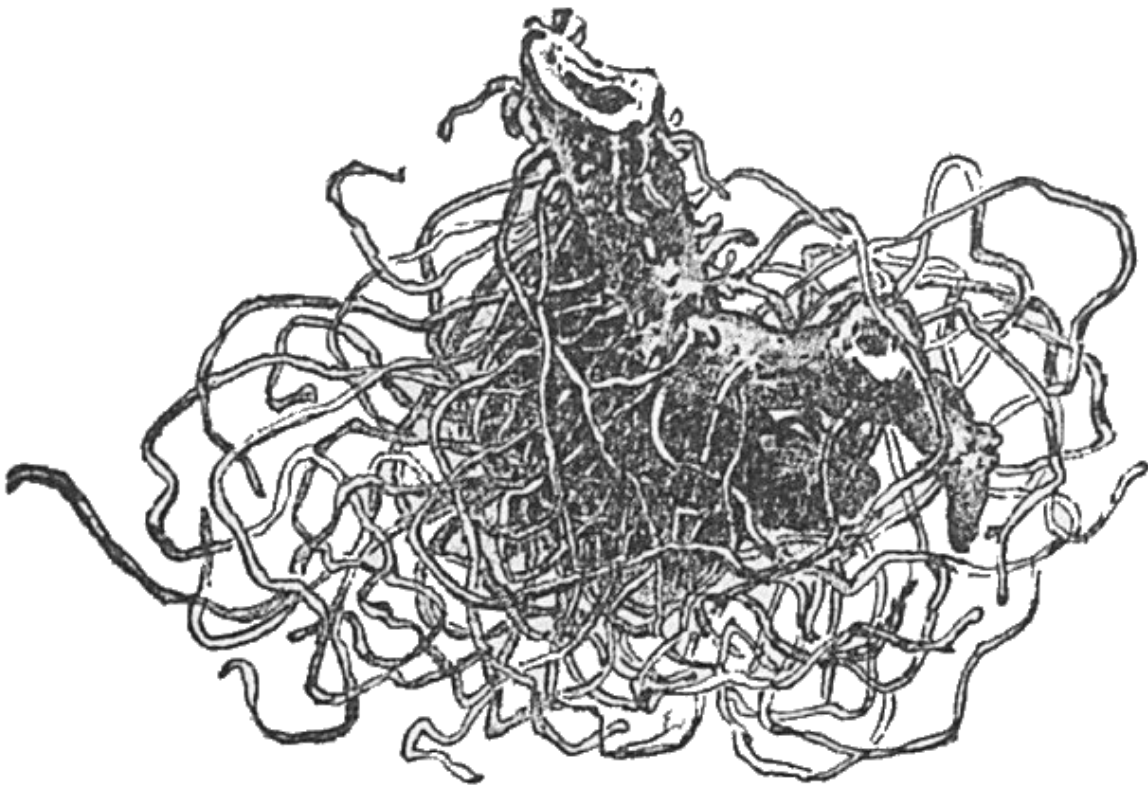




“How much life can I give?”

How artists with side jobs experience and
create the value of work



Klara Pertmann

Lund University - Department of Sociology - Social Anthropology

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The illustration on the cover page is of a “Dried Rhizome of *Caulophyllum thalictroides*”, and is from the book *Drugs and Medicines of North America* (Lloyd & Lloyd, 1984). The work is available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

Abstract

This thesis explores how performance artists with side jobs create and experience the value of work in relation to neoliberal capitalism, by exploring the continuation of life projects not in line with hegemonic values and conventional work-life boundaries. Through interviews with 8 key informants, and participant observation in work contexts and at a cultural hub for creatives, the study recognises how production processes constitute connections between work contexts, artist/worker-persons, and receivers of performed work. Using theory from Graeber on value, Mauss on *The Gift*, Lynch on care work and love labour, Lepecki on performance art, and borrowing terminology from Deleuze & Guattari, enables an analysis of how social structure and personal artistic practice are intertwined. The analysis considers the experienced and created value of artistic work and non-artistic side jobs, and how artists produce as a *rhizomatic bricolage*, using imagination and scrambling codes of their surroundings. Underlining, is an exploration of desires and needs, and how the precarity, exploitation, and devaluation inherent to artistic and service-based work, is handled by workers. The conclusion shows artists with side jobs use creativity to live a life they value - a life of human relations both in normality and imagination, through the care work and love labour of gift-giving.

Key words: value, work, performance art, side jobs, dance, social anthropology

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1. Introduction

1.1 “One must choose! Money or fun?”

“My dream is, *of course*, to work with art full-time”, a visual artist next to me says. We are at a workshop at a cultural hub for freelancers, and the topic discussed is money. Another artist, who does photography of “dance, performance, and people” and dances contact improvisation, says her biggest economic struggle is simple: “I don’t like money”.

When workers do creative and productive actions to get paid, money represents the value of workers’ labour, and becomes the ultimate object of desire (Graeber, 2001:66-67). During my fieldwork, I have met performance artists with side jobs who rarely speak of money as the ultimate object of desire, or even as an adequate representation of the value of their work. The dancer Dora provides an image of her relation to money, when describing her idea of the worst possible job:

Some office job where I do some numbers. Maybe economy? Something really boring, where your job is to pay some bills, and you sit among boring white middle-aged men in ugly suits who barely say hello in the morning, and whose teeth you’ve never seen because they never smile.

Maybe because money is seen as “boring”, even the workshop leader has an ambivalent approach to the intended topic. “Please, don’t forget about the money”, he says, only to counter his advice with “Don’t rush the money. Having passion means money will come.” While Dora also believes passion is necessary to endure the life of an artist, she does not believe money will come. Because, “being a dancer means you have a trash economy for the rest of your life”. This “trash economy”, has the dancer William complain over his low income: “It’s so fucking unfair! [...] I don’t believe money buys happiness, but in this case, it does.”

If money can buy happiness, it is because financial and material resources are necessary to achieve a good life (Fischer, 2014:8) But also non-material qualitative elements are necessary. These include feeling: a) Aspiration and opportunity - hope and direction to act on one’s future; b) Dignity and fairness, as social relations and the treatment and perception of others influences one's sense of self; and c) Commitment to larger purposes - the feeling of

doing something meaningful with one's life (a.a. 207-209). William's "It's so fucking unfair!" speaks for how my informants do not feel fairly treated. Aspiration, they do express, but often a "frustrated freedom" from limited opportunity structures (a.a. 144), or an "ambivalent freedom" that risks economic security and personal relations (Lynch, 2022:122).

What they do have is a meaningful commitment to a large purpose in what matters most in life. However, what is considered meaningful largely depends on cultural values (a.a. 7). For comparison, when framed by neoliberal individualism, having a life-project can be understood as the development of an entrepreneurial and productive subject; It is the work of self-realisation by accumulating personalized capital through consumption (Lynch, 2022:115-133). As we will see, commitment to artistic work is not experienced as an individual productive self-realisation, but as "work involved in coproducing humanity as relational beings" (a.a. 128). This life project rarely accumulates personalized human capital, but rather deprives artists/workers of other important qualities, such as material representations of value - money - and social relations.

The ambivalence of how a committed life project can both give and deprive artists of qualities of a good life, becomes further interesting when we consider the notion of choice. Lynch writes the neoliberal "ideology of choice" (2022:151) builds on classical liberalism's focus on rights over needs (a.a. 114), framing equality as the individual's right to compete, rather than "the right to choose among alternatives of equal value (a.a. 107). In neoliberal capitalism, it is the entrepreneurial and responsible individual's obligation to choose well and secure themselves against risks (a.a. 121). When my informants say artistic work is something they *choose*, they express awareness of its risks, and credit their *needs* and *values*, not rationality. Vega says: "People don't understand why I choose something so stupid even though I'm not stupid". Dora, similarly says: "You must be a bit stupid to choose this. [...] It's very easy to choose the other path, but you choose the most crooked road, with the steepest hills."

Why choose the most crooked road? Why choose to continue a life of artistic work and side jobs? Tom says he does not commit to a conventional life plan because he values feeling good, but questions himself: "...am I really feeling good? All I know is that most of the time, I feel good dancing, so that's all I can base my choices on". I remember a politician telling me: "One must choose! Money or fun". My thoughts echoed Tom's words: "...am I really having fun?".

1.2 Background

To have fun, feel good, and have passion are romantic but vague explanations for how artists navigate the tension between their life project and the life project encouraged in neoliberal capitalism. The tension demanding artists to navigate market logic, is largely due to neoliberal capitalism holding the hegemonic value system, resulting in a Swedish political landscape and cultural policy increasingly influenced by market logic.

Sweden provides better support systems for freelancing artists than many other countries. Membership organisations for freelance performance artists, such as Danscentrum, Teatercentrum, Cirkus Syd, The Dance Alliance, are funded by the Swedish Arts Council, among others, to provide training and support. But, as a 67-years old dancer I interviewed noted, artistic work is more precarious now than it used to be.

The current Swedish cultural policy bill formulates its objective for culture to be a “[...] dynamic, challenging and independent force based on the freedom of expression” (Government Offices of Sweden, 2026). By employing the arm’s length principle, artistic and cultural content is meant to remain “free from political influence” (Konstnärsnämnden, 2026). The policy was renewed in 2009 after the *Report of the Swedish Committee of Inquiry on Cultural Policy* (Kulturutredningen, 2009), commissioned by the government. The report recognised the culture budget had shrunk for the last 25 years (a.a. 12), and that society had changed because of globalization, industrial changes, and an increasing modernism, constructing new cultural norms and “freedom-values” centered on individual obligations and identity (a.a. 14-15). It concluded a new cultural politics was needed, one more in line with contemporary society, and proposed an updated cultural policy, in which they removed one goal - the one of culture resisting the “negative impacts of commercialisation” (a.a. 47, my translation). The investigation said the perception of the relation between culture and market was different to how it had been formulated in the goals from 1974 (ibid.).

In 2024, the government presented a 10 year strategy to improve the conditions for “businesses in the cultural and creative sectors”, “creative professionals and entrepreneurs” (Konstnärsnämnden:2026). As I have gathered from my fieldwork, artists express market logic increasingly influencing their artistic work. Initiatives such as *Kulturtåget*, a demonstration demanding for culture to receive 1% of the total state budget and a culture

more free from commercial interests (Kulturtåget Malmö, 2026), indicate a dissatisfaction with the current cultural politics, policy, and funding budget.

