assembled anytime, anywhere (Vierkant, 2016). An artwork would thus never become obsolete but instead 'endlessly reproduced after its destruction or decomposition, re-emerging always as both the object itself and a knowing mediated caricature of some past object or idea' (ibid., 9).

By the same token, Vierkant (2010) emphasises that the transformation of artworks from fixed format to fluxed media has surely changed the economic structure of the artworks. As mentioned above, the value of an object is ruled by its scarcity, and if scarcity is not an issue, as with digital images, it is *created,* for examply by only printing ten copies of a photograph or removing an artwork of the Internet. This democratization of the image-object has created a 'perpetual iconoclasm' (ibid.) as Vierkant calls it, where the media are in a constant battle of attention, and each format creating its own aesthetic doctrine to follow. However, Groys (2008) takes on a different turn and highlights that the value of an object is no longer in its scarcity, but in how it represents the constant fluidity of images in our environment. According to Troemel, (in Kholeif, 2015) art after the Internet holds a utopian vision of image anarchism where authorship is synonymous with viewership. It cradles an eager will to strip the image of its property, and 'regard it as a bureaucratically regulated construct' (39). This attitude, he states, is the result of our interaction with a de-authored and decontextualized Internet.

This situation creates problems with authenticity and yet embraces the challenges brought forth by the supposed death of the aura surrounding original copies. This idea can be traced back to Barthes (1977) theory on the 'death of the author' where the author dismisses all rights over the product after it has been 'published', or in this context, showcased. Artists 'by necessity must regard all cultural output as an idea or work in progress able to be taken up and continued by any of its viewers' (7). It is the rule of circulationism (Aranda, J., Vidokle, A., and Wood., B.,

2015). Because traditional values on ownership and authenticity are not in play any longer, artists are using social media to structure their work and create value around it. By that they turn themselves into their own brand (Kholeif, 2015, Bewersdorf, 2008, McHugh, 2011). In this context the artwork loses its significance as 'a simulacrum' and becomes a platform to express the artists' social media presence. According to Heidenreich (2016a/2016b) an original copy of an artwork is still important, but the purpose of its materialization is merely to be expanded onto the swirl of circulation, as public information.

As a result, the discourse on originals and copies seem irrelevant within a post-internet society, where the documentation of the concept has become the artwork itself, and the artist the corporation. It seems that the aura has moved from individual artworks and inside the artists themselves, who then use images found on the Internet, edit them, copy, paste, make collages, transform and finally circulate under a new signature (Groys, 2008). This suggests a paradox, because if the signature loses its value, then the artists' opportunity to 'get their name out there' should be hopeless. For young and emerging artists, entering this flood of information then becomes a race for attention, where attention works as a new currency for value.

The need to build an artistic persona is what artist and scholar Brad Troemel (2013a) has named *aesthletics,* where he describes the hyperproduction of online material, both artworks and social media content, as a form of athleticism. It is a creative act of constantly building up your artistic persona on the Internet.

> The long-derailed notion of the 'masterpiece' has reached its logical antithesis with the *aesthlete:* a cultural producer who trumps craft and contemplative brooding with immediacy and rapid production.
>
> (Troemel, 2013a)

Consequently, the value of an artwork has changed from being appreciated for its timelessness and material specificity, to how well it spreads and how much space it can possibly take up on the Internet in the little time it has before some other information or image throws it off the pedestal. Surprisingly, Troemel (2013a) states that value now emerges in the artworks ubiquity rather than in its scarcity, because there is 'no depletion of aura' (ibid.) as he suggests.

Conversely, film and art theorist Erika Balsom (Kholeif, 2015) notices that ideas on authenticity of original copies are in its renaissance. Authenticity is clearly a subjective ideal, and currently up for harsh debate, yet it has its origins in rigid objects and therefore, from the museum. The

museum still creates the value of authenticity, thus making artists completely dependent on them if they wish to keep the objects' symbolic and economic value intact. It is a contradiction to our cultural surrounding because 'authenticity is by definition anti-technological' (71), and yet we are in the midst of its circuits and circulation. Even though artists are using material media, the Internet is involved with how they choose to document their work and market themselves. This is a nuanced contradiction that artists and scholars are attempting to address.

An empirical example of this is that various established artists have recently written what might be called 'manifestos' of their work; a piece of text used as a guide for their artworks and the ideology they work within. Consequently, this bridges the gap between what it means to be an artist and an art theorist or scholar. According to Foucault (1977) these artists occupy the position of 'initatiors of discursive practices' (132) as they are not merely participating in the current discourse on contemporary art and society, but are important agents in creating new discourse, which brings about new artists and artworks. This position has brought forth problems with authorship as well as the value the signature of the artist withholds. These questions will be revisited in the analysis.

Artist Ian Wallace (2014b) explains that whilst the old modernist manifestos were somewhat prophetical, the contemporary manifestos are defensive, 'more complementary on the contemporary scene than inventive' (ibid.). To name a few, Seth Price's text 'Dispersion' (2002/1998), Hito Steyerl's 'In Defence of the Poor Image' (2009), and Artie Vierkant's 'The Image-Object Post-Internet' (2010) expand their artworks out of the material itself and into a philosophical, cultural and historical contexts, and situate them within a post-Internet era. Likewise, these texts intellectually justify their art practices as well as serving as their self-branding promotional tool. This could explain the multitude of new genres emerging as every new artist becomes a new brand and wants to restate its originality within a new gerne.

2.5 Getting on with the gold-rush

Many art theorists and scholars have been playing hide and seek with the aura through the century, and with every new technological development, the aura has found a way to persist. Benjamin (1935) left a vague taste in the mouth of his readers and so it has been possible to toss and turn the aura to everyone's liking, to keep it alive. As the metaphysical element of value, the aura has worked as the wheelbarrow for the art market, in steering and creating

symbolic and economic capital. Thus, it is of no surprise that the importance of keeping it alive determines the life or death of the institutional gallery system and the art-market.

It is impossible to ignore the fact that the Internet has influenced the art-world, yet recent literature on the post-internet transition illustrate a tendency to generalize. Statements about the Internet as a tool to avoid the paws of the market, and keep one's autonomy as an artist, may have been greatly exaggerated, creating room for further research.

In the recent post-Internet debate, the aura has been severely slandered, with many stating that it is not relevant anymore. Yet, it is apparent that the galleries have in return become more important to the art-world, as gate keepers of file-based artworks which can otherwise be easily reproduced on the Internet. Artworks that used to be created solely on and for the Internet are now emerging in galleries and institutions that have, in return, had to reinvent themselves to be able to accompany alternative media.

The key debates that emerge in the literature illustrate a potential in revisiting and possibly updating acclaimed truths. It is self-evident that the structure of society has changed drastically since Benjamin's theory on the loss of the aura, yet discourse around the aura persists. Similarly, Bourdieu's theory seems to hold water, yet needs to be reconstructed to fit a new era. According to prevailing discourse, the Internet has the potential of giving artists autonomy that was impossible when Bourdieu published his theory, and so the social structures of the market have changed. How and to what extent, needs to be examined further.

3. Exploring the intricate issue of value

How artists measure symbolic and economic value within their own artwork is highly personal and often arbitrary. Thus this research aimed to approach the artists for their own individual art practices, and not as representatives for artists in general. To do this the most sufficient way was to conduct semi-structured qualitative interviews on the artists about their thoughts and emotions about both their art practices as well as their outlook on the art market and their position within it. The research involved 10 artists from a wide range of art practices, age and location. This chapter will thread through the process of data collection and analysis to better understand the reasons for choice of method, the selection of artists and the employment of the interviews.

3.1 Straight to the source

The sampling could be best described as a *snowball sampling* process (Jensen, 2002, 239) as the artists often generated further contacts. This approach both had its pros and cons. On the one hand, it made it easier to get in contact with artists that would otherwise have been impossible, as well as it created trust between the researcher and the artist if the former came recommended. On the other hand, this led to the fact that the scope of the artists was limited to a certain group or 'scene'. Yet, that did not happen to the extent as anticipated, but should be recognized. Furthermore, this does not mean that the selection of artists was made by other artists as the researcher got familiar with the artists' material before contacting them.

Some problems emerged in the beginning when it came to approaching the artists. Either their contact information was not available (especially the more established ones), and in some cases they did not respond. When the artists replied it was sometimes difficult to arrange an appointment, especially if the artists were located abroad. Because of this the research does not include pilot interviews. Likewise, due to the interviews' personal nature, the interview guide was restructured for each and every artist, as mentioned above, and so piloting the interviews would not have helped as much as if the interview guide needed to be structured to get the most out of the research.

In deciding the number of interviews to conduct, the research aimed at continuous sampling until no more meaning could be found (Edwards and Holland, 2013). This turned out to be the

case, because even though each artist responded from their individual experiences, the dilemmas that they encountered showed similar patterns. Furthermore, because of the length and success of the interviews, the 10 interviews produced immensely rich data and benefitted the research to a great extent.

After gathering the names, the artists' material was researched, so to become conversant with their art practices. The research did not restrict itself to self-claimed post-Internet artists, as that would not have painted a clear picture of the state of the art-world in its entirety. Many artists also work quite media-malleably, between digital media and rigid-objects, so it was important to investigate how these differences in formats played a role in their experiences on value. To facilitate, this research classifies post-Internet as an *era*, and not a genre, as it has been claimed that this period distinguished itself as a transition era that affected all agents of the art-world. Genres change and evolve on a vast pace because of the art-world's cult of originality, and so it would not have been a beneficial parameter for this research to isolate post-Internet artists specifically.

