New Economy
Artists Space
June 15–July 28, 2007
Curated by João Ribas

Chantal Akerman
Kader Attia
Ursula Biemann
Mike Bouchet
Heath Bunting
Los Carpinteros
Carolina Caycedo
Daniel Dewar & Grégory Gicquel
Harun Farocki
Eva and Franco Mattes a.k.a.
0100101110101101.ORG
Cildo Meireles
Henrik Plenge Jakobsen
Oliver Ressler
Joe Scanlan
Santiago Sierra
Rirkrit Tiravanija
Milica Tomic
Donelle Woolford
“The basic economic resource—the means of production,’ to use the economists’ term—is no longer capital, nor natural resources, nor ‘labor’…. Value is now created by ‘productivity’ and ‘innovation,’ both applications of knowledge to work.”

—Peter Drucker

*Post-Capitalist Society*

The term “New Economy” emerged after the Cold War to define the postindustrial economic order. As a knowledge-driven form of post-Fordist capitalism originating in the 1950s, it heralded the productive power of information and communication technology as the new engine of global markets, ‘flexible accumulation’ serving as the catalyst for an economic model concerned with the production, processing, and distribution of information, and favoring ideas, services, and sociability over inert commodities and industrial labor. The ‘new economy’ and the corresponding expansion of broad non-industrial sectors of Western nations gave rise to a transnational market in which, according to *(Wired)* magazine in 1998, “people work with their brains instead of their hands,” and where “innovation is more important than mass production.”

As Daniel Bell had presaged decades earlier, the central role knowledge production and capital mobility played in this information economy focused on development in the ‘intangible’ sectors of production, as an ascendant ‘creative class’ leveraged the capacity of information through technology. By the mid-1990s, large-scale investment in information and communications media had supposedly fixed economic fluctuations and led to a steady pattern of economic growth, hitting fever-pitch in the Dot-com boom.

The dominant economic model became that of the circulation of disembodied entities, such as information, derivatives, copyright, and social relationships, and the eventual assimilation of such technological utopianism throughout the entire global marketplace. Industrial economies gave way to social productivity and circulation of electronic capital, the informatisation of production expanding just as readily throughout the technology sector as through the remnants of the ‘matter’ industry, that is, from new media technologies to automobile manufacturing.

Immaterial production thus began to assert a central role in global markets, as the economics of information shaped even non-immaterial aspects of production (such as the ‘flexibilization’ of labor). The U.S. economy, for example, began to demassify in the post-Cold War era, with the information and service-based sector accounting for a large percentage of the total economy (30% of the workforce by some statistics). According to a major study conducted in 2004, the US information sector “grew about 46% in 1967 to about 56% in 1992, and to 63% in 1997.”

While only accounting for a fraction of the total global labor force and thus concentrated geopolitically, this new composition of ‘knowledge-based’ labor exerted a hegemony over all other forms of production through a process of subsumption: just as capital had to ‘industrialize’ in the 19th century, it has to ‘informationalize’ today. In the words of Walter Wriston, a former chairman of Citigroup, “when the world’s most precious resource is immaterial, the economic doctrines, social structures, and political systems that evolved in a world devoted to the service of matter become rapidly ill suited to cope with the new situation.”

This lay behind Robert Reich’s argument, as secretary of labor under President Bill Clinton, for the assimilation of manufacturing jobs into the creative economy through the development of new skills. His case was seemingly oblivious to the fact that a new specialized sector might not absorb such displaced mass labor (thereby creating a ‘relative surplus population’ of the chronically underemployed). The goal was to educate a knowledgeable, rather than standardized, work force to act as the catalyst of economic growth through a redefinition of labor and the social character of work.

Yet as capital seemingly dematerialized, a correlative ‘remapping’ of labor occurred, as so-called industrial economies looked to downsizing and structural underemployment in response to increasing automation and flexibilization of labor. The result was an outsourcing phenomenon, a kind of spatial reorganization of capital flows: industrial economies shifted their manufacturing sector to areas with cheaper wage labor, and concentrated domestic investment on non-industrial and non-agricultural sectors. Concomitant with that spatial organization of information capitalism, was the rise of the ‘socialized’ worker, a mutation of abstract labor resulting from the decentralization of production and an emphasis on communication, creativity, and innovation.