1.3 Aspiration and purpose

My reason for meeting performance artists who do not make a living off their artistic work, is to question why, how, and what, work is valued, and who remains recognised as an artist, as neoliberal capitalism conditions the sphere of artistic work. By centering artists with side jobs, I aim to share perspectives missed when the primary narrative of artistic success is seen as a freedom from ordinary employment and working with art full-time. I aim to help fill the gap defined later in chapter 2, of research on the experiences of artists with multiple precarious jobs, that recognises creativity as a production process with both potentials and risks. I do this to counter common misunderstandings about the practices and values artistic work and non-artistic, gig, or working class jobs entail. I believe that if we fail to recognise how people practice, experience, and integrate work in their lives, we miss the whole point of discussing cultural politics in the first place.

This thesis is in line with Fischer's claim that to understand what constitutes a "good life" we must consider desires, hopes, and imaginations (2014:5). Inspired by Graeber, this thesis also aims to recognise how individual motivation relates to social form, bringing together human purpose and society, by beginning from questions of value and creativity (2001:21, 255-257). Therefore, the following research questions:

1.4 Research questions:

How do performance artists with side jobs experience and create the value of their work in relation to neoliberal capitalism?

- What is the experienced value of working with performance art?
- How are artists/workers produced as a "person" in relation to multiple work contexts?
- What is the experienced value of non-artistic side jobs?
- What are the potentials and/or risks of creative approaches to the value of work?

Disposition

There are 9 chapters. **Chapter 2** presents relevant prior research and identifies the research gap to further contextualise the project's purpose. **Chapter 3** presents the theory and terminology used in the analysis. **Chapter 4** presents the informants, describes the methods for collecting and assembling material, and reflects over reflexivity, positionality, and ethical considerations. In chapter 5-8, theory and empirical material is brought together to provide the analysis that answers the research questions. **Chapter 5**, *The strange zone of performance*, explores the experienced value of artistic work. **Chapter 6**, *The production of a person*, describes how the artists/workers produce themselves as persons in relation to multiple work contexts. **Chapter 7**, *The normality of side jobs*, explores the experienced value of non-artistic side jobs. **Chapter 8**, *The value of work*, considers what potential and risks arise from creative approaches to the value of work. It also answers the main research question of how performance artists with side jobs create and understand the value of work. **Chapter 9** provides a summary and discussion that answers the research questions, as well as a conclusion and proposals for future research.

2. Prior research

2.1 Performance, dance, drag, and circus

Performance art constitutes a field of research on its own, often employing the methodological framework of practice as research, where artistic production becomes a fieldsite for exploration. Researchers often use a phenomenological approach, and reference theory in an interdisciplinary manner.

Anthropology has always concerned dance and performance, rhythm and movement. Victor Turner considers cultural performance in *The Anthropology of Performance* (1987). Some examples of where the moving body has been subject for analysis is in ethnography on ritual, in Mauss' lecture on the *Techniques of the Body* (1934), in Bourdieu's non-dancing peasants (2004), and in the Swedish anthropologist Helena Wulff's research on ballet (1998) and Irish dance (2007). Anthropological research conducted by dancers, such as Katherine Dunham, is not to be forgotten. While earlier anthropology of dance was influenced by theories on style and structure, contemporary anthropology has moved from structure to process, acknowledging the body, embodiment, and embodied knowledge (Royce, 2004, cited in Royce, 2002:7). The field of dance keeps establishing itself as a "focus and method that contributes to general theories of culture and society" (2002:8).

The art forms of drag and contemporary circus artists are less researched within anthropology. Research on drag has increased with the passage of time, as the art form has become more common within mainstream popular culture. Much research comes from the field of gender studies, alongside with performance studies and sociology, focusing on gender, performativity, and identity. Research on contemporary circus is mainly undertaken by circus artists themselves as practice as research.

2.2 Artists with side jobs and precarious work

Multiple job-holding is common in the creative sector, so how artists relate to side jobs and precarious work, has been researched, mainly in sociology. The research tends to use interviews as the main method, and reference theory from Foucault and Bourdieu to discuss links between artistic identity, cultural capital, and entrepreneurialism. A common focus is on how artists construct identities in relation to artistic values, the art market, and cultural policy.

Karlsson's and Gerber's sociological article considers how artists handle the tension between their artistic values and entrepreneurial logic (2025). Karlsson's doctoral thesis explores *Subjectivity and self-precarization among digital freelancers in Swedish Cultural industries* (2024). Stenberg, sociologist, disputed on how the artist-role is created in relation to economic aspects of late-modern society (2002). Research on the importance of having and communicating an artist-role or artist-identity is a common topic. The article *Visual artist, craftperson, entrepreneur or...all in one?* (V. Radermecker & Loots 2025) discusses how textile artists deal with multiple, often conflicting identities.

Lindström and Flisbäck, sociologists, provide interesting research in linking the question of identity to the topic of work and labour. Lindström's doctoral thesis concerned how artistic identity is influenced by education, work, and family, creating a conflict between *being* and *working* as an artist (2016). Considering the relation between artistic career and cultural policy, she has written an interesting article on how visual artists with multiple job-holding use bohemian and/or entrepreneurial ethics to create narratives about holding breadwinning jobs (2016). She concludes that whether the narrative is positive or negative depends on what ethics artists employ the most, but if the breadwinning job is too insecure, no artist forms a positive narrative of it (2016:44). Flisbäck's doctoral thesis dives into how artists negotiate different work spheres (2006), showing that while female actors are affected by the modern conception of self-development being hindered by care for other people, they make less of a separation between professional artistic work and private/domestic life than first imagined.

There is less research on how freelancing dancers, circus artists, or drag artists handle similar processes. But sociologists Pulignano and Domecka slightly fill the gap with their book *The Politics of Unpaid Labour* (2025). In their analysis of unpaid labour and precarious work, they consider creative dance (ballet) and residential care. They write that to be recognised as a successful "real artist", the artists are expected to make sacrifices for the "sake of art" by continuing unpaid work. Similarly, care workers must make sacrifices for the sake of others.

2.3 Creativity and precarity

As seen, much of the sociological research on artists negotiating precarious work conditions and side jobs analyses the construction of an artist-identity or role in relation to values, rather than the value of work as a creative process. This results in a slight neglect of the actual lived

experience of adhering to neoliberalism and the market economy, and does not answer the questions of why and how artists with side jobs continue.

Research on creativity, improvisation, and resilience as processes of survival in precarious work/life situations, are not necessarily about artistic identity, but more about creative work as a lived practice. The field of anthropology and/or researchers using ethnographic methods, have researched creativity and precarity more extensively. Of course, these topics apply to many more areas of culture than artists and artistic work.

But the psychologist Imas connects art, organizational life, and precarity, often using ethnographic methods. In one article he considers the creativity of dreams and imagination, to “construct a theory of organisation from the periphery (precariousness) and the arts” (2012:438). In another, he ascribes creativity the potential to transform adversity into “adversity capital”, as people in precarious situations engage in bricolage practices of informal work to survive (2018). The term *bricolage* lingered in me, and inspired my choice of terminology.

Other researchers focus on how, despite creative approaches, people with precarious lives ultimately struggle. Bain and McLean provide important notes in their article *The Artistic precariat* (2012). They critique how creative class theory tends to frame creativity as an individual phenomenon, arguing this is wrong and dangerous, as artists appear unaffected by the political and economic context, undermining the need for collective action to challenge the work conditions of the cultural sector (2012:98).

The research gap:

With this brief overview of prior research, I recognise a need for further perspectives on how performance art, identity, and social structure are connected. There is a research gap on the lived experience of artists/workers working multiple jobs, that recognises the relationality and embodiment of production processes, and considers both the potential and risks of creativity. I aim to slightly fill this gap by using theory from, and being inspired by, different disciplines, though the overall framework is anthropological.

3. Theory

I here introduce the theories and terms used to illustrate, understand, and analyze the empirical material.

3.1 Qualities of *The Good Life*

In *The Good Life* (2014) Fischer lists qualities that constitute a good life. As seen in the introduction, wellbeing requires physical safety and social relations, and the non-material qualities of feeling fairly treated, having aspiration to realise opportunities, and having a sense of purpose (a.a. 6-7).

3.2 An anthropological theory of value

Graeber believes that beginning with questions of value, creativity, and “open-ended layering of real and imaginary social totalities”, solves an illusionary paradox between personal motivation and the social project of society (2001:256-257). He considers society to be made out of a set of collective projects (a.a. 230,254), and suggests value can be seen as the “way in which actions become meaningful to the actor by being incorporated in some larger, social totality” - even when the totality exists in the actor's imagination (a.a. xii).

Since it is impossible for humans to be aware of all relations in a social totality, they tend to circle off social spaces, creating micrototalities in which a common ground of value has not been established yet (Graeber, 2001:250). “All that is real” is the human capacity to create the social reality, making change by using objects that become pivots between reality and imagination (a.a. 251). Because social totality is inscribed in these objects, they become media of value and objects of desire that “contain everything”, sometimes in “strange inverted forms” (a.a. 259). Objects hence have a strange, illusory duality; the human subject can in relation to them feel a sense of lack and absence, but also become aware of the power of this absence (ibid). Because, this power is the “reflection of one's own potential for action - one's creative energies” (ibid). Graeber's theory of value hence considers how media of value are objects of desire because they represent and reflect the value of an actor's own actions back to themselves (ibid).

Objects can be “almost anything: a ritual performance, an heirloom treasure, a game [...]” (Graeber, 2001:259). So, both public performance and money are circulating media of value

(a.a. 75). But a key difference is that money can be invisibly stored, while the public act of performance can not be stored or hidden, as it is simultaneously circulated, gifted, and enjoyed, existing in a sphere of production, circulation, and realisation (a.a. 78). This implies performance and money provide different material for how humans recognise and relate to value. Money, producing meaning “off-stage” (a.a. 82), makes value appear inherent to its own form, which inspires a desire, experienced as a need, to attain and store said value through ownership and accumulation. Performance, as a physical reality composed of “powers - potentials, capacities [...] open system situations, unpredictable as well” (Bhaskar, cited in Graeber, 2001:260) could be interpreted to shortcut the recognition of value as creative potential. Creative potential can not be realized without coordination with others (Graeber, 2001:260). The social aspect is hence crucial for the circulation and realization of value. To understand this, Graeber revisits Mauss.

3.3 Gift-giving and open reciprocity

In *The Gift* (1950), Mauss argues gifts are never given voluntarily, but are circulated because of a social obligation to give, receive, and return. The obligation is a tie between souls, because the gift “is of the soul”, invested with the “nature and substance” of the giver; It is “[i]nvested with life” (a.a. 12-13). The social tie persists because to participate in exchange through reciprocity, is a moral obligation, where “[t]o refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war; it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality (a.a. 13).