Similarly, the researcher did not feel comfortable in classifying the artists' work into genres, as the aim of the research was to delve into their own personal ideas and opinions about their practice. By familiarizing myself with their art practices, the interview could revolve around selections from their artworks or past exhibitions. So in a sense, each interview was personalised to each artist, to enable a deeper reflection and avoid superficial questions.

The demograph of the artists was not limited by age because the research wanted to include both younger artists that grew up with the Internet as well as artists that started using it on their later years. Gender was also left open as that was not a parameter in the research. The research however tried to include artists from different backgrounds and social structures and thus the gender-balance was 4 men to 6 women.

The research attempted to further understand the idea of value in relation to the art market, and so it was important that the artists varied between being established and emerging. Those who are more established have a closer connection with the art market and have had more opportunities to reflect on it while the emerging artists still had not entered the art market in the same way and thus could possibly give a different mindset. This turned out to be the case. It was obviously not clear cut as to who were established and who were emerging, as it overlapped in many areas, yet it ranged from fine-art university students who have showcased their

artworks online or in small galleries to artists that have been working in the field for many years and have built a closer connection with collectors or the more institutional museums.

Importantly, some of the artists were also working, or had been working in the past, as curators and thus had a better way of understanding how the institutional market worked, both in its symbolic and economic consecrational influences. This gave a perspective that would have been lost if only one side had been interrogated. Bourdieu (1996, 216) mentions that these positions have completely different roles, yet equally important, that build the complex web of the artworld. 'They must [...] combine completely contradictory dispositions: economic dispositions which, in certain sectors of the field, are totally foreign to producers, and intellectual dispositions near to those of the producers whose work they can exploit only in so far as they know how to appreciate it and give it value.'

It was not necessary to limit the sample to a specific geographic location, as the Internet is a global phenomenon and is a big part in steering value, as well as trends within the art industry. Similarly, it was important for the research to not limit itself to a certain country or place because the art market works differently in each country. For example the rules of art in Scandinava and in the USA seem to differ drastically. The reason for this is because the former is more active in giving out grants for various art practices, and education is available to all unrelated to their financial income, whilst within the latter, grants are not as available for emerging artists and the universities demand high fees. This creates obvious differences in the power the art market has and the influences it leaves on the artists.

3.2 From the artist's perspective

When interviewing the artists it was necessary to beome familiarized with their art practices, past exhibitions, websites, portfolios and / or written texts. Without that the questions would have become superficial and the knowledge produced not as meaningful. According to Edwards and Holland (2013) this is also an important factor in balancing the power dynamic between the artist and the researcher when conducting an elite interview.

Each interview ranged from 60 – 90 minutes and was recorded to give a more detailed verbal record, as well as enabling the researcher to listen to it repeatedly afterwards and further engage in the conversation via eye contact (Rapley, 2010/2004). Rapley (ibid.) similarly mentions that using a tape recorder might influence the interviewees respones, as they can feel put 'on the spot', and so in the beginning the researcher asked every artist whether they felt comfortable

with being recorded, which they all admitted to. All of the interviews were then transcribed to make it easier to read over and eventually code the artists' responses. The interviews were semi-structured qualitative interviews as mentioned before, and even though the researcher used a thematic interview guide, its aim was to enable interpretation and improvisation between the artists and the researcher. The interviews thus turned into reflective conversations, as the researcher wanted the artists to feel unafraid to discuss their feelings and emotions towards the topics discussed.

Two of the artists were Icelandic, so the interviews were conducted in Icelandic and subsequently translated by the author into English, (see Appendix B for comparison). The other interviews were conducted in English, two of them with native speakers from USA, one from Norway, one from Sweden and four from Denmark. What needs to be taken into account is the language barrier between the researcher and the Scandinavian artists, as none of them are native-English speakers, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Six of the interviews were conducted through skype, as the artists lived elsewhere, but the Copenhagen based artists were interviewed in person. For the artists that live in Copenhagen, the interview was conducted at a location of their choice, as the aim was to make them feel comfortable and familiar in their surrounding, following Rapley's (2010/2004) suggestion that the location can affect the interview great deal. That way they could decide whether they wanted to do it in a private space (for example their studio) or a public space.

3.3 Delving into the details

3.3.1 Approaching the data

All of the interviews were transcribed and notes taken if any similarities or contradictions emerged, in relation to other interviews. Only verbal responses were transcribed and no contextual instances marked. The transcripts showed to be vital to be able to revisit each interview, re-read and scrutinize digitally. The transcripts were revised constantly, line by line, through the process of coding as to be sure of leaving nothing out or misinterpreting an answer.

After revising the transcripts, a couple of themes started to emerge. These themes were then used to code their answers into a grid created digitally (see Appendix A). Each theme was first color coded, which made it easier to put into the coding grid. When the artists' responses had

been divided up into themes, a clearer picture of the topic emerged and made the data more accessible to the researcher, as well as easier to analyse. As the interviews were quite long, the transcripts spanned many pages, and so thematically coding the answers reduced the volume of the content and structured it in a way easier to analyse (Seale, 1998).

The approach was deductive in a sense that through the reading of former research on contemporary art, certain themes emerged, knowledge gaps and contradictions that needed to be addressed. From past reading on the topic it became clear that the issue of value, the influence of the art market and the gallery institution were themes that needed to be explored further. The purpose was to 'update or expand on existing finding' (Seale, 1998, 368). However, new themes also emerged *through* the empirical data which were not dismissed, in an inductive manner. This was necessary as the artists' lived experiences differed and it was important to be flexible to find out what was most important to them within the topics discussed. Hence, the researcher had read substantially on contemporary art, as disclosed in the literature review, which influenced broad questions on the art market and the institutional art world, yet the research questions were kept wide and then narrowed down through the empirical material gathered from the interviews (ibid.).

By taking on a constructionist approach, the data gathered from the interviews is not seen as a 'true' reality happening objectively outside the interview but a jointly constructed new knowledge on the topic between the artists and the researcher. Both agents are producing themselves and their identities *through* the interview, and so the subjective nature of the interview should not be dismissed but embraced (Rapley, 2004/2010). This interaction should enable subectivity to get deeper reflections from the artists' experience and identity (Atkinson and Delmont, 2011). The researcher tried to be aware of her own biases and subjectivity, which cannot be escaped, so as not to produce leading questions or influencing their answers in any way. Yet, as the interviews were active conversations between two people, pretending to be neutral would be unsincere and hard to justify (Rapley, 2010/2004).

3.3.2 Building the bedrock

This research critically analysed the interview data through various theoretical perspectives. Great influence was taken from Bourdieu's theory on the rules of art (1996), in which he formulates an argument for the intermingled, and often ambiguous, structures that exist within the artworld, as well as how these structures work as main agents in steering discourse around

value. Similarly, Jameson (1984) generated a postmodern approach on this research to enable further understanding on the power structures between the artist and the market, in relation to the rise of aesthetic populism, which one can see clear examples of in digital society. Furthermore, Barthes eradication of the author (1977), as well as Foucault's (1977) resuscitation of him/her, brought forth an interesting dialogue about the signature of the artist and the value it produces. Additionally, media scholar Boris Groys (2008), and his theory on the power and purpose of the art market in a digital society, will help understand the power structures contemporary artists are situated within. Lastly, Benjamin's theory (1935) on the aura of an original object, threads through this research, where its historical background and future prospects help question and possibly justify its persistence.

3.4 Challenges and considerations

The character of the method raised some obvious epistemological questions. How can we possibly fathom the immense world of contemporary art, and if we get a taste of it, is there any way of using that sample to generalize about the rest of the case? (Seale, 1998) The transfer from meaning to action differs between every artist, which is what this research wishes to emphasise, yet one can ask whether these dilemmas would vary with each sample. The problems the artists embraced can be seen as characteristic of the art world today and so the sample, although different in individual responses, highlight the general quandaries that artists working within a digital society embark on from day to day. The clash between artistic – and economic value would persist no matter the sample.

As the topic was quite personal, the artists were perhaps not used to discussing their artworks in English, though completely fluent in the language. To avoid any misinterpretation or understanding, the interviews were kept quite long and the artists given time to reflect and get back to their answers. As the interviews were semi-structured, the question guide was present, yet was leanient towards improvisation. The artists varied in interests and knowledge and so if an artist was more engaged in one of the topics discussed, extra time was reserved to that. This enabled the artists to stay interested and reflect on the topics discussed in relation to their *own* art practices, instead of generalizing about other artists in the field. However, it was important that the interview always returned to the research questions as to not get distracted, to stay on topic.

It is important to understand that the purpose of the research was not to reach an ultimate truth about the state of value within contemporary art, but to gain knowledge about the state of value as it is today, and whether the rules of art have changed as expected from former research. Truth is always provisional. Consequently, the research did not approach the artists' responses as truths or falsehoods, but as constructions of their identities and 'representations of meaning' (Jensen, 2002, 240), which can nevertheless give temporary hypotheses on the state of the artworld as it is today. Inescapably, the researcher could have affected the artists' responses by the mere fact of gender, age or social setting, and so the interview became an interplay in constructing meaning between the researcher and the artists (Edwards and Holland, 2013).

3.5 Establishing an ethical conduct

At the start of every interview the researcher disclosed the research project thoroughly to the artists, so as to situate them loosely within the topic and make them more confident in what they were about to discuss. Consequently, the artists were made aware of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time as well as speaking under a different name. However, all of the artists were willing for their identities to be published and so they appear under their own names. Similarly, they were informed that the transcripts would be kept in a secure location and not shared with anyone before the publication of the thesis.

