



Art and Housing: The Private Connection

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Art and the culture of property

The paradox that contemporary art presents to the concept of housing is not one of content but of form. Contemporary art, like contemporary housing, is conceptually, psychologically, and economically, premised on ownership. The continuing economic crisis—dominant globally at the time of writing and one that has created and continues to create in its wake horrific but sophisticated forms of inequality—is based to a large extent on the invention of precarious speculative financial devices that exploited (and continue to exploit) the cultural and economic impulse towards house ownership, most recognizable in the form of the sub-prime mortgage fiasco that precipitated the downfall of banks in the US and the UK. (Perhaps here to call this an “impulse” is to fall into the trap of naturalization so common in the semantic and psychic armoury of neo-liberalism: to want to own a house is not a natural impulse, but one produced through the deep sedimentation of liberal cultures of personal freedom and rights to private space, holding sway historically, and now geographically, over increasing areas of the globe.)

Art too, is based on ownership of privatized spaces of individuality: its fabled DNA, encouraged consistently through the concept of “studio practice” in contemporary arts schools, the commissioning and selection of artists by curators, and the individualistically inscribed reputational value intrinsic to that selection across the world, is structured around the production of autonomized subject positions offering innovation and difference through various technical and imaginative forms that are, conceptually and literally, the private property of their authors.¹ This is quite apart from the processes of exclusive ownership that propel art’s market (of which more later) but bears close relation



to conceptions of (and contemporary politics of) intellectual property exploitation for financial gain. Yet this is despite the often trumpeted return to collaboration and cooperation within contemporary art: all collaboration, if developed through the system of art and done by people who call themselves “artists” (as opposed to merely users or interest groups), returns a relation to representative singularity, in the gallery, at the biennial, as a special guest within the community: a singularized and privatized subject represented in the form of an image or object to buy and sell (and from “Anonymous” to “The Bernadette Corporation,” forms of retreat from authorship only become highly fetishized in market terms). This presents a paradox to any artistic engagement with the social—particularly forms of sociality that either contain, or propose the invention of, non-ownership or shared ownership, and such is the case with social housing.

This property-based link between housing and art goes against the grain of more sympathetic narratives in which housing is perceived as a social necessity—or right—and in which artists are creative innovators within programmes and situations of user emancipation and organization. It by no means discounts the still vibrant and spectacular artistic gesture as a representational critique (Gordon Matta Clark’s *Splitting* is a brilliant affront to house ownership, making the house literally uninhabitable; Constant’s *New Babylon* is a monument to democratic colonization, Mike Kelley’s *Mobile Homestead* a deeply affecting mourning for lost belonging) but recognizes these works’ value as related to their making of object-image privacy. In this text I would like to examine this link of property ownership between the house-object and the art-object and ask, exactly how are any of them (able to be) social?

Thinking art and housing together

Initially, it would seem impossible to think about art and housing together as social constructions except in the most reductive terms. Artists have long been inventive in their appreciation of condemned, unsafe, short-life (particularly) urban spaces to house themselves and build their work; artists have also often been ingenious in organizing and designing new communal and collective ways to live and work together. On the other hand their cultural capital is easily marketized, and their flexible ethos proves useful when it is time to move on. Artists’ lives are

1 An abiding feature of recent and contemporary art concerns the invention of extremely sophisticated—and aesthetically intriguing—methods of protecting ownership and ownership transfer rights for work that is instruction-based, performance-based, ephemeral, site-based, etc. For a history of this see Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge: MIT, 2004). For a critical appraisal of art and intellectual property see Jamie Stapleton, *Art, Intellectual Property and the Knowledge Economy*, published online at: www.jaimestapleton.net Accessed March 20, 2012. For more general information on copyleft strategies see Creative Commons: <http://creativecommons.org/> Accessed March 20, 2012.

romanticized as transitory and unfixed. These affective properties are reinforced by the artistic production cycle, based as it is on commission, opportunity, spontaneity, and with its nerve wracking dependency on the whim of the collector and the commissioner. In their instantiation of unregulated life, they seem a long way from any discussion of housing provision as a basic and undramatic social necessity across other walks of life (although perhaps the whim of the collector is as unsettling as the knock of the *rentier*). Indeed, the very performance of precarity either carried out by, or fantasized through, the life of artists, would seem to diametrically oppose any politics of social housing provision. The permanence of ongoing necessity—its basis in the facts of daily life—would suggest that any argument made in favor of, for instance, the political sense of investing in social housing as a long term commitment to equal access to democratically decided amenities provision, runs counter to the psychic, cultural and, in the end, economically organized needs of artists.