Mauss meant the same morality and organization functioned in a “hidden” form, in what he called “our societies”¹ (Mauss, 1950:4). Graeber agrees objects become valuable for embodying some human quality in both gift economies and market economies (2001:211). But while market economies obscure essential links, like the one between persons and things, denying “the true soil of their own life”, gift economies recognize how production and circulation of material goods is also production and circulation of the person (ibid.). Since both market economies and gift economies involve reciprocity, Graeber considers it necessary to differentiate between closed and open reciprocity (a.a. 220). Gift-giving with open reciprocity happens without “any immediate return, or guarantee that there will ever be one”, and therefore risks being exploited (a.a. 225).

¹ Mauss here makes assumptions of the reader, exemplifying an us-and-them-perspective more common in earlier anthropology. When “our societies” is read as *his* society, it refers to France 1872-1950.

3.4 Care work and love labour

The sociologist Lynch writes that work given due to a perceived need, “is in some respects a gift”, and can be commodified and exploited (2022:72). In *Care and Capitalism* (2022) she considers care work and love labour to be work of this sort. I use Lynch’s writing on care work and love labour to analyse the artistic work and side jobs of my informants, as their work involves similar elements and values. Love labour involves work such as cooking meals and washing bodies, and listening, affirming, supporting, and challenging others (a.a. 70). It is a non-substantiable practice and inalienable need, meaning it is a relational experience dependent on the involved people “being with, the other in time and space” (a.a. 72-73). It is undertaken through affection, commitment, attentiveness, and material investment of time, energy, and resources, sometimes involving desire and often little reciprocation (a.a. 74). Lynch means love labour requires more self-investment, whereas care work usually is a commodified form of care, but that boundaries are fluid and relationships move between love labour and care work (a.a. 71). I use the two terms quite interchangeably.

Care work does not adhere to capitalist logic (Lynch 2022:57). Lynch writes neoliberal capitalism hold an ideological hegemony in the politics and economy of global life (a.a. 26). Neoliberal capitalism is “particularly care-less” (a.a. 30), and normalizes a model of individualism that disregards the reality of how individuals co-create each other relationally (a.a. 101). This model expects citizens to be responsible and entrepreneurial, and have an obligation to, not give and return, but secure themselves against risks by accumulating personalized capital (a.a. 115). This model, Lynch writes, fails to recognise the significance of the relational self and the care involved in producing people in their relationality (2022:21). Care is hence devalued, or, like Scholz words it: “dissociated from value” (cited in Lynch 2022:37). The value disassociation is rooted in historic separation of productive and reproductive work into the market vs. household spheres (Lynch 2022:38-45), ascribing personal use value to domestic and care work, rather than profitable exchange value (a.a. 56). But, as care becomes a “cultural residual”, it can resist and question the message of neoliberal capitalism (a.a. 32).

3.5 Performance as a strange zone

Lepecki considers dance and performance to be ultimate processes to resist neoliberal conditions (2016:8). In *Singularities - Dance in the age of performance* (2016), he argues live

art disciplines can undo neoliberal conditioning on bodies, dreams, and desires, by offering “strangely strange zones” of experimentation (a.a. 3,12). Performance has the following elements to experiment with: 1. *Ephemerality* - the work leaves no object behind and hence proposes a materialization of an alternative economy with “the promise of an incalculable return without profit; 2. *Corporeality* - to work with the body is to be affected by the political forces of desire and imagination; 3. *Precariousness* - the work is physically precarious and politically precarious for its economical instability; 4. *Scoring* - the work is a constant negotiation of rules and agency; 5. *Performativity*, here described to imply an invisible contract that puts subjects and bodies into motion; 6. *Performance of affective labour* - a work of investing one's imagination, body, and creativity (a.a. 14-17). Lepecki continuously references the philosophical work of Deleuze & Guattari, and I admit being inspired.

3.6 Terminology from Deleuze & Guattari

In the preface of *Anti-Oedipus*, Foucault writes that the writing of Deleuze & Guattari is best read “as an art” (1983:xii). I use terms and quotes from *Anti-Oedipus* (1983) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), as a creative language able to illustrate the experiences of my informants. My aim is not to give you an extensive explanation of their ontological philosophy.

Machines - Pretty much everything can be renamed as machines. This thesis is a thesis-machine. A machine is a body of work. A productive apparatus where desire causes flows. A machine could, for example, be a person. The term *machine* makes it obvious that production processes require connections. Every machine connects to another machine, interrupting and making possible each other's breaks and flows (1983:16). Flows quickly fill up the *body without organs*, producing a subject along the machine as an occasional break, as the subject passes through different states (a.a. 55). The state will change, and a new subject will be produced, as a new flow “fills up the body without organs in the space of an instant” (ibid.).

The Body without Organs - It “is what remains when you take everything away” (1987:176). It is a practice (a.a. 174), flow, and milieu of passing and circulating intensities. It can be full of “ecstasy, and dance” (a.a. 175), and “remains fluid and slippery” (1983:27). The body without organs is unproductive, and only becomes a “working machine” because “the organs of life” attach (a.a. 19, 27).

Codes - The social machine (society) *codifies* the flows of desire by regulating them (1983:47). Capitalism is a social machine that decodes and recodes, but Deleuze & Guattari deem capitalism unable to provide a code applicable to the whole social field, saying it instead is “substituting money for the very notion of a code” (ibid.). Using desiring-production, the schizophrenic² “scrambles all the codes” (a.a. 49), always giving different explanations “according to the questions asked” (a.a. 27).

Rhizome - A system different from a tree. A rhizome is not hierarchical, but flat, and has no plotted point or fixed order (1987:6,8). It has no beginning or end; It is connection and alliance, expanding like “and...and...and...” (a.a. 26). It follows the wisdom of plants, always forming “a rhizome with something else - with the wind, an animal, human beings” (1987:10). Some examples of rhizomatic systems are: “the best and the worst: potato and couchgrass, or the weed”, rats swarming over each other, and music (1987:5,11).

Bricolage - Deleuze and Guattari use the term bricolage to describe a production process of rearranging fragments (1983:18). Before them, the term was introduced to anthropological theory when Lévi-Strauss used it to describe the creative process of performing tasks using limited material, by “making do with what is at hand” (1962:11). The “bricoleur” produces from potential rather than a planned project (ibid.), and “always puts something of himself into it” - “giving an account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between the limited possibilities” (a.a. 14).

A work of art has a *rhizomatic* structure (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:12). The bricoleur is someone “who undertakes odd jobs” (Lévi-Strauss, 1962:11, translator’s note). I hence connect the terms and use *rhizomatic bricolage* to speak of the production processes of my informants, as they creatively and improvisatory create themselves in relation to their environments. Or, as they follow the body without organs and scramble codes, with their connective machinery of desire. This will soon make sense.

² Referencing Deleuze & Guattari means the “schizophrenic” inevitably will be mentioned. I will not explain or problematize this, but simply approach it as a character that produces from desire.

4. Method

This chapter covers the process and ethical considerations of this qualitative anthropological study.

4.1 The selection of informants

The key informants are 6 dancers: Dora (24), Ellis (42), Vega (22), Mona (36), Tom (25), and William (22), one circus artist: Saga (27), one drag artist: Dionyx (30). These names are pseudonyms, chosen by themselves or me. Most live in Malmö, one in Stockholm, and one in Amsterdam/Stockholm. Four are women, three are men, and one is nonbinary.

Socio-economic background and ethnicity was rarely discussed with my informants, largely due to the interview method used. The parents mentioned by them hold a varying range of jobs - engineers, artists, a taxi driver - implying different class statuses. A majority of the informants are white and born in Sweden. While the gender distribution in performance art, intertwined with the value of feminized labour, is a reason for its precarity, ethnicity and socioeconomic background largely impact who can undertake precarious work. By recognising who is included in this study, we also recognise who is not, implying that the hardships described by the informants would be further prominent for those with less cultural, social, and economic capital.

They are all freelancers. Though categories of art are not clear-cut, I would say the informants create artistic work not in the form of objects existing external to their creators (literature, paintings, textile, etc.), but performance art - created moments in time and space, using bodies in movement as main material, involving a physical meeting between people and a performer-audience relation. Their side jobs include hospitality in restaurants and cafés, being a postman, working at a LSS³ group home, facilitating a support group for queer youth, and doing project planning at an artistic networking platform. Teaching and holding workshops are approached as both artistic work and side jobs, depending on the processes involved. The side jobs are experienced to provide low salaries, do not have full-time or long-term contracts or entail a conventional career ladder climbing. This line was semi-intentionally drawn, since full-time employment is less precarious, but also, few of the

³ The “Law on Support and Service” - LSS “is an important piece of legislation designed to provide individuals with certain disabilities the opportunity to receive support and services to live an independent and meaningful life.” (Omsorgsenheten Sverige, 2026)

artists I came in contact with held these jobs. I also interviewed a dancer of 64, who after freelancing re-educated herself to be a physiotherapist when starting a family. Her experience has influenced my analysis, but she is not referenced as a key informant in the analysis.

I came in contact with all informants through my networks, contacts, and work contexts. Having myself worked with dance and hospitality for years, I was my own gatekeeper. I sent out an informative image on social media, in relevant online forums and group chats, explaining the project and how to contact me, but also simply talked about the project with people in my close proximity. The informants are my colleagues⁴, colleagues of colleagues, friends, friends of friends. Some I have worked with, either before or during fieldwork, and we will continue to work within the same field after the fieldwork. Since personal dynamics will influence the interactions between interviewer and informant (Davies 2008:113), it also influences what and how material is created. Including artists with practices unknown to me, working with other art forms and jobs, would provide other material than covered here.

4.2 Fieldsites and participant observation

I did participant observation in multiple work contexts. The methods for collecting material were adjusted to individual needs and conditions. Some work was not possible to observe and time was limited. I participated in studio practices, rehearsals, and performances. I visited the artistic networking platform, the LSS-home, two caf  s, and a live podcast. Everywhere, the experiences engaged my senses, deepened my understanding, and filled me with utmost respect, responsibility, and care for the informants

Though my presence affected the work, I tried to not disturb it. Performances, I had the pleasure to participate in both as an engaged anthropologist and audience member. Rehearsals are slightly sensitive since the work is not meant to be performed yet, but I have attended enough work-in-progress sharings to understand how to behave for informants to feel safe. These were comfortable moments where I felt “at home in the field” (Fadzillah 2004:36), which were appreciated but called for reflexivity. The caf  s were familiar rooms, but involved being mindful of managers, guests, and clients. The LSS group home was a sensitive context; I was not only visiting a work place but the home of people who are not my informants and can not communicate their consent to me directly. The agreement was to not

⁴ Colleagues in the context of artistic work of freelancers, often refers to the kind of “distant colleagues” you become from working within the same field. Not the conventional colleague of being employed in the same organisation, working on the same project.

do care work tasks or observe intimate situations. I mostly stayed in the communal living spaces, and trusted my informant and her colleagues when they said they had worked there long enough to communicate with the inhabitants. I let them be my translators, but also communicated with eyes and energies, sensitively aware of what signals I was projecting (Davies 2008:120).