In conducting the interviews, the researcher was in the position of an *interprative subject* (Jensen, 2002, 236) Thus, the researcher was aware of the fact that the data analysis could never be completely unbiased as it would always reflect past experiences and social setting. Thus, it was important to make the process of the interviews as transparent as possible (Edwards and Holland, 2013). After recording the interviews, the transcribed text was sent to the artists so they could verify it, as well as the direct quotes that would be included in the final draft. The Icelandic artists also received both translations of the quotes to confirm its fairness. Following Edwards and Holland (2013) it was important that the researcher worked under complete beneficence and showed great respect to the artists' autonomy when involving them in the research.

4. The Work of Art in the Age of Post Prefixes

This chapter analyses the contradictions in the informants responses, focusing on the highly nuanced tension between economic and artistic value, within the contemporary art scene. Their responses represent obvious dichotomies on discourses surrounding the relationship between contemporary art and Internet culture. This issue is important to analyse further as it seems that the current discourse on the relationship between contemporary art and the Internet is too simplified and more contradictory than first appears. This simplification can create a naive view on this incredibly intricate era, not giving the various voices justice.

As the Internet has cohered to a discourse of democratization and an alternative to a political art market, it is important to understand how contemporary artists situate themselves and their practice within that supposedly emancipatory structure. How artists value their artwork symbolically and economically in a digital society, the challenges that are brought with a new medium, their relationship with the institutional gallery and the competetive art market, are questions that need to be asked in order to gather deeper knowledge on the state of the artworld today.

4.1 Rigid objects - mediated concepts: The issue of media malleability

The issue of value has always been present in the discourse around contemporary art, and has been closely situated around the idea of an 'original' object or the value of the 'unique'. The media has had great importance in describing the artists' practice (painter, sculpturer, installation artist), which keeps the idea of the value of a 'rigid object' alive, as well as the importance of the gallery space to showcase it. In the late 1960s, artists like Sol LeWitt and Joseph Kosuth, began to question the value of an 'original' object, using appropriations (inspired from Duchamp), recipes for artworks that could be recreated and mixed media arts, using the same idea for different materials (Groys, 2008). For these early conceptualists, it was the idea that mattered, whether it was they or someone else who created it, or whether the idea was materialized at all.

> When you think about Sol Le Witt's wall drawing, that's just a set of instructions, well that's no different from the code base that underlies all software based artworks.
>
> (Kelani Nichole, 2017)

This debate is thus definitely not untrodden, yet is still filled with simplifications and contradictions that need to be addressed. The discourse of media-malleability has been too theorietically based, without researching the artists actual intent and opinions on the subject.

4.1.1 Situating value within an unstable medium

With the emergence of the Internet for common use, art emerged on people's computer screens and smartphones, which enabled audiences to browse artworks, (or documentations of artworks) without visiting the gallery or being in direct meeting with the works. This situation brings to question the purspose of the gallery space as consecrator of art and the importance of an original 'physical' object.

An obvious contradiction emerged in the artists' answers that mirror the conflicts stated above, in the divide between the importance of an 'object' versus the 'concept.' This is not to say that object-orientation does not have conceptual ideas behind it, 'of course there are ideas in the work but there are ideas in everything' (Torben Ribe, 2017). Yet, this continues the century old dialogue of whether it is the idea of an artwork that deserves most of the attention or the material object, the offspring, so to say, of the artists intent. This is important because the aura has been hiding behind the idea of the original object, which has a hard time being transferred over to a digital society. Artists Joe McKay and Sæmundur Þór Helgason suggest that there is definitely still a sense of the aura within an original object in a museum, but when you are not working within an object oriented medium, it is silly to even bring it up. According to them, the aura has not been translated over to digital media, contradicting Davis' (1995) former statement on the aura.

> It's hard, the problem is that I wonder what a copy now, if it's digital it's the same, it used to be a copy, and the degradation made the original more valuable but now you can make a one to one copy, the original doesn't have the same sort of intrinsic value anymore. But I don't know, from my perspective that's kind of a good thing, I think it's healthy, they make some more interesting art from more perspectives.
>
> (Joe McKay, 2017)

> It's different because it doesn't have the unique quality of an object, a video is not unique somehow, because it can exist like in million copies without losing anything of itself […]. I guess a thing being digital makes it somehow into a *mass,* the amount of it is unlimited and that makes it a little bit difficult for people to know how to get around this, if you buy this how is it then yours?
>
> (Anna Vibe, 2017)

The discourse around media-malleability has led to the fact that one can no longer classify artworks by their medium, which entails obvious complications. A genre evokes with it a 'mark of distinction' or an idea of 'originality'. For artists there is the pressure of creating something 'original' and 'new', to raise its symbolic value. 'They fulfil the function of signs of recognition distinguishing galleries, groups and painters' (Bourdieu, 1996, 157).

One sees this pattern repeat itself in our current cultural environment with the emergence of the many genres referring to a similar understanding of a transformation in the art world, i.e. the emergence of net-nativity into the art discourse. Drifting from the former media-focused generation of computer art, (which defined the artwork by its technological medium), in recent years the discourse has been more vague and medium-malleable. This obviously creates a lot of confusion between the distinction of genres as well as recurring overlap.

> I think that calling anything digital is sort of like ghettoizing it, because it is referring to it as a medium as opposed to just speaking of it as contemporary art.
>
> (Kelani Nichole, 2017)

Kelani Nichole, curator of Transfer gallery in New York, prefers to use the term *time-based media*, over contemporary digital-art, when describing the artworks she curates, which are mainly screen-based artworks, yet with the possibility of an extension into physical space. It is a media that is 'constantly evolving in order for it to exist through time, accentuate it, update it and act it out' (Nichole, 2017). In a society completely dissolved of the boundaries between the online and the offline, our physical realities and the Internet, referencing to an artwork based on its digital medium thus seems outdated and limiting. Time-based media covers different aspects of contemporary art that share certain elements such as indicating that something is *evolving,* 'the nature of the work itself that is being acted and updated and constantly engaged' (Nichole, 2017), connoting to the constant obsolescence of contemporary artworks. This is one attempt at finding an applicable term to this seemingly transformation era of media, where the media does not matter for the content, and the content does not matter for the media. 'The distinction between digital art and just contemporary practice, I think its fully dissolved' Nichole mentions.

> [It's]sort of acknowledging that there was a tipping point there, after the .com crash, sort of realizing that there was […] a turn in the trend of how art and the Internet could kind of work together.
>
> (Joe McKay, 2017)

However, the dichotomy between rigid object orientation and mediated concept orientation, does not seem to be dissolving without resistance. As seen from the artists' responses, the medium is still very relevant, even though it has been under scrutiny for the past decades.

> Everything is just so incredibly complicated, that's maybe the problem. Also, when you think about art history then there are periods in history where everything has been completely periodized; what the idea was, what the medium was, what the purpose of the painting was, but now there is so much different stuff going on that it's incredibly hard to say something like this, everybody isn't thinking the same, everybody is so individually driven.[1]
>
> (Hrafnhildur Helgadóttir, 2017)

According to Groys (2008), contemporary artists have turned their attention towards themselves, engaging in their own political, cultural and social realities. As Internet use is for the most part a private experience, art practices also become increasingly more solitary and less homogenous. Yet, this makes the artist into the commodity instead of the artworks. In a post-Internet society the tension between an original object and an original idea has been tossed and turned, yet it looks like it is not about to be dissolved. Quite the contrary, artist Torben Ribe suggests that because of how fluid media-use has become, it is increasingly more important for the individual media to justify itself and its existence.

> The good thing about the spreading of the Internet is you get more focused on the different realities between the media, you have to really think about why should I make a book when it's so easy to spread your images? And you get more concerned about what makes a book a book, and why do I make- and why do I read it.
>
> (Torben Ribe, 2017)

He stated that he could understand why medium specificity would be unimportant today, in *theory,* but not in practice, '[rigid objects] just exist in different ways, and people look at a painting in a different way they look at a book, and judge it in a different way.' Furthermore, artist Tiril Hasselknippe creates very big and heavy sculptured objects which she states carry with it strong ideological influences, and so the material becomes very important to her as it changes the way the audience feels when experiencing it.

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[1] Translated from Icelandic by author. See Appendix B, note 1.

Concrete as a material has a long traditional use, our community has a sort of response to it and that's important […] People that don't know my process that well think that I start with material and then formulate it from that but it actually goes in the opposite direction.

(Tiril Hasselknippe, 2017)

Torben Ribe explains how these connotations bring both limitations and opportunities to each medium, for example he mentions that his paintings might disappoint some people because of how far he strays away from the historical background of the painting medium that carries very 'classical' expectations. He mixes painting with other media such as brochure advertisements, plastic and real food, and various objects he places onto or in front of the painting such as plants or ironing boards. Similarly, artist Anna Vibe says she is very malleable in her media use yet consciously tries to stay away from painting because of the historically rich connotations the form carries. 'In my work I'm not so much embracing traditional media, I try to escape this cause I don't want […] people to look at it and think about a lot of other works being done' (Anna Vibe, 2017).

Each medium carries with it a heavy historical and discursive baggage that is hard to avoid. Thus, it becomes important what media artists choose to use, as well as whether they choose to adhere to one medium specifically. According to Groys (2008) the avant-garde has tried to bypass medium-specificity by straying away from the museums. To break away from the museums is also to break away from history, but the museums do not show what should be done, but what has been done, and should not be repeated.

This becomes especially important when one discusses digital media, as the discourse around media such as photography, video art, and Internet art has been transformed so not to devalue the artworks made. Fredrik Jameson (1984) mentions that with postmodernism the divide between 'high' culture and mass culture was effaced. Before that, as Manovich (2001) mentions, the categorization between artworks was very clear, as one could arrange them by their physical media. This made the division between art-culture and mass-culture obvious, as the art world focused on the scarcity and value of unique objects, available to few, whilst mass-culture was made to be easily reproduced and distributed. However, with the emergence of video art, digital art and net art, the artists appropriated the media formerly designated for mass-culture, creating new contradictions in the economic and symbolic value of 'original' objects.