As information technology theorist Shalini Venturelli has argued, “a nation without a vibrant creative labor force of artists, writers, designers, scriptwriters, playwrights, painters, and musicians,” would not possess the necessary base to succeed in this new economic model. Creative enterprise has become a determining economic factor: according to the Intellectual Property Association, its related sectors are estimated to be worth “$360 billion a year, making them more valuable than automobiles, agriculture, or aerospace.”

But if the knowledge and information-based sectors of major economies are increasingly valued as the driving force of economic development, and work is increasingly governed by creativity and social productivity, what is the role of artistic practice in this political economy? Are artists acting as migrant laborers who produce ‘artisanalized’ information? Is studio practice a localized form of resistance to immaterial capitalism?

In the era of information as capital, artistic labor seems placed in a specific political position in terms of new economy ideology and new social structures defining the global labor market. *(New Economy)* surveys the nature of artistic practice in this post-Fordist era, while also focusing on artists who are dealing with the social conditions and redefinitions of labor implicit in the information-based model of postindustrial economies.
One of the most significant issues is seen in the rise of migrant labor policy debates in Europe and the U.S. While the idea of a common European market implies a borderless circulation of capital—in the ‘neo-medievalist’ Europe of decentralized power and transnational governance—borders themselves are in fact contested in order to stem the flow of migrant labor displaced by the ‘new economy.’ Yet through the proliferation of art fairs, biennials, and the transnational character of artistic production today, artists seem to function increasingly as part of a knowledge-labor sector that flows across neoliberal borders.

Is there any condition for criticality or political agency when artists are positioned directly in contrast to the marginal elements of the body politic, afforded rights, such as that of circulation, denied to other political subjects? Can this position serve as the basis for a politicized practice? In this sense, the transnational political character of artistic practice today might perpetuate a pattern of social organization that is increasing the disparity between the ‘first’ and ‘developing’ worlds along a division of labor.

Renowned filmmaker Chantal Akerman’s From The Other Side (2002) focuses on Mexican migrants waiting to cross over illegally into neighboring Arizona (thanks to surveillance technology perfected for the Gulf War, the INS has closed off most entry points into the U.S., leaving mostly mountains and deserts as pathways). Akerman’s film addresses the economic dependence of the U.S. on such undocumented labor and the disparities and dire reality of the supposed ‘frictionless’ economy. Kader Attia’s illegal sweatshop, used to produce his own branded ‘Hallal’ goods, similarly makes visible the conditions of labor that lie behind the functioning economy of many subaltern populations.

If practice itself becomes a way to reconfigure artistic labor, and mobility and social production are embraced as potentially socially progressive, this is because contemporary art practice has in fact long been driven by information, from conceptualism and the dematerialization of the art object to relational aesthetics and new media art. One of the most prescient uses of this relationship is the appropriation of the e-commerce model by Heath Bunting several years before the Paypal system of electronic payment. Skirt—The Internet Beggar (1995) functions as a website through which visitors can donate funds using a Visa or Mastercard. Ursula Biemann’s video Writing Desire (2000) looks at the role such information and communication technology plays in sex work on the internet, and on the exploitation of women from the third to the first world through the gaze of an internet browser.

In Workers Leaving the Factory (1995) filmmaker Harun Farocki addresses the factory as a social body, and as the source of organization of production in society, through its unique presence in the history of film. ‘Taking its subject matter from the eponymous Lumière brothers’ film of 1895, widely considered the first work of cinema ever publicly screened, Farocki’s film essay traces the social development of industrialization and the nostalgic presence of the factory in cinema as a symptom of the ongoing disappearance of industrial labor in the 20th century.

The nature of labor is also the source of the collective work of Havana-based artists Los Carpinteros and of French duo Daniel Dewar and Grégory Gicquel. In their work, artistic practice is a means to call on older forms of production—including the medium of drawing for Los Carpinteros—to assert that the role of creative labor in the new economy is as significant to artistic production as the shift from craftsman to inspired artist in 15th-century Italy. By drawing on the artist’s studio as a site of almost artisanal production, the work of Dewar & Gicquel seems to propose a kind of resistance to the conditions of labor that lie behind the functioning economy of many subaltern populations.