At a cultural hub for independent creatives offering co-working spaces and educational events, I attended the workshops on creative self-leadership, how to navigate money and art, how to continue creative work in the climate crisis, and an online lecture on navigating Swedish cultural policy. The discussions and presentations provided material on how artistic work is encouraged to be navigated, and how artists respond to this. Group discussions shared aspects with focus groups, where groups have their own dynamic, often resulting in either polarization or consensus (Davies 2008:116-117), revealing strong opinions and feelings.

4.3 Interviewing, coding, and analysing

The interviews with the key informants were semi-structured and usually around 1.5-2 hours. Instead of using an interview guide, I let the flow be reminiscent of a natural conversation, guided by a memorized interview schedule of topics to discuss (Davies, 2008:105-106). One interview was done over videocall, and all others in person. The interviews happened in different rooms, for example while the informant was working (or working out), at their home, in close proximity to work, or in a time and space separate from work. Davies points out how when interviews are connected to fieldwork, the interview can not be separated from other acquired knowledge; the interview presumes that the relation is affected by historic and future connection (Davies 2008:105-106). The variation in rooms enabled different themes to arise, and me to relate to my informants with different kinds of presences and participations. Similar to how ethnographers can inhabit a role of “stepping in and out of society” (Powdermaker 1966:19 cited in Davies 2008:5), I shifted between being a mutual dancer/artist/worker and “other” interviewer. The former resulted in emotionally charged moments of empathy and laughter, while the latter was necessary to reach beyond vague language and assumptions.

With consent, I voice-recorded the interviews and listened to them afterwards, as my first phase of selection, while manually transcribing what “stood out”. This was usually material connected to topics and key words I already had in mind, or that held emotional charge and

provided an interesting perspective. I translated material from Swedish to English, so the quotes used, in a sense, are paraphrases. I thematically organised the interview-material and field notes from participant observation, according to patterns and contrasts, using an intuitive system of colour coding and commenting in the margins.

During this process, I read prior research and theory, resulting in an hybrid analysis - both deductive and inductive - where all acquired material collectively developed a thematic network. The network changed with every interview and participant observation, because every interaction provides incomplete knowledge that gets filled in and developed by new interactions (Davies 2008:109). This creative process extends also to how I bring empirical material and theory together in my analysis, with the difference that theory mainly illustrates, explains, contextualizes, and highlights, whereas the empirical material provides the fundamental body and soul of the analysis, similar to how human quality makes an object “invested with life” (Mauss, 1950:13), reminding us we are dealing with the reality of human life.

4.4 Ethical considerations and reflexivity

Following the 7 principles from The American Anthropological Association (AAA), I made sure to obtain informed consent, not impose harm, be open and honest, consider ethics, protect the privacy of records, maintain respect; I will share my research with the informant to ensure accessibility. I was honest about the process of the project, stayed mindful of possible sensitivities, and have kept my informants anonymous.

My position in, and relation to, the field calls for reflexivity and admitting potential bias. I am a dance artist with side jobs meeting performance artists with side jobs. Because the field was my “own society”, I practiced an aspect of defamiliarization to not assume perspectives were shared (Davies, 2008:119-120). Defamiliarization combined with knowledge of social meanings inherent to the context, meant I could identify and analyse the local conventions (ibid.), for example notice how artists initially structure narratives of their artistic life in line with how they would when networking and writing applications.

My position in and relation to the field involved handling emotions. Fieldwork is charged with energy and emotions for all participants - including the anthropologist (Fadzillah 2004:43). This emotional charge is not necessarily a problem; being confronted or confused with, one's positionality as a subject in one's own field, gives the ethnographer the possibility

to use the full complexity of their experience, and see the world from the inside (Fadzillah 2004:43-44). My priority was making the informants feel safe, and often, my emotions were necessary to meet their emotions. I followed Oakley's encouragement for anthropologists to invest their identity and share their knowledge (cited in Davies, 2008:113), by providing stories from my own life when relevant or needed. This makes obvious that both interviewee and interviewer are involved in creating knowledge (Davies, 2008:108-109); The research process is a co-constructing of a world (Steier, 1991, cited in Davies, 2008:8). This world, we now enter.

5. The strange zone of performance

This chapter explores the value of artistic work. The informants describe how artistic practice provides a medium for expression, communication, and storytelling towards others, and entry to worlds of personal introspective images. Performance will here be understood as a *strange zone*, where the informants work with exploring the relation between imagination and physical body, driven by a need to connect inside and outside.

5.1 Relating inside and outside

Mona describes experiencing a separation in values between the professional field of concert dance⁵ and spiritual practices, making him want to work in a way where aspects of the two practices could meet:

In spirituality, everything was inwards. Where was the creativity? What about creating? Why was expressing, exploring, and sharing considered wrong in that world? You were never in relation. In [concert dance] you are only in relation. [...] everything is external and so much art is created with a product value. [...] I felt there was a need to be in relation, on the outside and inside, at the same time.

The drag artist Dionyx also describes working with inside-outside-relation: “Drag comes from an impulse. Something that needs to get out. It’s a concept I create in my head and need to materialize”. They love to create “moments of time to transport people into some space where it’s free to not be so serious”. One such space is the queer bar where they host quizzes. Dionyx, wearing a red glittery costume and long lashes, makes rounds around the room, tells us to befriend our neighbours, flirts for fun, improvises jokes. The quiz involves challenges. Dionyx challenges, supports, guides, and gives words of affirmation to people moving and doing things. To challenge and support, are tasks involved in love labour (Lynch, 2022:70). Dionyx’s drag quiz is, like love labour, a non-sustainable and unalienable practice, dependent on the people being present with each other here and now (a.a. 73). After the quiz, Dionyx begins to DJ and we dance. On my way home, I write in my fieldnotes: “To put on that costume and makeup, host a quiz, and DJ until 3 am is a REALLY HEAVY SHIFT”. Dionyx says they love it because they work for the community.

⁵ Concert dance, or theatre dance, are traditionally staged choreographic works, often performed by professional dance companies.

From late night to early morning. I watch Ellis and her colleague perform for children with comforting presence, clarity, and care. They build an obstacle course. I help hold a hula hoop for children to jump or crawl through, and feel a sense of purpose. We dance to bouncy music in a room full of balloons. I feel my body activates physical qualities a choreographer once told me to work with when performing for young audiences: being soft, responsive, and present. Performance, like love labour, involves the attentive work of listening (Lynch, 2022:70), and is a practice of care that requires “face-to-face, and sometimes hands-on contact” (a.a. 55). It is a moment of care. I remember attentively moving my hands with a glittering glove to create a visual universe of stars for a baby. I remember seeing the mother see her baby see the stars. I relate to Ellis' words on performing: “I believe art’s role is to give different experiences, and give humans tools to understand themselves and their surroundings.”

Ellis wants to *give* experiences and tools, Mona wants to be in integrated *relation*, and Dionyx works *for the community*. Saga feels she is a “good circus artist”, because she is “good” in relation to her colleagues and the audience. When talking about artistic work, the informants always describe being in relation. They say this work demands responsibility and openness. Mona describes he is responsible to invite and bring the audience with him: “An exploration requires a guide that’s aware of what [the performance] is.” William says responsibility is not about control. “When I’m performing, I have the most responsibility. But it’s dangerous to have everything predetermined. Everything is unwritten. I want to share something with you, but then what happens is up to us.”

Graeber writes that performances exist in a shared sphere of production, circulation and realisation (2001:78). Produced and consumed, gifted and enjoyed, simultaneously. This means performance, like William identifies, is an open-ended process, not a product with a predetermined value. Its element of ephemerality means no exchangeable visible conventional product remains after production/consumption has taken place (Lepecki, 2016:14, 15). It is hence ascribed a use value, and can be seen as unproductive and valueless (Lynch, 2022:56). My informants however, experience the process as a valuable gift given, and describe the production required. Ellis says that to give an experience, she must work with a method she calls the “clear image”, where she considers concrete actions to transform herself. “Adults would probably not know that the fundamental work is to find the rhythm of a subject, and then dance dance dance that rhythm”.

5.2 Imagining worlds

Many informants mention imagery, imagination, and fantasy, as necessary methods to connect with others in the artistic work of worldbuilding. By understanding how artists experience the production of performance, we will see why Mauss' theory of *The Gift* (1950) is applicable to understand the value of their work. According to Graeber, Mauss means that objects in gift economies become most valuable for embodying some human quality, such as the creative potential of human action or particular histories and identities (2001:211). One could say our imagination is what makes us human (Marx cited in Graeber, 2001:88). And indeed, imagination is a human quality, creative potential, and particular identity making performance valuable to performers and audiences. Dora describes herself to be...

...an imaginative person who sees an atmosphere or world. Through dance, I can express my ideas and fantasies, and really imagine myself in the world. Sometimes I imagine I'm on the moon and I'm some kind of alien, creature, or movement in space. Or, I'm a weather, or a storm, or in the forest. I'm some sort of complement that is not human, but another form in this world.

Dionyx imagines themselves as "more-than-human". They say they can not limit themselves to the human form, but that it takes too much production to explore everyday. Mona works with visualisation, by for example imagining connecting with the earth and the "vital life force that carries everything, keeps everything alive, and exists in the body as well as in the air". Dora's, Dionyx's, and Mona's expressions of shifting form by connecting to environments and forces, reminds me of what Deleuze and Guattari write of the schizophrenic connecting to machines out on a walk: "he is in the mountains, amid falling snowflakes [...]. Celestial machines, the stars or rainbows in the sky, alpine machines - all of them connected to those of his body" (1983:12). Dora uses her body in dance-work to connect to her imagination, to connect to other people: "When I work with people...to be able to connect to you...I usually think: What world am I entering now? What is the atmosphere and who am I with? To fully connect, this must be in the body."