One could no longer assign value to an artwork solely based on its scarcity, and so it had to be fabricated to keep its artistic value intact. Hence, the difference between television material and video art, or painting and a photograph, has become sociological rather than merely physical. As Bourdieu mentions (1996, 162) 'this structure, which is present in all artistic genres, and has been for a long time, tends to function today as a *mental*[2] structure, organizing the production and perception of products.' Similarly, Brad Troemel (2013b) states that art-culture has appropriated mass produced good, which is socially acceptable as long as the artworks are not mass produced, but kept valuable. It is the sociological value, the symbolic alchemy, that keeps them valuable, not the medium.

4.1.2 'We will always have bodies'[3]
Rethinking the online / offline dichotomy

The post-internet era was a period of transitions where artists were allegedly rethinking the relationship between their physical bodies and the mediated space of codes. Within this era, the museum space became increasingly more important in showcasing digitalized artworks, that often extended from the screen and into a physical space. Because of this, it is apparent that physical space is important to both artists and audiences in experiencing the world, and so stating that this dichotomy is completely dissolved might be an exaggeration.

> I think those encounters with embodiment and with space, are definitely becoming more and more prevalent in the way we think about surface, and screens and displays and the dissolving between this 'rigid' object of a computer and just like this kind of general space and environment.
>
> <div align="right">(Kelani Nichole, 2017)</div>

Nichole mentions that in the past five years she has been running Transfer gallery, she has seen a development in our interaction with non-rigid objects, as well as how the galleries have become more malleable towards time-based art. To her, the body plays a big role, and our awareness of our body within a physical space, 'the rigid objects are a way for a lot of artists to explore what happens when a work moves away from the screen' (Kelani Nichole, 2017).

Emerging artist, Ida Brockmann, concurs to her opinion, because, whilst she states that she refrains from painting and photography, she likes to use media that one can touch or feel

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[2] Emphasis added by author
[3] Kelani Nichole, 2017

physically. 'You can interact more with it or consider it because you meet it in another way'. Similarly, Anna Vibe mentions that she has a hard time materializing her conceptual ideas, but she would never *not* want to materialize them because if you have an object, a *thing,* as she mentions, you can start a physical dialogue with other people through other senses, 'because I think a lot about […] how things are bodies […] and how you can somehow communicate with the things like this' (Anna Vibe, 2017). Similarly, Bourdieu (1996, 170) mentions that 'the irreducibility of the work of symbolic production to the act of material fabrication performed by the artist has undoubtedly never been as visible as it is today.' In a post-Internet era, this statement stands unrefuted. Furthermore, Nichole is in disbelief that rigid objects will ever stop being important to us, because it affects our physical bodies in different ways such as with smell, taste and touch, 'I think that distinction will always exist'.

> It would seem like you don't need a gallery anymore because you have the Internet, so you can just be your own gallerist in a way, but then again the galleries are really pushed to think about what they should do and why they should exist, so they probably want to be better, they want to justify themselves, so hopefully it's just to sharpen the areas, that there is a kind of competition but in a positive way.
>
> (Torben Ribe, 2017)

This contradicts the popular discourse around the online / offline effacement in a post-Internet world. Groys (2008) mentions that because we can no longer discern an original from a copy, we cannot distinguish between that which is artificial and that which is natural. This difference is created by the participants around the art market, because if a physical aspect can be reproduced without notice, then it loses its aura, unless the aura is fabricated to withhold its symbolic capital.

> Material objects and incorporeal objects – it's very difficult, the material is such a physical matter, when you have a computer and all the data is stored in data bases all around the world that uses incredible amount of electricity, this incorporeal world is very material.[4]
>
> (Hrafnhildur Helgadóttir, 2017)

The post-internet era was surely a period of transition, where we were reexamining the relationship between ourselves and the Internet, between us as individuals and as a collective,

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[4] Translated from Icelandic by the author. See Appendix B, note 2.

as bodies or machines. As with media, our bodies seem to have become more important to us than ever. Yet, as artist Hrafnhildur Helgadóttir mentions above, the overlap between what is material and immaterial is blurry and sometimes arbitrary. The emergence of digital art into the gallery space can thus not solely be explained by the structure and demands of the art market, but also the artists' need to communicate their work physically to the audiences.

4.2 What do we talk about when we talk about value?

4.2.1 The circle of belief

> Oh, so should an artist always struggle?
> (Kelani Nichole, 2017)

Because of the increasing demand of the 'open access' of artworks, the artists have had to find new ways of financing their art-practices. This is done by various ways and differs between whether the artists are established or not, working with digital media or rigid objects. After Web 2.0, artists have taken the branding of their products in their own hands, leading to a competition of self-branding. As mentioned above, it is becoming increasingly more common for audiences to experience artworks through their smartphones or personal computers, whether it be art created on (and for) the Internet, or a documentation of a past rigid object. This makes it even harder for artists to survive on their artworks alone when people are not ready to pay money for reproducable works online, nor can afford high price gallery works. Simultaneously, the market does not seem attractive to contemporary artists.

> When you get priced really high, then you are excluding the most general art buyer.
> (Tiril Hasselknippe, 2017)

> I just won't participate in that conversation because I don't see a good point in terms of my creativity into that, you know, it's not who I really want to have a dialogue with. I am not interested in trying to reach out to the 1% who got an endless disposable income to buy you know the successful works, its uh, it is a tough one.
> (Joe McKay, 2017)

> That's a business too you know, and maybe that is a world you want to be in, and maybe you have to like, succumb, to accept, [if] you want to come to that level of art.
> (Adam Varab, 2017)

It is obvious that the vague and highly subjective idea of value is something that the artists think a lot about, especially when there is money involved. All the artists interviewed stated that their art was not money driven and that they had a hard time economically pricing their art. They admitted that it was hard to live off being an artist alone, and in some cases, such as with Joe McKay and Sæmundur Þór Helgason, they did not expect any financial income at all, even though they are quite established.

When the artists were asked how they economically valued their art, the responses were quite similar yet aligned themselves onto two poles: On the one hand, the artists that produced mainly rigid objects had an easier way of pricing their artwork, such as by accounting for the expenses of the material used and the physical hours that went into producing the artwork. One the other hand, the more conceptual based artists had a harder time justifying the price based on the material used and the time that went into physically producing the artwork, and so in return the emphasis on symbolic alchemy became more important.

However, even with rigid-objects, giving artworks economic value becomes very nuanced. As Anna Vibe states, 'then there's the little bit vague thing of how much it means to me.' It's what Bourdieu refers to as *symbolic alchemy* (1996, 147). Because of how incredibly ambiguous the universe of art is, emerging artists without any financial assets can still affect the market by asserting how much symbolic value their work produces (ibid., 149).

Emerging artist, Adam Varab mentions that one should not even think about money when creating art, because, as he states, you do not become an artist if you want to have a stable living, 'there is no stability at all unless you brand yourself, unless you try something that works, and that is for me where it dies, where the idea dies.' For him, being an artist is not a career, it is a symbolic attribute.

> I think that artists have to accept that there isn't a one way to be an artist. I can be a cleaning lady until I'm fucking thirty if I have to, and that's a way of being an artist […]. In my mind, an artist has a real idea of what an artist is that in my mind you can't pinpoint as a career, it's a journey.
>
> (Adam Varab, 2017)

He does not mind having to have a day job whilst doing his art-practices if he must. Similarly, he mentions that in a perfect world he would give out the artwork for free, as he does not like

selling his work for money, but when he is doing projects for others, he economically values them quite practically based on time and material spent.

However, artists Rebecka Stone and Anna Vibe are very clear that they think of their artwork as a career. Rebecka Stone mentions that she would like to be able to create something that she could sell, like prints or publish a book, because she has a hard time imagining someone buying her installations and more conceptual work. She found it hard to economically value her art as she wishes to reach a wide audience yet does not want to undermine her artwork as well as the whole art field. By keeping the price low at first, she reaches more people and gets a wider audience but she says that it is important to 'respect your colleagues' she states, 'because if I sell my artwork for nothing, that means that people think that you can buy art for nothing. It undermines my whole field.' This is apparently a problem, as Ida Brockmann states, that 'the artist's work isn't […] paid and everybody wants to do that stuff so they work for free and if I say, 'no I need to get paid' then they will always get someone else.'

Nonetheless, Anna Vibe does not necessarily want her art to reach to as many people as possible, because as she states, 'I mean, it's nice that it's accessible but you don't do like free law just because you think law is a good thing and everyone should have the rights for a lawyer, you don't do it for free […] it's not that you don't wish everybody to have a lawyer, and you want everybody to be able to buy your work.'

Yet, all the screen-based artists Nichole works with at Transfer gallery are on the opinion that a work should have open access for all. However, this does not mean that everybody can 'own' the artwork. With file-based art, even though an artwork is available for everybody to view, only a couple of people can *own* it and the rights to it. In that sense, it is no different than buying a rigid object.

> I don't like to inforce scarcity of works in that way. I think that works should be free and should be on the web and out there, especially works that need the formats, like animated Gifs, it's absurd to think about restricting access.
>
> (Kelani Nichole, 2017)

This puts the symbolic value of the artwork under obvious scrutiny, because even though, it is for example an edition of three, there is not so much material difference in the file that the buyer *owns* and the file that the audience sees on their home computer or smartphones, apart from perhaps better quality in some cases. The artist needs to make a promise to sell limited editions

of the artwork to not affect its value. It is a game played between the artists and the collectors, pretending that there exists only a certain amount of copies for sale. This ensures its value, but it is clear to everyone that this value is fabricated and not *real,* at least not in the sense that Benjamin (1935) put forward with his theory of the aura.