The nature of labor is also the source of the collective work of Havana-based artists Los Carpinteros and of French duo Daniel Dewar and Grégory Gicquel. In their work, artistic practice is a means to call on older forms of production—including the medium of drawing for Los Carpinteros—to assert that the role of creative labor in the new economy is as significant to artistic production as the shift from craftsman to inspired artist in 15th-century Italy. By drawing on the artist’s studio as a site of almost artisanal production, the work of Dewar & Gicquel seems to propose a kind of resistance to the conditions of labor that lie behind the functioning economy of many subaltern populations.

Like logic is taken to a brilliantly absurd endgame in Mike Bouchet’s My COLA Lite (2004), an artist-produced, homemade diet soda. Joe Scanlan’s fictional African-American artist Donelle Woolfard, who creates wood-based cubist paintings in a re-appropriated style, and Scanlan’s own sculptural work, function as a method to disseminate information and to reconfigure the character and distribution of artistic labor itself.

Away from the production model of artistic practice, the nomadic nature of post-studio work and the use of manual labor to produce art through instruction or exploitation reveal a specific position of the artist within the social body of knowledge-workers (reflected in the ‘artist as corporation’ phenomenon of the 1990s). From diametrically opposed ends, both Santiago Sierra and Rirkrit Tiravanija confront this condition, either by outright politicized manipulation of divisions of labor—as in the rounding up of beggars in Mexico City in Sierra’s 100 Indigentes (2005)—or the creation of conditions that highlight an increasing commodification of social relationships over democratic processes, seen in Tiravanija’s work, such as Untitled (Artificial Flavor) (1991).

Karl Marx diagnosed the transformation of the capitalist mode of production reflected in this practice in the Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie of 1858:

Labor no longer appears so much to be included within the production process; rather, the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator to the production process itself. What holds for machinery holds likewise for the combination of human activities and the development of human intercourse.

Henrik Plenge Jakobsen’s ‘relaunch’ of Marx’s Das Kapital and Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations proposes a reassessment of classic economic doctrines within substantive changes in production and social life. The relaunch—in fact nothing more than promotional material generated for exhibition—also calls into question notions of branding and the increasing emphasis on the regulation of intellectual property rights in monopolistic information economies, as information goods become...
reproducible at virtually no cost, and since knowledge leads to profit through copyright. Milica Tomic’s Reading Capital (2005) puts Marx’s text in the mouths of wealthy Texans, re-examining the premise of Marxist political economy within a model of capitalist wealth and exchange that is itself in contention. In contrast, Austrian artist Oliver Ressler uses the format of public posters and billboards to suggest tenets and principles on which an alternative system to the existing capitalist economy could be based.

One such principle still functioning is a barter economy, which has survived the agricultural, industrial, and postindustrial ages, continuing to this day on the internet. Carolina Caycedo’s Day to Day (2006) revolves around such a dynamic of exchange without money. By subsisting only on the services and goods she could trade for others, Caycedo effects a redistribution and conservation of knowledge and commodities, breaking apart, as much relevant artistic practice today does, some of the essential conditions of production in a global informational economy.

—João Ribas

Chantal Akerman

De l’autre côté / From the Other Side
2002, 103 min.
Courtesy AMIP Multimedia, Paris
Kader Attia  
*Sweatshop*
2005  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Christian Nagel, Berlin

Ursula Biemann  
*Writing Desire*
2000, 23 minutes, Color, VHS  
Courtesy the artist
Mike Bouchet

*My Cola LITE*

2004, Homemade diet cola, glass bottles, photocopied hand affixed paper labels.

Courtesy Maccarone, New York

Heath Bunting

*Skint—The Internet Beggar*

1995
Los Carpinteros

Jardín Francés
2007, wc / paper
64 × 128"
 Courtesy Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

Carolina Caycedo

Day to Day 2 (I took Pedro [right in photo] to pick up his broken bike from Williamsburg to Sunset Park in Brooklyn, in exchange for internet access whenever I needed it)
2006, digital c-print, 10 ½ × 22"

Day to Day 11 (I moved Amy’s stuff from Fort Green in Brooklyn to El Barrio. She gave me a camera, books, plastic dishes, toys, clothes, curtains and 6gm of cannabis sativa)
2006, digital c-print, 10 ½ × 22"
 Courtesy Galería Comercial, San Juan, Puerto Rico
Daniel Dewar & Grégory Gicquel
*Handcrafted BMX Frames*
2004, A37 tubes
*Handmade Deck, Truck and Wheels*
2002, Rubber, wood, stainless steel
Courtesy Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris

Harun Farocki
*Workers Leaving the Factory*
1995, video, b/w & color, 36 min.
Courtesy Harun Farocki
Filmproduktion
Eva & Franco Mattes  
a.k.a. 0100101110101101.ORG

Nothing Is Real, Everything Is Possible
2007, posters and postcards of ongoing synthetic performance in Second Life, a re-enactment of Joseph Beuys’ 7000 Oaks
Courtesy the artists

Cildo Meireles

Zero Dollar
1978–1984, Offset litho on paper
Courtesy Galerie Lelong, New York
Imagine a decentralized system of social order in which all persons affected by political decisions are allowed to make decisions in a grassroots democratic way, based on the principle of consensus.

Imagine a society in which people have a say in decisions in proportion to the degree that they are affected.
Santiago Sierra

100 Indigentes, Plaza del Estudiante, 20, México D.F., México.
December 2005
Courtesy the artist and Galería Helga de Alvear, Madrid

Rirkrit Tiravanija

Untitled 1991 (Artificial Flavor)
1991, Two suitcases, flavored potato chips, lots of people
Courtesy Gavin Brown’s Enterprise, New York

1991, Two suitcases, flavored potato chips, lots of people
Courtesy Gavin Brown’s Enterprise, New York
Milica Tomic

*Reading Capital*
2004, production stills
Courtesy Charim Galerie, Vienna

Donelle Woolford

*Desktop Publishing*
*Still Life With Hanging Lamp*
2007, Wood scraps, latex paint, screws, cardboard
Courtesy the artist

*Reading Capital*

*Still Life With Hanging Lamp*
Selected Solo Exhibitions
2004 "Selfportrait/Alter Ego" kamel halle, Brussels, Belgium 
2001 "La Familia de Bruxelles" Edição n°252, 2007; 02, 2007;...
Henrik Plenge Jakobsen
Born 1967 in Copenhagen, Denmark.
Lives in Copenhagen.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

Selected Bibliography

Oliver Rosler

Education
Arts Residency, Banff Centre for the Arts, Banff, Canada, 1998; University for Applied Arts, Vienna, 1995.

Selected Exhibitions

Selected Bibliography
Artists Space would like to thank João Ribas for his vision and enthusiasm; the artists for their work and generosity; Aurélie Pourret at Audiovisual Multimedia International Production, Paris; Joaquim Garcia at Galeria Helga de Alvear, Madrid; Laura Mitterand at Gavin Brown’s enterprise, New York; Boško Buskovic at Joan Kelly Gallery, New York; Alexandra Schillinger at Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris; Ellen Langan at Maccarone, New York; Miryam Charim and Kurt Kladler at Charim Galerie, Vienna; Mark Hughes at Galerie Lelong, New York; Francisco Rovira Rull at Galeria Comercial, San Juan; Adam Michaels and Prem Krishnamurthy for their design; and Jessica Heywood for her research efforts.

Exhibitions at Artists Space are funded, in part, by Altria Group, Inc.; Harriet Ames Charitable Trust; Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation; Florence V. Burden Foundation, CAMPARI; Carnegie Corporation Inc.; Con Edison; Consulate General of the Netherlands; Cowles Charitable Trust; The Danilson Foundation; Danish Council; Elaine Dannheisser Foundation; Debs Foundation; Easton Foundation; Foundation for Contemporary Arts; Gesso Foundation; Stephen A. and Diana L. Goldberg Foundation; Herman Goldman Foundation; The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation; The Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts; Greenwich Collection, Ltd.; Elise Jaffe + Jeffrey Brown; Jerome Foundation; JetBlue Airways; Virginia W. Kettering Fund; JP Morgan Chase; MAT Charitable Foundation, Mondraan Foundation, Betty Parsons Foundation; Puffin Foundation Ltd.; Starry Night Fund of the Tides Foundation; Strypemond Foundation; Trust for Mutual Understanding; Verizon Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; and with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a State Agency; the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; and the National Endowment for the Arts.

New Economy was made possible, in part, by Etant Donnés.