William experiences that dance enables particularly strong connections, because it is a small universe in which he can expand. The regular and real world is too big and compressing to comprehend processes of connection, because there, it feels predecided what is considered valuable and how one is supposed to feel. William's experience sounds like Graeber's

recognition of the human inability to be aware of the social totality, and how humans solve this by creating a micro-totality (2001:250). In this micro-totality, “The larger social reality does not yet exist. All that is real [...] is the actor’s capacity to create it” (a.a. 251). Or, in William’s words: “what happens is up to us”. Performance, understood as a micro-totality, is a pivot between reality and imagination (ibid.), with potential to make a change.

5.3 Making change

Imagination is crucial for change. Imagination has the potential to critique and reproduce a different value-system than, for example, that of the current market (Graeber, 2001:88).

Similarly, care work and love labour can constitute a site of resistance, because care is a cultural residual whose workers absorb another set of values than those prescribed by neoliberal capitalism (Lynch, 2022:32). My informants have alternative values: inside-outside-relation of care, over external product value or individual healing, and responsibility and freedom, over control. These values are given temporary physical existence when acted upon in performance. We can better understand how imagination in performative artworks is a practice of critique, with Lepecki’s description of strange zones.

As “production of strangeness” (Lepecki, 2016:6), live art disciplines can undo the conditioning imposed on bodies from surveillance and control, by offering “strangely strange zones”, or “real zones of existence that opportunistic neoliberal capitalism really hates” (a.a. 3). Dance and live performance can realise resistance to the current social situation, because they have specific elements to experiment with. This involves a performance of affective work that fuses creativity and corporeality (a.a. 17). Affective work includes the physical body-work and personal investment Lynch identifies in care and love (2022:52,71).

Performance is also a practice of *scoring*⁶, which involves a constant negotiation of rules, agency, and surrender (Lepecki, 2016:15-16). With these elements, dance and performance can experiment with critiques of the contemporary conditions (Lepecki, 2016:18).

Graeber similarly describes how some media of value imply “all those principles of motion that shape the field in which they take on meaning”, sometimes in “*strange inverted forms*” (2001:259, my emphasis). A strange zone is a strange and inverted form. Deleuze & Guattari identify how art, by “introducing an element of dysfunction”, creates group-fantasies, where

⁶ “In the performing arts, we identify a score as a set of instructions, guidelines or tasks related to the creation of a performance that serves as the starting point for improvisation or as a communication tool for generating movement and action” (Franco & Clothilde Chernetich, 2026).

the production of desire is used to short circuit social production (1983:45). For Deleuze & Guattari, fantasy is always group-fantasy, because it is an expression derived from two machines connected to each other (a.a. 43). Two machines can here be read as either audience and performer, inside and outside, social reality and artistic micro-totality. Or, desire and the object of desire (a.a. 39) of performance.

Lepecki, Graeber, and Deleuze & Guattari all describe the informant's artistic work. Through the creative action of performance - this pivot between imagination and reality; this relation between inside and outside - change occurs. Graeber writes change can be significantly revolutionary if it is imposed not only on the value and flow of objects, but of people in the larger structure (2001:249). In the strange zone of performance, people are changed by being physically and emotionally moved by more-than-human or non-human forms. This is what happens when Ellis *gives* audiences tools for understanding, and when Dionyx, in their own words: "make[s] people get the stick out of their ass". Using imagination, they connect to alternative experiences that they feel the need to share by connecting to audiences. Taking on the responsibility and openness of a guide, they practice what can be called care work, love labour, or gift-giving, and reintegrate imagination into the social totality, generating change. Their experienced value of artistic work is hence in line with Graeber's definition of value as potential for action realised when shared.

The theory of *The Gift* has already been referenced, but before expanding on its relevance, we must understand what Ellis means when saying her fundamental work is taking on the rhythm of other subjects, and what this creative work implies for the person she might experience herself to be. Because, we can not understand the circulated values in a gift economy without understanding what processes create and dissolve the person (Graeber, 2001:167).

6. The production of a person

Here, I describe how my informants experience their “person” as a fluid body able to take on states of different context-dependent subjectivities. To illustrate the bodily machinery of this, I use terms from Deleuze & Guattari. I use the *body without organs* to describe flow, and *machines* to describe the production of subjects as passing states.

To repeat and develop: the body without organs is a “fluid and slippery” practice of flow (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983:27). It is a self-constructing milieu of experimentation that you always carry with you (a.a. 190-191). On this milieu, different machines operate; they connect to social machines that codify flows into subjects. A social machine can be neoliberal capitalism or a strange zone of performance. Codes are guiding rules, for example the norm of the nuclear family or movement scores⁷. Money is a kind of substitute code provided by capitalism (a.a. 47). The body without organs can escape certain social codes, by recognising alternative flows of desire (a.a. 3) But desire is in everything, including money (1987:192), and when instead connecting to this desire, a capitalist subject is created. Because the body without organs is fluid and the variation of machines endless, different subject-states are continuously produced. I call this production a *rhizomatic bricolage*, to emphasize the creativity, improvisation, and spontaneity that, together with desire, produces the artist/worker-person/body my informants experience.

6.1 Creating as a rhizomatic bricolage

We encountered the body without organs earlier in Mona's description of working with a vital life force that “exists in the body as well as in the air”. It also appears in Dora’s description of how her self “leaks” into the environment and into others, while the environment and others leak into her:

It seems like normal people think there is an end to the body, but to me, my body is everywhere. My body is the whole atmosphere, my body is everything I’m in. I’m touching the world, but the world is also touching me.

⁷ The definition of a movement score as a “set of instructions, guidelines or tasks”, that generates movements and actions in improvisation (Franco & Clothilde Chernetich, 2026), makes a perfect example of a code.

She asks questions: “What even is the body? What is it even to be outside oneself? Where is the beginning and where is the end?”. “A rhizome has no beginning or end”, Deleuze & Guattari would answer (1987:26). Dora asks herself: “Can we be everywhere?...I go crazy....”

Mona similarly gets “all weird in the head” when trying to understand what “really” is him. He says he can never know what he wants to say. But, he can explore what the body wants to do with the practice of “spontaneous movement”, where he follows the body without intention. Most informants similarly experience the body as something they follow and are, rather than have and control. Mona describes: “*I* am not the one doing [the movement]. I just let it happen”. Ellis says she *is* the body, not that she *has* a body. This connects to how “it is not “my” body without organs, instead the “me” is on it [...] changing in form” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:188). Since the body without organs is not by itself a functioning person, it is attached to machines, and can experience and experiment with what the temporal and spatial structure it lives in offers (a.a. 187). This process allows different codified subjects to pass through the body without organs as temporary states (1983:55).

Mona says he can not stop the patterns he carries. Instead, when practicing “spontaneous movement”, he plays with different states. The states can be “emotions like doubt, anger, or fear. But also experiences, situations, and characters. It’s like clowns work: very impulsively. This practice is so varied. There are many things to play with.” Patterns are codes; States are subjects. An impulsive work: a rhizomatic work. Without intention: a bricolage. Artists might be particularly prone to produce and use a rhizomatic bricolage. Deleuze & Guattari write “[t]he artist stores up his treasures so as to create an immediate explosion” (1983:45), which sounds like William's description of dancing: “When in movement, I pass through everything. A million images are produced, as an explosion of all my synapses, and then I can manipulate this explosion so it becomes something else, like a weird movement.”

Creating “a weird movement” is how William uses a rhizomatic bricolage process in the production of art. But most informants employ similar creative processes to handle their work and values in relation to social structures and conditions, including those imposed by neoliberalism. They activate rhizomatic bricolage behaviour to gather material available in their surroundings and manipulate it into something “weird” that works better, or at least as good as possible. I will now describe what this means in a material, spatial, temporal, and linguistic sense in the informants' lived life.

6.2 Scrambling codes

At a lecture on how to navigate the landscape of cultural policy in Sweden, the lecturer wants us to understand how the system is organised: “If you know what water you are in you can swim”. William says he notices patterns and social cues to be able to give “satisfiable” answers: “It works really well. You become a fucking adaptable human. [...] You know how to enter a context, how to behave and what to say, and what reaction you might get”. Deleuze & Guattari describe a similar process, as their schizophrenic “scrambles all the codes” (1983:49), by quickly shifting from one to the other, according to the questions asked him” (a.a. 27). The codes my informants scramble are those constructing boundaries in time, space, money, worker-identity, and relationships. They do so to make work-life align with their values, be comprehensible to others, or valuable to the market economy.

For baristas, the café job can be used as an office with free coffee. Homes are used as rehearsal studios. Work hours are used differently than the conventional 9 to 5. At a workshop on planning time and energy, an artist says: “We do have strong labour norms, but as creatives we already barely follow them, which means we have the freedom to make our own rules”. But this freedom of breaking rules can mean artists, like Dionyx, have a “brain [that] is working all the time”, leaving little separation between personal and professional spheres.

My informants share the fluidity Flisbäck identifies in women actors that make little difference between domestic and professional spheres (2006). Saga makes a phone-call to her injured colleague/friend, navigating how to be both a caring friend and a stressed colleague needing to know how to continue their circus project. Ellis’s relation to her colleague/friend Lisa⁸ have “no clear boundaries.” They “live very closely together without actually living together”. Ellis is Godmother to Lisa’s children. I additionally argue that when performing for the children of strangers, they are also engaging in a sphere simultaneously public and domestic, as they do the creative practice of love labour, producing people as human beings (Lynch, 2022:74). So does Mona on paternal leave. My fieldwork with him involves taking care of his daughter. When we have a music- and dance jam in the living room, I experience the value of dance work, but framed as care or domestic work, with personal, rather than professional, relations. I hold Mona’s daughter’s hands as we dance around. We invent this game of improvisation, where I shift between moving and stopping, depending on whether

⁸ “Lisa” is a pseudonym.

she shakes the maracas or not. Mona plays guitar, improvising a melody for the words from a songbook:

When all that counts is to win and get rich
 And nobody cares if you fall
 And when no eyes look at you with honesty
 So the dream freezes in your heart
 Then do not forget that love always believes in you
 So never give up. Never give up
 For the flowers they smile and the stars they see
 Never give up, Never give up
 (Di Leva, 2012, my translation).

An artist at the cultural hub says: “I worked hard and felt I accomplished something but my bank account was empty”. William says: “I am working so much, and yet nothing happens. [...] The amount of work I do is not equivalent to my pay.” They desire and recognize money as necessary to pay rent and eat food. But because they feel money does not represent their work, and maybe because it is a “code” not applicable to the whole social field (Deleuze & Guattari 1983:47), they rearrange money to enable other values. The priority is to make artistic work possible. Saga uses paid hours at her side job to work on her artistic projects. Dionyx appreciates how their side job income means they can do badly paid jobs that are worth it because they give visibility or new experiences.