> Then you […] create the illusion of the unique somehow, like you promise that there will be only ten and then you have more of an idea what you get, you get one of ten, when you get a copy of a video, what is it then? […] It's just a copy for you, but how is it yours? But if you get that thing that is signed, you have like two out of 10, then you have it and no one else has it somehow, it's like unique value, the value of the unique.
>
> (Anna Vibe, 2017)

Groys (2008) mentions that the digitalization of the image has created the illusion that the difference between originals and copies is dissolved, yet that is also a fabrication, because 'there can be no copies without an original' (91). In that sense, the only difference between the original and a copy of a digital image is that it is impossible to view the original source as it is simply just a file. The original *is* there but it is of no use to us under a veil of codes.

With digitalized images the value lies in the fact that it is open access, and so restricting access to it seems destructive. Nichole states that this factor is something that collectors and institutions must consider when they are buying digital artworks. Restricting access to the artwork would be limiting to its potential and original purpose, thus devaluing the work once again. Troemel (2013a) similarly mentions that in a post-internet society the value lies in the artwork being ubiquitous, but not in its scarcity. This transformation is due to the fact that the cost of reproducing copies of digital images is none, and the magnitude of aura can never be drained.

Various scholars and contemporary artists have suggested that the value of an artwork, the aura, does not lie in its scarcity any longer, because of the vast circulation of images on the Internet. Audiences view artworks and documentations of artworks mainly online, and thus declaring that its value lies within its scarcity, its original place or 'file', seems outdated. However, deriving from the artists' responses, the rules of the art-world have not changed as much as has been suggested. The symbolic and economic value of an artwork still lies in its scarcity. With digital images, as with photographs, video art and documentation of installations, the fabrication of scarcity has become ever clearer, yet has not changed the rules of the game. The

rules have simply needed to be restated and emphasized; its veils of seduction covered even tighter.

4.2.2   Making a virtue out of necessity

> What is market driven is rarely interesting.[5]
>
> (Hrafnhildur Helgadóttir, 2017)

Obvious contradictions emerged in the artists' answers when it came to the market. Either the artists opposed to it all together, i.e. did not want anything to do with it, so as to keep their autonomy, or they saw it as a necessary part of being an artist in this society. What is noticable is that the more experienced and established artists, such as Tiril Hasselknippe, Joe McKay, Kelani Nichole, Torben Ribe, Sæmundur Þór Helgason and Hrafnhildur Helgadóttir, were more aware of the power of the market, admitted and accepted it, and could thus approach it in a different way, whilst the emerging artists, such as Adam Varab, Rebecka Stone, Anna Vibe and Ida Brockmann, found it more important to stand against it.

> I think that as soon as you go into relation with the galleries there is a kind of hierarchy, like you are the artist and that person has the money basically. And I have only been in that situation a few times but I am kind of a little bit disturbed by it, it is something about my artist nature that makes me like, it turns me a bit more into a teenager or a rebel, I kind of, I want to break the rules!
>
> (Rebecka Stone, 2017)

> [When] I've been invited to do a show at a promotional gallery I'm gonna make something really really impossible to sell, and I think that gives me a disadvantage in many ways and gives me advantage in other ways.
>
> (Tiril Hasselknippe, 2017)

The more experienced artists could work as art teachers on the side, so they did not feel the intense need to sell their artworks, which, they said, gave them more artistic freedom. The free labour of their art-practices in return gave them the opportunity to work within the field of their choice as teachers, guest-lecturers or take part in paid panel discussions.

> We get paid to take part in symposia and stuff like that. It is online work that you get reputation for and so you are invited to take part in symposia.[6]
>
> (Hrafnhildur Helgadóttir, 2017)

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[5] Translated from Icelandic by the author: See Appendix B, note 3.

[6] Translated from Icelandic by the author. See Appendix B, note 4.

> You get publicity, you get to get to that next level so that is like sort of, it doesn't necessarily translate into money, but it does translate into other benefits that can lead to money.
>
> (Tiril Hasselknippe, 2017)

The discourse around the ambiguity of symbolic and economic value becomes apparent in the works of many of the artists. For example, Sæmundur Þór Helgason, a conceptual artist, does artworks that are in contstant dialogue with the market, using it as sources for inspiration. Because he knows that he needs to succumb to the artmarket to survive, he wants to, as he says, 'go at them through the back door'.

> I am not exactly making artworks that can sell, and I have never sold an artwork and it is not a statement that I do not want to sell my art, I am just not in that position [...] so that is why I try to find alternative ways to perhaps finance my art and find various strategies or ways to work from *within*[7] the conventional market.[8]
>
> (Sæmundur Þór Helgason, 2017)

In his graduation piece from Goldsmiths, he investigated how artists are constantly intermingled with the market, whether they want it or not, which can be seen for example in how they 'tape' over the brand names of the products they use for their artworks. 'Is the artist then trying to stay away from the commercial market or stand against it?' He mentions that these might be leftovers from the discourse of when art was considered 'pure' and completely autonomous, but now whether they like it or not, contemporary artists are completely intervowen with the market. By doing this, Sæmundur Þór Helgason is both accepting his fate, by succumbing to the market, yet keeping an ironic distance. He states that this position made him feel somewhat more autonomous but it was not as simple as that.

> I do feel more autonomous, I think that the artworks can be much more fierce and dangerous than if it was this classical path, but ah I don't know, no actually, then it backlashes completely when I have to hassle with making a living for myself in other ways [...]. I must find various part-time jobs, apply for artist salaries.'[9]
>
> (Sæmundur Þór Helgason, 2017)

Artists are no more independent when they stay away from the market because they are dependent on side jobs or need to apply for grants for financial security. 'I think a lot of artists

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[7] Emphasis added by author.
[8] Translated from Icelandic by author. See Appendix B, note 9.
[9] Translated from Icelandic by the author. See Appendix B, note 10

are producing rigid objects just to be able to sell them, [...] and if I look at the painting medium as a way to, you know, make a living, then I think it is alright.'[10] By the same token, artist Joe McKay, works as an art teacher and does not need to rely on his artworks for financial security.

> It would be hard for me to buy my own work; technology that's gonna fall apart and you know, compare that to a picture you hang on the wall, it's a different prospect.
>
> <div align="right">(Joe McKay, 2017)</div>

Joe McKay currently focuses on game-based art, where he programs computer games as artworks that he exhibits in gallery spaces. He mentions that he has never sold any of his game-based art before, 'And that used to bother me, or I used to try and work harder to figure out how to crack that nut, now I'm, I don't know, I've been around the New York art-world long enough, I know how fickle it is, I know how arbitrary it is and so I just, I'm just gonna keep doing what I like and not worrying about it.' Likewise, Sæmundur Þór Helgason's says that it gives him more creative freedom to do what he wants to do, so long as the galleries know beforehand that he will probably not make any sales.

These responses show that the art market is very present whether one likes it or not. Standing against the art-market is necessarily not a dive into creative freedom, because at the same time the art market regulates what is considered 'art' and what is not. If you want to be independent, you must still acknowledge that the market is there, as will be further discussed in the following chapter. What is intriguing, is the mutual understanding between all parties of the omnipresent, yet esoteric power of the market. Bourdieu calls this agreement a legitimate imposture, 'collectively misrecognized, and hence recognized' (1996, 169).

It is a collective agreement of symbolic alchemy. When the artists economically value their artworks, they put a price on it that is in no correlation to its material cost. The added cost is due to the symbolic alchemy of the market, and of the discourse that surrounds the aura of an art-work. The artist owes the market the power of the aura because without it the artwork could not be priced so high. The market value of the artwork thus does not have a direct link between material cost and the price-tag, yet one can also say that the creation of the art-object will bring with it immense aura that is the result of a huge network of agents meddling with symbolic alchemy (Bourdieu, 1996, 170).

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[10] Translated from Icelandic by the author. See Appendix B, note 11.

His act would be nothing but a crazy or insignificant gesture without the universe of celebrants and believers who are ready to produce it as endowed with meaning and value by reference to the entire tradition which produced the categories of perception and appreciation.

(Bourdieu, 1996, 169)

The value of creation stems from the structures that surround the artwork, as well as the artist, and so the production of cultural goods is an act of consecration. According to Bourdieu there is no ultimate 'creative power' (ibid.), but it is made through the network that constructs the art market. It is thus apparent that if the aura disappears, the power of the art market will suffer greatly.

It is incredibly difficult for the galleries and the market because art is one of the things that can become awfully expensive and incoherent to the material it is made from. [There is] this 'aura', and reputation and this name that is connected to it and it takes an endless amount of money and becomes more and more valuable.[11]

(Hrafnhildur Helgadóttir, 2017)

It's just like a religion, money, because when you believe in it, it works, and that's how the money system works, […] and of course we want to keep it holy because […] if I don't think it's twenty krona then it's *not[12]* and then the system doesn't work.

(Ida Brockmann, 2017)

The reason why the consecration of art objects stays so effective, yet ambiguous, is because it is deeply constructed and accepted within the field. The agents of the art world play a game of the 'aura', almost as a god-like role of creation, to keep it alive, even though it is under serious scrutiny at the moment, when a copy of an artwork cannot be discerned from its original. With the increase of appropriations, video art and various time-based art, this veil of symbolic alchemy has become increasingly transparent, and even though it has been a game of pretend for a long time, it is getting harder to keep the aura away from its deathbed. The mystery around the creation of these art works is gone (Groys, 2008).