6.3 Being and doing

Despite code-scrambling, most artists consider it “good” to separate work. But I notice the events at the cultural hub encourage artists to separate themselves from all work, while my informants describe how different aspects or amounts of themselves are active in different work. They separate work A from work B from work C, and their self is active to some extent in all of them, as a self able to both *be* and *do*. Some attempt to separate their everyday life from their working selves, but seem to do so *because* creative work is integrated with who they are. Most find they *are* their artistic selves, because they are body and creativity. They *do* other work/jobs that only engage specific parts or aspects of them. This relation to work, they find difficult to explain when questioned who they are, or what they do or work with.

These questions, Tom answers randomly. When a manager said “if you are an actor working at a café, you are a barista, not an actor”, Tom could not be bothered to explain that though he works as a barista, the “whole truth” includes that he is a dancer. Saga says a benefit of her side job being related to circus, is that she can say she works with circus full-time, without being questioned. Ellis will answer that she is a dance artist, “if someone asks what I work with, and I assume they are asking about who I *am*”. She uses different words to define different relations to her occupations. Artistic work is *work*, referring to a more concentrated and invested work, while her *job* is the LSS-home, because it “is more about doing a specific task; it is one job that I *do*.” Dora makes a similar difference. The café job is a thing she *does*, while she always *is* a dancer, since it is a role created “not from what you make money on, but from how you spend your life”.

Another work related to their person, is administrative work undertaken as an entrepreneurial subject. Like much sociological research shows (Karlsson & Gerber, 2025; Stenberg, 2002; V. Radermecker & Loots, 2025; Lindström, 2026), the entrepreneur is “a figure that neoliberalism wants to extend across the board to everyone, artists included” (Lazzarato, 2011:47, cited in Lepecki, 2016:9). Neoliberalism draws in cultural activities into the market in the name of competition, establishing a line between professionals and amateurs, and basing human worth on the individual’s place on the work/career ladder (Lynch, 2022:139). The workshop leader teaching artists how to “swim”, tells us market logic must be included in artistic projects to receive funding. Meaning, artists must adhere to neoliberal and capitalist values when writing applications with project plans (“according to the questions asked”).

Administrative work my informants find to be “cognitive work” and “verbal communication”. Ellis says that while dance involves communicating with her “whole” self, only a small part of her is active and involved in “admin” work. Mona says he likes to be practical and do things with his hands and body; “I don’t want the computer to be the main spot where I spend most of my time. It comes down to values and capacity.” In relation to administrative work, individuals must present selling points to stand out in the market (Lynch, 2022:139-140). Mona expresses he neither values the marketing needed to make dance work possible, and mentions an alternative:

It feels extremely tough that you are dependent on selling to live. Sometimes I don’t know if it’s worth it, to be like: “look at me” [...] This is my vulnerability. Because it feels extremely important to be and live with [my] values, but they make it less easy

to thrive. I want something else, but I don't quite know how, so I keep exploring how I can live sustainably. Does it mean I need to have another job sometimes? Okay then, maybe I will do that.

The precarious element of performance is enhanced by neoliberalism (Lepecki, 2016:15). Therefore, the informants will take side jobs to make artistic practice, and a life with the values discussed in chapter one, possible. But, they also speak of side jobs sometimes having value in themselves.

7. The normality of side jobs

This chapter describes that besides making artistic work possible, side jobs are experienced as valuable when artists can identify a social purpose, learn something new, or experience the shift in work mode as a break from the creativity of artistic work. Side jobs provide the informants with a valuable connection to normality but can make them feel different and difficult. While this chapter does not provide much analysis, its material must be presented to understand the following and last chapter.

7.1 Landing in reality

Like artistic work, side jobs are appreciated if experienced as a commitment to a larger purpose, which Fischer writes is the main non-material quality that constitutes a good life (2014:2). William mentions the function of handing out post to society. Service jobs, such as working at a café, are less prone to be experienced as purposeful. The strongest sense of purpose comes from working with caring for human needs. Ellis thinks working at the LSS-home is a “super important job”, because the care receivers need support and care:

We make a difference if they have a good life or not. If we lived in a dream world with basic income, we would also need to contribute to society in some way, and this job I have now would really be a community service I could do. Or plumbing, because clean water and a working sanitary network is important so we don't get sick and die.

Ellis also experiences another of Fischer's non-material qualities of a good life: that of realising aspiration and opportunities (2014:207). The LSS-home or doing plumbing are different environments that develop her as a human being; “Development is not the aim of the jobs, but a consequence from seeing other things, doing other work tasks, and seeing other people's life conditions.” These “other tasks” of care work include cooking food, feeding, showering, and cleaning (Lynch, 2022:70), and are undertaken with affection, commitment, attentiveness, like love labour (a.a. 74) Plumbing too, is in a sense a work taking care of people so they do not “get sick and die”. To perform care is a “relational good” that exist only when shared and lived with others (Donati, 2010, cited in Lynch, 2022:146), like performance art. It is produced and consumed simultaneously (Rosanvallon, 2013:272,

cited in Lynch, 2022:146); It has use value, the value of tending to human needs. This value, Ellis recognises as "We make a difference".

Similarly, Mona finds meaning in doing workshops with people "who have mental or physical difficulties, or are born with illnesses, and different kinds of hindrances. [...] It's beautiful to be in those processes and explore with people and see how much they appreciate it." Mona enjoys this work with people who are "completely normal people without any dance training." Many informants describe it as necessary to connect with what they call a "normal" side of society with "normal people", often through befriending colleagues at their side jobs or having partners who are not artists. Tom says his colleagues are "normal people", and values that the café job puts him in a different context, because:

I don't want everything to be about dance. I want friends who are not dancers and to realise there are other perspectives. It's good to find other things meaningful. I get distance and become more grounded.

Even if he did not need it economically, he could still do the café job sometimes to "get anchored in reality". He separates the café job from dance work, but mentions another dancer he used to work with, who would make everything about dance. He wanted to tell her: "It's okay to just stand here and make coffee." Ellis similarly separates dance from working at the LSS-home or with plumbing:

People propose to make a plumbing dance, haha, but I find that completely uninteresting. Others propose that I should dance at the LSS-home, but that is not the job. [...] and actually, when I have a lot to do, I find it kind of meditative to go to the job, follow the routines and be a bit closed off from everything else. It becomes a break, because everything is predictable and concrete all the time. I don't have to be creative or make any decisions. I just need to give this person food.

Though Saga appreciates that her circus-related side job allows her to say she is working with circus full time, she considers working with something different. She says it is good to meet people outside of the small "circus bubble"; she needs to feel she exists in the rest of the world. She thinks she could do a hospitality job, as it is something "you do here and now with the body. You go there, you work, you leave".

Lindström notes artists can experience side jobs as interruptions to their artistic career (2016). But, side jobs can also be experienced as valuable breaks from the artistic bubble, connecting

artists to predictability, concreteness, and normality. Despite sharing some elements and values with performance art, being precarious and care work, the side jobs are not strange zones. Instead, they pause fluidity and creativity, by involving concrete tasks and “normal people”. William gets annoyed when people do not understand that him taking breaks from dance does not mean he wants to quit. “Pausing is part of my process. Everything has to do with my dance...or with my life...everything is connected. It’s all part of the same thing, the thing being my life”. Dora thinks that because “dance and life are connected” and “artistic practice is who you are as a human”, she must experience other things. “Sometimes you have to distance yourself from the form of dance and just apply dance in life”. But, when these breaks mean “people don’t understand”, normality annoyingly reminds the artists of the difference between what they believe to be a good life, and “normal people”.

7.2 Feeling different

Tom describes this difference:

I feel I am somewhere else than my colleagues [at the café] in my attitude to life. Something is different and I can’t quite put my finger on it. It just feels like dancers carry themselves differently than normal people. I don’t place any value in that, but I feel I can’t quite relate to them in the same way. They are busy with other things and find other things, like love, important. They don’t understand what it’s like to operate as a dancer. They might ask: “So when will you be a professional dancer?” And I’m like: “I’m working. I’m getting there...I guess?” I get tired of explaining.

Dora also finds it difficult to explain herself and her world:

I often feel I’m in another world, and that can be difficult in normal situations. I feel different. I feel I have a desire to experience things in a way that others find excessive or unreasonable and don’t understand. Dancers might understand, because they work in similar ways with characters, worlds, and imaginations, and they work with their bodies, but a normal person will find this weird. [...] There is no right or wrong. I just see the world in one way, and they in another way. [...] But it’s quite demanding to always explain and prove yourself. When people keep asking what you are doing and why, after a while you begin to question: What is wrong with me? Since I think this life is reasonable?

Expressions of feeling misunderstood mainly come from the informants in their mid twenties. But there are other examples of how living a different work life can make social relations difficult. Ellis says it feels like she is always working when the rest of the world has time off. Sometimes she questions if it is possible to date someone working regular office hours, like her partner does. Vega says her boyfriend finds it difficult that she can never promise anything or give stability. But reprioritization is not an option, because she “seems to suffer from a need to run away from her conditions”. Ellis says: “Someone once told us to not do so much at the same time, but then we would get bored. We would miss our other worlds”.

8. The value of work

The expression “To suffer from a need” begins to reveal how “miss[ing] other worlds” can have negative consequences. This chapter describes how the freedom and potential of creative approaches can become a matter of exploitation, when combined with a willingness to work and desire to explore. The theory of *The Gift* is used to analyse the value of work inherent to both artistic work and side jobs.

8.1 “I want to do a good job”

Dora describes the challenging aspect of dancing as beautiful: “I think it’s beautiful to see someone loving dance so much they give their all [...] dancing til exhaustion”. William says he “loves the struggle” but that this attitude might be a coping mechanism. Saga notes how the pressure on artists to appear successful is one reason they work a lot. However, coping mechanisms, appearances, or not, I gather my informants find value in working, doing a good job, and giving their all - physically, mentally, and emotionally. Loving to struggle and being able to creatively adjust, artists can function well in what Lepecki calls “the age of neoliberal performance” (Lepecki, 2016:5). Dancers are “ideal labourers in an idealized creative economy [...], valued for their creativity, flexibility, and absence of material needs” (Randy Martin, 2012:66, cited in Lepecki, 2016:17). Vega says that every company should hire a dancer, “because they will work”. She will work, because:

[Dance] is attractive because it’s hard, or people say it’s hard. Everything society classifies as unique or difficult, I’ve always wanted to do. I like to feel I’ve conquered something. I want to be the best at what I do.