Maybe it's because art is like seeking this, to be taken seriously, so it tries to be something, like put things on a pedestal to really say like, 'this is something!

(Ida Brockmann, 2017)

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[11] Translated from Icelandic by author. See Appendix B, note 5.
[12] Emphasis added by author

Because of this ambiguity, there has always been a clear opposition between the avant-garde, that tries to tear up these structures, and the 'institutional' art world, that is comfortably seated by the art-market buffet. Yet, this is not so straightforward; if one wants to stay away from the market, one still needs to acknowledge it. This creates a lot of tension, especially for the less established artists. How can emerging artists create symbolic capital from their opposition, without stepping into the commercial institution, if they are not already well-known in their field?

According to Groys (2008), if an artist wants to step out of the institution, they also need to acknowledge that they might become collected, because the institution is not interested in that which has already been done, but exactly that which the avant-garde artists are doing: the 'pure', the 'fresh' and the 'new'. 'The more you want to free yourself from the museum, the more you become subjected in the most radical way to the logic of museum collecting, and vice versa' (ibid., 24-25).

Because of the paradox between art and money, the avant-garde and the institution are forever intermingled. One cannot exist without the other. The museum creates the contrast needed for the avant-garde to thrive.

> If you decide to push back against the gallery […] it has to be there before you can subvert it. It is really hard to subvert the gallery context when you went *around*[13] the gallery context. So, sometimes […] a lot of the work that you are seeing is coming 'round full circle and back into the gallery again that seems to be market driven.
>
> (Joe McKay, 2017)

These various avant-gardes situate themselves against the economic and commercial structure of the market, eventually leading to its normalization and appropriation, creating yet again a climate for a new avant-garde to emerge. This leads to the never-ending circulation of the avant-garde becoming institutionalized, generating an opposition in the form of a new avant-garde that is doomed to be ultimately institutionalized. For example, Kelani Nichole mentions that the truly *good* artists cannot help it but become bought by institutions unless they really strive against it.

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[13] Emphasis added by author

When we talk about value it seems to split between how artists personally value their creation and how the agents of the market force value onto objects to suit the need of the system. This creates obvious clash as the artists need to rethink their artworks by mirroring them against the fabricated recipe of value. For the more established artists, they have more autonomy in their practice as the consecration of their signature has translated into other job opportunities related to their field. Emerging artists enter a more difficult situation because, as part of the avant-garde, it is hard (and often not desired) to 'sell out' to the standards of the market. Yet in order to 'get your name out there', one has to succumb to the art market and its arbitrary rules of value. Because of this, avant-garde artists have for the most part stood against the institutional gallery space, in hope of reinstating their autonomy. However, it is not so simple, because one cannot stand against the institutional gallery system if one is not *within* it to begin with. As the art world withholds the power of consecration, it too decides that which is 'real art' and that which is amateurism. Even though amateurism is becoming widely more acceptable as 'real art' within the avant-garde scene, it misses out on the fabricated aura which is the reward for succumbing to the market, similarly making it harder for the artist's signature to stand out from the flood of images and information circulating in a digital society.

4.3 Meddling with symbolic alchemy

4.3.1 How deep does the irony cut?

According to the artists answers it seems that not much has changed in the paradox between the avant-garde and the institution or the power structure between the art market and the creative freedom of the artist. However, in the recent years the Internet has brought with it an interesting alternative to producing, marketing and selling artworks. Namely, web shops and online galleries. Various artists have started creating their own platforms to promote and sell their artworks, thus completely blocking the art world as a middle man, keeping all the profits. What is noticeable is how ironic these websites are, as they often have a highly political and satirical agenda *against* the market, yet admitting their defeat.

The emergence of alternative methods such as artist-run web shops has created a dialogue about the purpose of the gallery space and the market as a consecrator of symbolic and economic value. It is apparent that by talking to the artists that they have needed to find alternative ways to live off their art, often turning it into a comical or satirical response. As mentioned earlier, the gallery space has had to reinvent itself and justify why it takes half of the price of every

artwork sold, when the artist can sell it on their own webpage, which is becoming increasingly more acceptable. Artist Kevin Bewersdorf (2008) even mentioned that web pages have become the galleries of our time. Hence, one can ask what the purpose of the gallery space and museum is in this day and age?

> I don't know how a gallery is a feasible business. I don't know how anyone runs a gallery or why, it is such a cluster-fuck and its very parasitic on an artist and I think it is a completely outdated model.
>
> (Kelani Nichole, 2017)

> I think it is flawed […] because when you think of conceptual art at its purest, you could take that fridge and say it has value because it is in a gallery and it provokes you to think about what it is, but then again, the question is that it's just a fridge, it provokes your thought but it cannot give you anything, and that annoys me a lot, when it is too ironic.
>
> (Adam Varab, 2017)

> It feels like the white cube is just like 'silly' and also, it is in many ways just an elitist esoteric space, and that is not necessarily good, but there is a reason why white cube is a white cube, it is pretty much like anything you put into a white cube will look good and will look kind of special and so thereby the white cube is kind of an ultimate way of showing art.
>
> (Tiril Hasselknippe, 2017)

Emerging artist, Ida Brockmann, takes a similar ironic stance in her artworks. A conceptual artist that works with rigid objects, she likes to show how symbolic and economic value of rigid objects is subjective, fluid and open to negotiation. In her artwork 'Ida is selling out now'[14], she created a webshop, selling replicas of her everyday objects made from wood (such as her hairbrush, Iphone, medicine tablets and driver's license). This art project is a parody, commenting on the discourse of 'selling out' as a necessity of being able to survive as a contemporary artist. The 'objects' were all created from the same material, yet had different price tags, depending on the symbolic value she put to them. In that sense, a replica of her birth certificate became much more expensive than a replica of her iPhone.

The avant-garde has for the most part held a discourse of 'anti-economic economy', where the art is for the arts sake, *l'art pour l'art*, so to say, and an apathy towards commercial gain or economic profit (Bourdieu, 1996). According to Bourdieu this accumulates symbolic capital,

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[14] Translated from Danish by author: *Ida Sælger Ud Nu*

that can in the long term, ironically, provide economic profits. 'the only way they can combine the economic profits of an ordinary economic enterprise with the symbolic profits assured to intellectual enterprises is by … abstaining from fully revealing their self-interested goals' (1996, 142).

By abstaining from these 'self-interested goals' such as economic profits, they avoid 'selling-out' in hopes of greater symbolic prestige. According to Troemel (2013b), contemporary artists can secure artistic freedom only by working 'outside the governing institutions of their field'. But this outlook creates obvious complications if the artist is not established enough to be able to 'get their name out there'. How does one create symbolic capital out of *not selling out* if one does not even have the platform yet of *selling out*?

> Motivation for making art is for me not very money-driven, […] I don't make art for money but I can make art *with* money, so you just find your own ways.[15]
>
> <div align="right">(Hrafnhildur Helgadóttir, 2017)</div>

> I understand why you put things on a pedestal in the white cube because people have worked on it, you have to get paid and you have to be able to live from doing it, so you need to say 'this is serious'.
>
> <div align="right">(Ida Brockmann, 2017)</div>

> We need to put value in what we are doing, generally artists are very bad at it, we think that, I mean after all we dedicate so much time and so much of ourselves and so many years and so much money, and in the end we say like 'oh but this is free, I 'just' made it' but you didn't 'just' make it, it took seven years! That's an important point. You cannot undermine, you must also show respect to all the other working people.
>
> <div align="right">(Rebecka Stone, 2017)</div>

Some of the artists deliberately 'de-consecrate' their artwork, for example Ida Brockmann showcased her Ida Sælger Ud web-shop artworks in an adult-video store window, that then looked like actual commodity in a shop window. When the artist removes the artwork from the gallery, the consecration is lost and the artist can showcase it as a regular product, away from the discourse of symbolic alchemy.

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[15] Translated from Icelandic by author. See Appendix B, note 6.

I could have exhibited it in a white cube, put it on a pedestal, and whatever, but again when you put it in this web-shop […] all this becomes like a shopping experience and then you start to have this view on these things as products.

(Ida Brockmann, 2017)

This creates obvious complications because if the artist demeans his artwork down to a product, by boycotting the gallery, the value will inevitably suffer, and thus they will not be able to sell their artwork for the same price as they would inside a gallery space that takes half of the profit. Contrarily, in Sæmundur Helgason's show 'Things to Return to the Store' (2015) he asked companies like Sony, Samsung and Dyson for products to put up in a gallery room that would resemble one of the mundane 'showrooms' in appliance stores. The companies did not want to appear in the same room together as competitors and so he had to buy most of them himself. So quite the opposite to what Ida Brockmann did, he appropriated commodities into the gallery space, and forced various companies into an unwanted dialogue. By that he turned commodities into art, which was only possible because of the space it was situated in.

4.3.2 Creation or commodity?

The artists' answers varied a lot depending on how established they were, as mentioned above, which becomes a big factor when discussing the gallery industry. All the artists understood the value of the gallery space as a 'space' to showcase art, an empty room so to speak, where anything can be put into it and it can be represented without being influenced by other things, yet they also showed collective disbelief in it as a consecrator of value. It was obvious that they understood it to be arbitrary yet accepted the power of it.

Bourdieu (1996) states that artists' works would doubtlessly be quite different had they to market the products themselves because they do not understand the sanctions of the market and the commercial industry as consecrators of value. However, it seems that contemporary artists are more aware of the structure of the market and try to compromise with it to a certain extent. As the artists have mentioned above, staying away from the institutional market gave them an added sense of autonomy, yet they understood that it was not that simple because the institutions create recognized sanctions, which will reward you if you follow them, for example in added economic value to your artworks. By putting things on a pedestal, as Ida Brockmann mentions above, the artist is succumbing to the rules of the game, which in return rewards them with the magic stick of value that is way harder to fulfil on your own. She similarly mentions that with the products she sold in *Ida is selling out*, she understood that the economic value she put on

the artworks was so arbitrary that she needed to take it seriously for it to work; she had to play the game which she thought was very difficult 'because comparing it to other [artworks], it made no sense' (Ida Brockmann, 2017).

Yet, contrarily, Jameson (1984) argues that the fact that creative production has turned into a commodity is not necessarily a product of the postmodern, nor is it completely ironic, but it is the market's demand for new and fresh goods to sell in greater quantities. The choice in selling artwork as commodities, in dialogue with the power of the market, is not an ironic distancing from the market, but exactly the opposite; it is the complete engulfment of the capitalist market over artistic innovation. According to curators Baumann and Brown (2014) this has made the museum system seem ever more attractive for emerging artists, 'suddenly, museum collections, which were considered rather unsexy, have become a safe haven, far from speculation […] now they see it as a shelter from the greedy market.'

The artists understood that in theory you did not need the gallery to promote yourself, as there are alternative ways of showcasing and selling your art. Furthermore, Hrafnhildur Helgadóttir mentions that the Internet has the added benefits of enabling artists to produce and share artworks without having to get permission from galleries.

> A very general idea about the galleries, is that they are trying to create a commodity, and if one does not want to create a commodity or have that as some sort of a parameter to stop you, then it is great to be still able to exhibit, still be able to share, and create opportunities even though there is no gallery promoting you, but maybe there is a need for promotion.[16]
>
> (Hrafnhildur Helgadóttir, 2017)

> It is so sad when [...] your passion and your work is so dependent on pleasing someone else.
>
> (Rebecka Stone, 2017)

> It is also the market that governs art, there is demand for certain artworks that, I think that [the Internet] is good for steering away from this market because then you have more freedom.[17]
>
> (Sæmundur Þór Helgason, 2017)

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[16] Translated from Icelandic by author. See Appendix B, note 7.
[17] Translated from Icelandic by author. See Appendix B, note 12.

Troemel (2013b) mentions that when an artist can sell and market their artwork themselves, they in return become the artwork, the commodity. 'What the artist once accomplished by making commodities that could stand independently from them is now accomplished through their ongoing self-commodification.' This has reversed the traditional thinking that the gallery brings you the audience, when you market the product yourself you need the audience *first* to be able to sell and market your product in the flood of information that is the Internet. This brings with it both its advantages, in power and artistic autonomy, yet disadvantages in lack of marketing. As Hrafnhildur Helgadóttir mentions above, that maybe there *is* need for that promotion, that audience base, to start out with. Torben Ribe mentions that the gallery surely adds economic and symbolic value but these factors are interchangeable because a lot of artists start in a non-commercial way, for example by marketing their artworks online, and then later they exchange that prestige into economic value.

> That's something that's helped me a lot, you are always able to reference to me, […] its normalized to stalk someone now, it's acceptable, even in an artist spectrum.
>
> (Adam Varab, 2017)

Their comments suggest that when the artists can oversee their Internet presence (as with social media presence), their name, or *signature*, becomes the main commodity. In that sense, the artwork refers and points back to the artist; its creator. The name of the artist creates the consecrational value which fuels its symbolic alchemy (Foucault, 1977, 115). Foucault rethinks Barthes (1977) famous declaration of the death of the author, which made every work consequently open for complete de-construction by the receivers. According to Barthes, the 'author is a modern figure', created by capitalist ideology to force a person upon an artwork. He argues that the author creates his or her work from various sources and inspirations and it is thus unfair to view the work as the result of a single genius. Foucault (1977) stresses that even though the attitude towards an artist's signature as a metaphysical genius has just about abandoned the discourse of authorship, the signature has transformed its role, not to describe a person, but the signature is expanded to cover a whole new array of discourse, of concepts, of eras. How the signature is perceived is 'regulated by the culture in which it circulates' (123), and thus becomes situational. Hence, the author is not dead, its monarchic persona has stepped aside, and the empty void has been filled with various discourses and insinuations, controlled by agents in charge.

> Like the stories that I produce on Instagram, when people look at this they build up
> a story of me.
>
> <div align="right">(Anna Vibe, 2017)</div>

Similarly, when you enter the gallery system, it is the name, the *signature*, that is for sale. Not the person, but what that person stands for. The institutional galleries consecrate the work in exchange for the name. This becomes difficult if the artists democratize their artworks on the Internet because in the extremely fast process of posting, liking and sharing, the name and date are usually the first information to get lost in the sea of data (Troemel, 2013a). So, ultimately, 'the more famous an art image becomes, the less its author will be attributed' (Troemel, 2013b).

Ironically, as Troemel (2013a) mentions above, when one democratizes their art on the Internet, the name becomes the most important part. The artists become their own managers. This creates obvious contradictions and difficulties, especially if you are an emerging artist that has not yet established a style or a technique that can be recognized as *your own*. The emerging artists want to get their name out there, yet not devalue their artwork or the practice of their colleagues by making it free. Similarly, the labor of keeping the signature in constant spotlight on the Internet becomes tiring in its flood of information. It is the signature that separates one work from another. In the decision of 'democratizing' the artwork, the artist becomes obliged to take on all the responsibility the gallery would otherwise do, without the previously constructed audience platform.

> I think [the aura] will always be there no matter how much you try to avoid it, even
> though the Internet is meant to be a horizontal, flat structure without, you know,
> that kind of value, but as soon as you produce something and hang it in a gallery or
> museums that has aura, it's unavoidable, I don't think its necessarily a bad thing.
>
> <div align="right">(Torben Ribe, 2017)</div>

> I think the idea of the original and the consecrated art-object to be a little bit
> unexciting, [...] the aura is in a constant ecology of ideas and forms, even trends,
> so I think that is something that has shifted.[18]
>
> <div align="right">(Hrafnhildur Helgadóttir, 2017)</div>

The relationship between the artist and the market changes when the artists take the production in their own hands, because, as explained above, the artists will have to accept that the consecration of value on their artworks will have to come through their own self-commodification that hopefully turns into symbolic and economic value. Conversely, it could

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[18] Translated from Icelandic by the author. See Appendix B, note 8.

be that the work is only valuable exactly because the name of the artist has been consecrated (Foucault, 1977). What is apparent by their responses is that even though they understand how flawed it is, it is still the main factor in steering the success of their artistic endeavors.

It is obvious that the Internet offers various new alternatives in marketing, showcasing and selling artworks. As the gallery system usually takes about half of every profit made, this solution would seem like a better way for artists to finance their practice, as well as enabling them to be in charge of their Internet presence; thus not relying on anybody but themselves in branding their name. Various artists have used this method as a way to stand against the institutional gallery system, for example by selling their artworks on webshops, or selling 'merchandize' with their own personal label. This, however, has commonly a very ironical and satirical stance to it, where the action of selling creation as commodity becomes an artwork in itself. The artists might gain financial profit from it, such as Ida Brockmann, yet the main idea seems to be to show the audience how arbitrary the idea of value is.

Furthermore, when artists take the role of promotion and branding into their own hands, they miss out on the perpetual audience the gallery system brings with it. The artists likewise need to market their signature continuously so as not to drown in the flood of information. The signature changes when it is situated within an institutional gallery because, apart from creating value around it, it also freezes the signature in history, something that the Internet is not capable of due to vast circulation of material. One would think that the signature loses its significance when thrown into the pool of circulation, yet it seems to be the opposite, as the artists need the signature to be able to hold their head out of the water, and gain prestige and hopefully, be able to live off what they love the most, making art.

5. In subordination to the aura

5.1 The perks of periodization

> If we do not achieve some general sense of cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectivity is undecidable.
>
> (Jameson, 1984, 57)

What has characterized the recent period of transition is namely the obvious emergence of time-based art into the museums, mirroring the simultaenous appearance of artists on mass culture platforms such as social media.

As a social structure, the aura has been restlessly kept alive by forces of the art market. It is apparent that the aura has persisted even though the reproducibility of images has become normalized and most audiences view 'copies' of art through their computer or smartphones. The dissolvement of what was considered 'high' culture and 'low' culture surely has made it harder for the aura to thrive as it has always been associated with 'high' art, but what happens when high culture becomes reproducible is that the galleries step in. The galleries still carry the consecrational badge, and have become the main agents in steering reproducible art inside the exhibition space. Hence, the postmodern prediction of the dissolvement of cultural hierarchy has not been fully realized, as that which ends up put inside an institution is still considered high art, and that which does not make it in there enters the flood of information, often associated with amateurism.

In contrast with former literature on the subject, the interview data demonstrates that the value that is put on the signature of an artist, as with the aura surrounding a unique, original object, still works as the main influence in regulating symbolic and economic value within the art-world. Surprisingly, all the artists were aware of the art market's fickle and arbitrary structure, yet understood that if they wanted to play along, they would have to follow the rules of the game.

Furthermore, the artists illustrated a sentimental relationship with their art practices, which translates into symbolic value, and trying to measure that or understand why that is, comes down to their own personal identity. The symbolic value that inhabits the artists' signature is

thus a confluence of the consecrating power of the art market and simultaneously emerges from the artists' passion towards their practices; they do not want to de-value their practice symbolically nor economically.