Tom wants to be the best at the café: “I have this image that I want to become the best at this. I want to do a good job, because then it becomes meaningful.” The pride he takes in this, is however absent when he comes home Sunday evening after a chaotic shift. He compares his effort to others:

I notice other people don’t give a fuck; they do the bare minimum. But I can’t? But maybe I should? [...] Why am I putting up with this for such a little pay? [...] I guess I’m a performance person. I know I do more than some of the people higher up than me.

When I visit Ellis at the LSS group home, I notice a similar frustration. Ellis and her colleagues believe they work harder and are more knowledgeable of care work, than the people higher up. They take responsibility, make choices, and do tasks that otherwise would have them waiting on the manager's decision - a decision they feel would not even be based on the lived reality of the job or the needs of the care receivers, because the manager is never present at the home. The visiting culture pedagogue⁹ have surprisingly little knowledge of the people living at the home or how to communicate with them. When I ask Ellis about this, she expresses her frustration. But, she says she becomes frustrated with the organisation of every side job, "So I guess this is just me?". Ellis's dance colleague confirms: "Ellis wants to do a good job. She wants high quality".

The "business world would crash if employees only did what they were explicitly told to do" (Fischer, 2014:15). In artistic fields, not getting paid for the work put in is stated as a truism. In a workshop on navigating culture policy, self-volunteering is included in the artist's budget. Work taking place outside of contracts or conventional work boundaries is in a sense voluntarily given, an is "in some respect a gift" that can be exploited (Lynch, 2022:72). Exploitation is a risk of open-ended reciprocal gift-giving (Graeber, 2001:225). Gift-giving, I will arrive at, after describing the risk of wanting to work hard and valuing experience, if needs and limits are neglected.

8.2 "Change, change, change, explore", "more and more and more"

William describes a dance project where working hard without getting paid was worth it, because he learned so much and felt moments like: "This I have never experienced before! My body is like: Use me; here you go. The potential, the possibility that something can happen, is higher. It gets bigger and bigger and bigger." He feels his body takes him on "more and newer trips". Tom's dream is to travel with dance: "I love how dance takes me places in the world [...]. I love to explore new places, to expand my views and have a sense of freedom. A nomadic lifestyle". To move physically or spatially (or geographically in the example of Tom's travelling), is to experience the desire of the body without organs to "keep moving, even in place, never stop moving, motionless voyage", the "nomadism as the movement" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:185), and the life of the rhizome: "be quick, even when standing

⁹ The culture pedagogue is hired at the LSS-home to organise creative and artistic activities. To be employed as a culture pedagogue, one must be an educated pedagogue. The position gives a higher salary than the position Ellis has as a carer.

still [...] never plant!” (a.a. 26). Vega says she is “addicted to the flow”, and that a problem her boyfriend finds difficult is that...

...I never know where or how long I will be. I don't really live anywhere. I live from my suitcase, and move around and exist in so many different environments and contexts. You can never land anywhere. [...] and I never know when it will end.

Maybe there is no end. Tom says:

Dance is a world without an end. It expands all the time. Dance gives me so many perspectives and angles; you can twist it however. There is always more and more and more...

But he brings the trip to a halt, adding: “At the same time...the body has its limits”.

The tendencies of my informants to travel in body and space, are similar to what Deleuze & Guattari write of their schizophrenic deliberately seeking out “the very limit of capitalism” (1983:49). Capitalism itself tends to draw near its limit, and might “with all its flows [...] dispatch itself straight to the moon” (a.a. 48). This tendency “is carried further and further” (ibid.), like William's “bigger and bigger” and Tom's “more and more and more”. Artistic practice and modern life are both experienced to expand endlessly and spin so fast! Both are fluid, creative, and always full of desire, because “desire causes the current to flow” (a.a. 16). But, when desire decodes and deterritorializes (takes away the ground), drawing nearer and nearer the limit, warning signs arise.

Vega's sign that she is coming close to a limit, is when it becomes difficult to keep things apart. It makes sense then, that artists consider separation a good strategy to manage their rhizomatic bricolage behaviour. Vega describes her behaviour as “throwing balls randomly in all directions”, and recognises how there “is a limit to how much one can push and be uncomfortable. I just have 24 hours in a day. [...] I know I'm living a life that is not sustainable long term.”

Mona, who is older than Vega, confirms that the lifestyle of desire is unsustainable: “I did improvisation and dance tasks where you change, change, change, explore. I stood on my head a lot. [...] I really wanted to test myself.” He got many injuries from pushing the body in dance and yoga:

Some bodies can handle it, but most bodies break. But I liked it. It was good until a certain limit, where it was uncomfortable, but not dangerous. [...] But I've stopped seeing the value of pushing myself. I've seen too many injuries and too much destruction. I've seen people push themselves to their limits all the time, because they are trying to prove something to themselves or others.

William tells me about working with a choreographer with a “very able body, who maybe didn't understand that the majority of people can't twist or bend like he”. William's job as a professional dancer hired for a short-term project, was “to make it possible [...] You can't waste any time or cause trouble. You're meant to function here and now”. Determined to perform 100%, while asked to “twist and turn”, led to him getting a herniated disk injury:

Then I ruined everything. Everything got fucked up, because my body definitely said no constantly. The potential was not there. The only response was: emergency and the possibility of a dangerous situation.

Dora began to hear mean voices in her head when working too many jobs. Tom describes having believed he is above not only the 9 to 5 format, but also the 24 h reality and the need to sleep. Vega says the “constant strife” will make you “completely bonkers”. So, when the body without organs explores, asking: “Is it really so sad and dangerous to be fed up with seeing with your eyes [...] Why not walk on your head?” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:175). A response is: the desire to be upside down; to twist and turn into new subject-forms, non-human-forms, or more-than-human-forms; to push, test and give it all, might become not only what William calls a coping mechanism, but a non-sustainable survival strategy to keep functioning while proving something. Lynch identifies the dangers of neoliberalism, as competition and its status anxieties can accelerate risky and harmful behaviour to avoid negative evaluations and boost sense of well-being” (2022:141). I consider these dangers of pushing limits because, like Bain & McLean points out, framing artists as more adaptable and resilient, as if unaffected by the political and economic context, undermines the need for collective activist action (2012:98).

8.3 “That's like killing life”

The political and economic context does affect the artists; their “labour is inseparable from the conditions of the world” (Lepecki, 2016:12). William notes:

It's hard to go through the rest of life with the same fluidity as in dance. Everyone is encouraging us to escape from everyday life [...]. I would love to do so if I had money and safety. But it's scary to be impulsive when you are economically unstable. This other ideal [of escape as a reward for hard work] doesn't work. It's bullshit.

Money and safety is needed to make other worlds possible. To travel to the moon without ground to land is precarious and scary. As we have seen, side jobs provide some ground, safety, money and an “anchor in reality”, making artistic work possible. But ironically, while side jobs are not strange zones, they share aspects with artistic work that make them precarious and undervalued in neoliberal capitalism. Some of Lepecki's elements of performance apply; My informant's side jobs are precarious, ephemeral, corporeal, involve negotiation of disciplining rules and agency, and a performance of affective labour (2016:14-17). The work is commodified care work with use value (Lynch, 2022:18), and do not result in a representative pay for the energy the informants experience they invest.

Handling multiple precarious, undervalued, and underpaid work makes a fluid and adjustable self-production useful but exploitable. The informants experience themselves as fragmented and fluid, and use creative skills of code-scrambling to neglect or live with believed values. They do so in relation to an entrepreneurial neoliberal logic that both encourages and exploits fluidity, creativity, and *deire*, which means a rhizomatic bricolage can move and stretch so far limits are reached.

Limits are of time and the body. The human body can not be in two places at the same time, and like care work, performance art and hospitality and care-related side jobs require physical presence and action on and in time (Lynch, 2022:76-77). All artists conceive of multiple job holding as negative if the jobs give too little control over work hours (Lindström Sol 2016:44). No matter how grounding, purposeful, and full of care a side job is - the main reason for holding it is to provide enough income and stability to open up space, energy, and time for artistic work. If the side job takes too much energy, time, and life, it will not be experienced as worthwhile. Dionyx loves their side job, but “time is so consuming” and they want more time to explore and fail artistically. Dora says it is impossible to be creative after a café shift, because “It takes an extreme amount of energy. [...] I'm completely exhausted afterward, all emptied out physically and mentally”. Vega expresses:

If the job that is supposed to make dancing possible, instead takes time that is supposed to go to dance, it has gone wrong. That would be dangerous. Then my dance would be dead.

“Death” and “life” are words many informants use to express value. Tom says that working full time at the café would be like “killing life”, and that dance once “died” when it became auto-pilot. Vega finds working at a salad bar “brain dead” because she repeats the same script to every customer. Dora hates how at the café she is “this good girl that has to smile and serve and follow the same script everyday [...] like a robot without feelings. [...] Going to the café does not make me feel human”. The robot appears also in Mona's description of working in a kitchen:

When you stand in line and prep and prep forever, after a while, you feel like a robot. Then you think: But this is not good. Why the hell am I standing here? Your neck hurts, your feet hurt. But when it's nice, it's like wow. That's when you are in relation, you're in a team, collaborating.

Also William enjoys teamwork in the mornings at the post office, when they don't talk, but do everything coordinated together. In coordinated flow, predictability becomes presence instead of alienation. Death becomes life, as the work is experienced in relation. One is in flow, but not a strange one, a grounded one. There is predictability, but no autopilot, script, or robot. Or fog. Vega feels like she is in a fog at the salad bar. “It feels like [life] is dragged out from me. I want to die.” She wants work that lets her connect to her community, “meet a person”, and ask herself “how much life can I give this person?”

8.4 “How much life can I give?”

“Life needed”, Mona says, feeding his daughter through her nasogastric tube. Then he feeds her homemade tofu. “It was so nice to make the tofu yesterday. I got really happy, but also really tired. But it was a good kind of tired, a satisfied tired, like: yeah, good, now I have worked”. This good and satisfying tiredness is different from Tom's exhaustion after a stressful shift at the café. The difference is not necessarily the context. As we have seen, some values can be experienced both in artistic work and side jobs, “domestic” work and “professional” work. Dionyx says their side job and drag entails similar work; they work for queer people and queer kids, “only in different formats and amounts of makeup.” The relation affirms the need of both work: “When I was a queer kid I wished I had a queer adult to guide

me, and now I can do that for other kids.” The value of work appears dependent on how the worker connects both to the process of producing the work’s “material”, and to another person in giving the created material.