5.2 Do not hate the player, hate the game

> A certain form of adherence to the game, of belief in the game and the value of its stakes, which makes the game worth the trouble of playing it is the basis of the functioning of the game.
>
> (Bourdieu, 1996, pg. 228)

Bourdieu's (1996) notion of symbolic alchemy can be seen in contemporary art within the gallery system, how becoming a part of it can make an artist automatically consecrated, something that does not happen as effortlessly, do they wish to publish or market themselves online. However, in his historical examples there is a tendency to think of the artists as merely subordinate agents, unknowingly following the rules of the game, whereas many of the artists interviewed had a wide understanding of how the market worked and were aware of its rules and limitations. As has been thread through this essay, the notion of symbolic alchemy has become increasingly more transparent with aesthetic populism, and thus it is not strange that contemporary artists have had further opportunities to reflect and converse with its prevailing discourses. Contemporary artists have for the first time a platform outside the institution to publish their aesthetical innovations to a wide audience and engage with it as active agents, which was unthinkable in Bourdieu's time.

This enables many contemporary artists to perform as 'initiators of discursive practices' (Foucault, 1977, 132) where they also act as scholars or theorists of their time, allowing endless new discourse to stem from their own. Likewise, the signature of the artist becomes increasingly more important in withholding these structures, as the artist is one of the main agents in this discourse. The function of the artist is namely to 'characterize the existence, circulation and operation of certain discourses within society' (Ibid., 124). Artists not only participate in the game, they are the main coordinators.

Within digital society, the signature of the artist becomes increasingly more important because of the flood of information that exists before audiences in every day life. Paradoxically, the Internet is a flawed regulator of copyright, as in the stream of information the signature and date are usually the first information to drown, and so the galleries have become the main agents

in stabilizing the stream and highlighting some artworks above others. One of the reasons why time-based art is entering the institutions once again, undermining the discourse on the democratization of the image, is to stabilize a signature, freeze the flood, and be able to view it with a closer look, without gulping for air.

This creates financial problems as few artists are granted the right to be showcased within the instiutions, and immensely hard for those who stand beside it to live exclusively off their art practices. This results in a nuanced relationship, in how the artists can economically and symbolically value their art *without* the structure of the institution. What became apparent from the data is that straying away from the art market does not necessarily grant the artists more autonomy in their artistic practices. They may be granted more freedom when it comes to political content, yet by marketing the products themselves they lose the predetermined audience base the gallery gives them, as well as having to justify the economic and symbolic value they put on the artwork without the recognized rules of the art-world.

Even though the Internet can be a powerful platform in democratizing art and giving artists an autonomy in constructing their art practices and sales, it still comes with the price of the fabricated aura that surrounds the institution. Thus, the artists have needed to find alternative ways of living off their practice, especially if they are not established enough (or willing) to take part in the institutional art market. By creating web-shops and online galleries, artists have managed to keep an ironic distance from which could give them leverage in publicity that can possibly translate into success in jobs relating to their art practices such as teaching, guest-lectures or book publishing. However, by solely using this method, emerging artists lose their access to the game, the circle of belief, and so the artwork lands between the blurred boundaries of supposed 'real art' and amateur production.

What this research shows is that despite the effortless reproducibility of the image on the Internet, the attempt to give artworks value based on their scarcity is more relevant than ever. The gallery system has lost its role as the sole presenter of contemporary art, and so it has been forced to corroborate its role as the primary agent in steering symbolic alchemy. Through interviews with contemporary artists of various fields, this research identified contradictions in prevailing discourse around contemporary art and the artists' answers. Even though it is apparent that the Internet has changed the way people view and approach art, the issues stated above have been too generalized. Stemming from the artists responses, too much value has been

put on the Internet as source of influence, as well as a steering factor in our relationship with contemporary art.

It seems that the need to preserve symbolic value in an object is stronger than ever. Because the Internet has the potential of both spreading time-based art, as well as documentation of rigid-objects or installations, audiences are not as inclined to support or purchase artworks. Artists thus need to protect both the symbolic value of their artwork, often by succumbing to the institution which protects the aura, yet also giving it an economic value, to hopefully be able to live off their art practices. The aura, as a metaphysical element, is not something that can die or be revived, it is something that persists by drifting across the elements that construct the art-world.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Data Coding Example

	Joe McKay	Ida Brockmann	Torben Ribe	Kelani Nichole
The autonomy of the artist in a post-Internet society	'I'm not interested in trying to reach out to the 1% who got an endless disposable income to buy you know the successful works, its uh, its a tough one.'	'I understand why you put things on a pedestal in the white cube because people have worked on it, you have to get paid and you have to be able to live from doing it, so you need to say 'this is serious'.'	'Of course, we try to bring something to the gallery that is at least theoretically possible to sell, and then we show at an underground artist-run space the next month, you can do that pile of dirt on the ground or something.'	'I think it's not really about an artist deciding to sell or not, I think it's more about like an artist being serious about fulfilling their career and finding their right allies'
The institutional gallery space	'The downside of making work outside of a gallery context is that you don't have an audience that's thinking of an art framework when they are thinking of your work' 'it supplies a context that has a base level'	'It's these labels that you have to work around in because people they recognize art when it's in the white cube.'	I think it's possible to do it in other places, but I think it's really nice with the gallery space that it's easier to see what's 'art'.	'I don't know how a gallery is a feasible business, I don't know how anyone runs a gallery or why, its such a clusterfuck and its very parasitic on an artist and I think its a completely outdated model'
Symbolic and economic value of an artwork	'The original doesn't have the same sort of intrinsic value anymore. But I don't know, from my perspective that's kind of a good thing, I think its healthy, they make some more interesting art from more perspective'	'I think that's when it becomes a problem because if you have to sell and label things, people only consider it as art when its like, there is 'this one' and then it becomes valuable.'	'I guess you add symbolic value to your artworks every time you experiment with art and push the limits and show it to other people, tell about it or post pictures online. … all good art has a high sense of symbolic value because its valuable, it means something to the artist and to a lot of people and you may not be able to sell it but its meaningful for the art scene.'	'The symbolic value of having made that placement into that institutional context is worth its waiting goal and often times when you make that sale into an institution, other collectors will then see that as a proof point and be more interested.'

Appendix B: Translations

Hrafnhildur Helgadóttir

1. Allt er bara orðið svo ótrúlega flókið, það er kannski svona málið, líka þegar maður hugsar um listasögu þá er alveg tímapunktur í myndlistarsögunni þar sem er algjörlega skilgreint hver hugsunin var, hver miðlunin var, hvaða tilgangi málverkið þjónaði, en núna er svo mikið af mismunandi dóti í gangi að það er ótrúlega erfitt að segja eitthvað svona, það eru ekkert allir að hugsa eins, það er allt svo einstaklingsdrifið.

2. Efnislega hluti og óefnislega hluti - mjög erfitt, efnið er svo mikill physical partur, þegar þú ert með einhverja tölvu og allt það data er geymt í gagnagrunnum út um allan heim sem notar geðveikt rafmagn, þessi óefnislegi heimur er mjög efnislegur.

3. Það sem er markaðsdrifið er sjaldan eitthvað áhugavert.

4. Við fáum borgað fyrir að taka þátt í málþingum og svoleiðis. Þetta er vinna á netinu sem að fær reputation fyrir þannig manni er boðið að vera í málþingum.

5. Það er ótrúlega erfitt fyrir galleríin og markaðinn því að myndlist er eitt af þeim hlutum sem getur orðið ofboðslega dýr og er í engu samhengi við efnið sem það er búið til úr. Einhver 'ára', og reputation og eitthvað nafn sem er sett við það og þetta tekur endalausa peninga og getur orðið verðmætara og verðmætara.

6. Svona motivation fyrir myndlist fyrir mig er kannski ekkert rosalega peningadrifið, …, ég geri ekki myndlist fyrir peninga en ég get alveg gerst myndlist með peningum, þannig að maður bara finnur sínar leiðir.

7. Mjög general hugmynd um gallerí, er að reyna að búa til einhverja söluvöru, og ef maður vill ekki gera söluvöru eða hafa það sem einhvern parameter til að stoppa mann þá væri mjög frábært að geta samt verið að sýna og samt verið að deila, og fá tækifæri þó það sé ekkert gallerí sem er að prómóta mann, það er kannski þörf prómótion.

8. Mér finnst að hugmyndin um originalinn og hinn heilaga list-hlut er núna orðinn svolítið óspennandi […], hún er náttúrulega bara alltaf í einhverri ekólógíu hugmynda og efnis, jafnvel trenda, þannig að mér finnst það eitthvað sem hefur breyst.

Sæmundur Þór Helgason

9. Ég er ekki beint að búa til list sem að selst, ég hef aldrei selt verk og það er ekkert svona prinsipp að ég vilji ekki selja listina mína, ég er bara ekki í þeirri stöðu, […] þannig að ég skoða leiðir þar sem ég get kannski fjármagnað listina eða einhverveginn, fundið strategíur eða leiðir til að vinna innan markaðarins.

10. Ég finn fyrir meira sjálfstæði, ég held að verkin geta verið mun beinskeyttari og hættulegri heldur en ef að það væri þessi klassíska leið, æ ég veit það ekki, nei í raun og veru þá snýr það algjörlega upp á sig af því að síðan þarf ég að vesenast í því að eiga fyrir mér á annan hátt, […]ég að finna mér allskonar hliðarstörf, sækja um listamannalaun,

11. Ef ég horfi á málverkin sem einhverja leið til þess að, you know, eiga fyrir sér þá finnst mér það allt í lagi.

12. Það er líka sko markaðurinn sem stýrir myndlist, það svona, það er einhver svona eftirspurn eftir ákveðnum verkum sem að, ég held að það sé svolítið gott upp á það að stýra út þessum markaði því þá hefurðu aðeins meira frelsi.