We have arrived at the comparison to gift-giving. I employ Graeber’s definition of open reciprocity (2001) and Mauss theory of *The Gift* (1950), to present a final analysis of how the value of work is produced and experienced by my informants.

As mentioned, there can appear to exist a paradox between personal life projects and the project of society. Graeber writes that this is because when we imagine society as a social contract, we tend to do so in market terms (2001:230). He means that with the help of Mauss, we can reimagine the notion of a contract, by alternatively considering the social structure of gift economies. Gift-giving is not opposite to market logic, because all forms of exchange are reciprocal (a.a. 225). But, a crucial difference is that market economies have an ideal of complete detachment to the processes that constitute it, denying that all “economic” activity is also a creation of the person (a.a. 211). This detachment generates Vega’s “fog” and Dora not feeling “like a human”. Gift economies instead recognise how created and circulated things are entangled with personal identities (ibid.).

Gift economies sustain the obligation to give, receive, and return gifts, because “to make a gift out of something to someone is to make a present of some part of oneself” (Mauss, 1950:12). As we have seen, most of my informants consider artistic practice to be “who you are as a human”, which implies *imagination*, *relation*, and *body* is who they are. And indeed, one might say it is “*imaginings* that make us human” (Marx, cited in Graeber, 2001:88, emphasis mine). Lynch writes the significance of the *relational* self, is only ignored because the neoliberal non-relational model has become norm (2022:21,115). With imagination, relation, and the whole body/self, being invested in artistic work, this “gift” is experienced most valuable. Administrative work is experience as least valuable as it is not work of the body or physically relational. Side jobs are more valuable if they involve working with the body, and the relationality of answering a human need.

Furthermore, performance can be understood as a practice of gift-giving - open reciprocity - also because it has the elements of *ephemerality*, *performativity*, *corporeality*, and performance of *affective work*. Its *ephemerality*, making dance disappear as soon as it happens, proposes an alternative economy based on “the promise of an incalculable return without profit”, is possible (Lepecki, 2016:14-15). Its *performativity* includes an invisible

contract that puts subjects and bodies into motion (a.a. 16-17). The performer has (or is) a *corporeal* body affected by desire and imagination, and performs *affective work* (a.a. 15-17). Corporeality and affective work, constitute the investment of life that creates the moral obligation to give, receive, and return; “The promise of an incalculable return” and “an invisible contract” implies the active reciprocity is non-obvious, absent, far away...

It is invisible and uncalculable. Artistic, service, and care work produce no conventional exchange value product, so the inherent reciprocity is different from market exchange. The reciprocity is open, so “[t]o give a gift is to transfer something without any immediate return, or guarantee that there will ever be one” (Graeber, 2001:225). The lack of product is due to the ephemerality of performance; making performance a semi-absent source demanding the dance to return again and again (Lepecki, 2016:17). This need for creation to be repeated, is the condition ascribing use value to care work. Semi-absent ephemerality is then an element of some side jobs. Absence, Graeber includes in his theory of value, as a quality inherent to all objects (2001:259). “The object in question might be anything [...] a ritual performance, [...] a game”, and have “a looming absence of its own” (ibid.). This absence inherent to all objects, though sometimes perceived as a lack, is a powerful “reflection of one’s own potential for action - one’s creative energies” (ibid). Dora recognises this, saying artistic practice is a “reflection” of “who you are as a human”. Performance, ephemeral absence, is pure potential, power, and practice. It can never hold value stuck in its temporary micrototality, which makes clear how desire for its object actually is the value of potential for human action and creation, reflected back to the participating audience.

The audience is needed. Graeber writes that the power of creative potential only can manifest as value in coordination with others (a.a. 260). Coordination is connection, through the reciprocity of gift-giving. The object given is not inactive, but “invested with life” (Mauss, 1950:13). And, Graeber writes, when one gives away one’s life, one should be guaranteed life in return (2001:162). Vega wants work where she can “give life” to someone. Is life given in return? Dora says dance gives her life and makes the precarity of her lifestyle worthwhile. However, a feeling of reciprocity is not enough; one needs to pay rent, and the informants consider the presented countergift an inadequate one, since it does not represent their invested work. They hence feel deprived of qualities constitutive of a good life, such as cultural capital of respect and necessary material goods. But as long as they are not alienated or injured, the informants deem it worthwhile.

So, to circle back to the politician - is it worthwhile because it is *fun*? William says:

There's this idea that dance is happy and fun, while other work is bad, but no, it's all part of everything. Work isn't supposed to always be fun. A nurse is also not always happy to go to work. [...] For me, the negative aspects are just an interesting part of the process. If I complain over something, it means I'm invested and that the work has value.

Dora thinks having fun is feeling *all* feelings. Tom considers his café job fun, because "it is fun to be in a new context and have a community that feels like family". The fun of dance, he describes as "a feeling in the body and a release in the brain that makes me feel more free, which is pleasurable".

Like *love labour*, performance is expressed as both work and pleasure (Lynch, 2022:70). Graeber believes a theory of value must connect to a theory of pleasure, claiming Marx and Mauss provide hints of this (2001:260). Marx with his idea of an unalienated labour in which creativity becomes pleasure by being embedded in social relations (ibid.); Mauss in writing about "the joy of public giving; the pleasure in generous expenditure on the arts, in hospitality, and in the private or public festival" (1950:69). Relationality is pleasure. So, Graeber proposes, when formulating a theory on value, why not use the image of a pleasurable experience like "making love, or being at a concert or playing a game?" (2001:260). I read this as confirmation my comparison to love labour is relevant.

All this indicates that even if the neoliberal notion of choice is applied, the life project is not a question of "money or fun" for artists with side jobs. The work has value if it realises desire for connections - connections enabling them to be invested, feel free, feel all feelings, and have a community. Value is hence experienced as the *pleasure* of relational creative process and production, rather than a desired quality inherent to produced objects. Since coordination with others is necessary to realise this value of creative energies, value can be seen as the "way actions become meaningful to the actors by being placed in some larger social whole, real or imaginary" (Graeber, 2001:254). Exploring this "way" is the life project of my informants, guiding how they create themselves and their lives, despite that this way is, like Dora says, "the most crooked road, with the steepest hills."

9. Conclusion and discussion

Answering the questions

Artistic work has value to the informants as the work of imagination and relation. Working with connections between bodies and worlds, inside and outside, they create strange zones and micro-totalities of alternative values, and feel they generate social change when giving the work to audiences.

Because most performance artists experience their bodies as their whole selves, and they conceive of artistic work as more “invested work”, they often experience personal life and artistic work as connected. Creative approaches are hence not only applied in the production of art, but also in the production of themselves as persons living in neoliberal capitalism. Experiencing a *body without organs* that connects to *machines*, and produces subjects as temporary states, they use a *rhizomatic bricolage* to creatively scramble the codes provided by social surroundings, to make their work-life valuable, functional, and understandable for themselves and others.

Since creativity is constantly demanded, side jobs can be experienced as grounding breaks connecting artists to normality, making artistic work possible. The jobs are experienced as most valuable if they involve caring for human needs and provide new perspectives.

However, “normality” can also make the informants feel different. Furthermore, since the side jobs are precarious and underpaid, they ambivalently make the artist’s work-life both more and less doable.

Artists with side jobs, who feel a need to live by certain values, want to do a good job, and are able to creatively adjust, have a tendency to overwork themselves into “dangerous situations”. Because artistic work, service, and care-related side jobs involve an aspect of gift-giving with open (or unanswered) reciprocity, they can be exploited. I gather that creativity and the desire to give, is both useful and risky. Imagination can be a flight from the predictability of normal life, but also a tool to ignore danger, by neglecting and dissociating from human needs. The desire to be in other worlds can be used and experienced as a pleasurable and interesting adventure, but without support, it becomes a coping mechanism of “loving the struggle”, to push limits of time, space, and body.

Despite the value of their work being translated into (little or no) money, and sometimes

leading to problems in health and relationships, the artists continue. They continue by connecting to normality through side jobs and imaginative worlds through artistic work, recognising how both work contexts are cultural residuals, but valuable as practices producing society. To answer the question of **how artists with side jobs experience and create the value of their work in relation to neoliberal capitalism** - I conclude they experience and create the value of their work by recognising it as the work of connecting and contributing to society, “giving life”, producing the reflection of creative potential and the human capacities for action, that make all objects valuable. To an extent, they value working in different formats: to both do needed labour in normal life - like making and giving food, and imagine necessary dreams in strange zones - making and giving art. In relation to neoliberal capitalism, they both resist and adhere to market logic and values, by using the same creative production process active in artistic work. They use and produce a rhizomatic bricolage, sometimes to flourish and sometimes to survive, while dreaming about how much further they could flourish if they did not have to spend so much time, energy, and creativity surviving.

Answering the needs

I have contributed to the need of research on how (performance) artists with side jobs experience and create the value of work in relation to neoliberal capitalism. I have slightly filled the gap of research that considers how creative production processes are relational, embodied, and involve potential and risk. By using the fieldwork methods of interviews and participant observation, and selecting informants that are dance, drag, and circus artists with non-artistic side jobs, I have centered peripheral experiences and questioned an ideal of artistic success that prevails despite its incompatibility with the reality conditioned by current Swedish cultural politics and policy. My choice of theories has enabled an exploration of the production of a person, rather than identity, and of process, rather than product, with a slight emphasis on value, rather than values (although they of course are inseparable from each other). Methods and theories combined, have resulted in arguments grounded in the lived experience of creative practice and work in the social reality of neoliberal capitalism.

In doing this, I have contributed with another contemporary and creative perspective to an anthropological theory of value. This perspective further extends Mauss’ canonical theory of gift-giving to contemporary performance art and side jobs, proposing these contexts have elements that make them relevant spheres to consider. Furthermore, by pointing out how

artistic work and care work only can continue to produce society if eventually reciprocated in necessary material and social qualities of a good life, I contribute to establishing connections between anthropology, performance art, and cultural politics and policy. If, like the theories used state, theories on value must consider imagination, dreams, desire, and pleasure, as well as relationality, care, and needs, I argue that an optimal place to begin is in the lived experience of combining artistic work and service or care-related side jobs.

I hence propose for future research to employ similar material, methods, and theories, but to apply a more intersectional perspective on how class, ethnicity, race, and gender matters. It is also possible to include artists/workers not considered here. I myself, in the beginning, wanted to meet artists working within the club and rave scene, as this is a cultural sphere with little economical support and normative cultural capital. I believe it would reveal further paradoxical complexity and surprise. When I told a DJ: “Isn’t it so nice to let go of the idea of how life is supposed to be lived?”, she just laughed: “Oh, that I let go of long ago!”

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