There is another direct link between art and housing. Often in recent creative rebrandings of urban space artists have been employed to decorate and ease into place marketized housing schemes; often curators have collaborated with artists and architects on temporary building projects that, whilst aimed in principle at a newly distributive model of roles and relationships between initiators and “users,” in fact maintain and even reinforce the separation of these roles. Artists are deemed to be armed with a flexibility that resists, or has no need of, any permanent lodging (both practically and in fantasy). More mundane requirements of stability and everyday legibility sit at odds with this.

Perhaps this is best exemplified through artists’ use of short-life housing in inner cities in the mid to late 1960s onwards, most famously in New York. In London in the 1970s, in a formal relationship with local borough councils, organizations (that later became ACME and SPACE Studios, for example), developed unique one-off partnerships in which they would convince the council to allow them access to empty and soon to be demolished (“short-life”) housing, on the guarantee that the artists would leave when demolition day arrived. In return, they agreed extremely low rents and the right to transform the living spaces internally in order to make suitable studio spaces. The pragmatics of this concept—soon to be rolled out on a far larger and more secure basis as the organizations became more bureaucratic and more



skilled at making relationships with property developers—are clearly at odds with day-to-day housing needs. The story of the connection between this inventive and practical manoeuvre on the part of a few shrewd art school graduates and gentrification is now well known; the ACME website currently boasts a quote from The Mayor’s Cultural Strategy (2011): “Artists have contributed to the international reputation of the City Fringe and East End as an artistic center ... playing a key role in the cultural and social regeneration of neighborhoods.”² Yet it is not simply their role in gentrification, with its paradox of provision and division, that draws art close to (the dissolution of) social housing, nor the modes through which artists’ life styles and practices resemble forms of precarious living that mimic the reality of many people who would not choose to live in this way if they had a choice. It is also the concept of ownership at the basis of art’s economy and its stark contrast to what I would call the need for “property-lessness,” or a lack of ownership, at the heart of economics and culture.³

Panic on the streets of London

Interviewed in the *Social Europe Journal* in mid August 2011, the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman was asked if the UK’s summer riots were in large part caused by the ghettoization of people in British council estates. Bauman’s response exactly describes the political basis of, and rationale for, my concern to draw together the economics of housing, its privatization, and the privatization of subjectivity evident in many areas, not least the art world. Noting the evident relationship between the Government’s withdrawal of commitment to social housing provision (in the UK, “council” housing) and wider questions of social spatial belonging he said:

- 2 www.acme.org.uk/ Accessed March 27, 2012.
- 3 In evidence of artists’ use of short-life housing turning sour, in 1993 Claremont Road, London E11, a road on which an established community of artists (among others) lived, was compulsorily purchased along with a huge swath of East London for the building of a new motorway link road, the M11. This became the site of an extremely successfully organized anti-road campaign (though not successful enough to stop the road). See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M11_link_road_protest for a thorough history, and http://republicart.net/disc/hybridresistance/hamm01_en.htm for a report that connects Reclaim the Streets to a history of artistic activism. Both accessed March 31, 2012.

Successive British governments stopped building “council estates” a long time ago. They left the spatial distribution of population, complete with its troubles and problems, entirely to the market forces. Condensations of dis-privileged and deprived people in certain areas of the city, not much differently from the case of the favelas, is not guided by social policies, but by the prices of housing, while being aided and abetted by the tendency of the better-off sections of urban dwellers to lock themselves up, away from the city troubles, in the so-called “gated communities.” Segregation and polarization in the cities is today the result of a free and politically uncontrolled play of market forces; if the state policy makes its contribution, then [it does so] only in the form of the governmental refusal to be bothered with the responsibility for human welfare and its decision to “contract it out” to private capital.⁴

The riots in London, Manchester, Birmingham and elsewhere in the UK in the summer of 2011 were not organized by articulate and collectivized activists and protesters, yet they were equal in political importance to those occupations of Wall Street, the London Stock Exchange and the Amsterdam Beurs, as well as many other places, that began in the autumn of the same year. What struck many commentators was the fact that, when asked why they were looting and burning their own neighborhoods, the rioters did not respond with clear anti-government or anti-consumerist statements, rather they did not express themselves verbally, but did so through the actions of destruction aimed at raiding local shops and through the goods that they were taking: hi-definition TVs, branded trainers, cigarettes, alcohol, and soft drinks, etc. (i.e. luxury goods and goods of immediate gratification). Mirroring a poverty-stricken version of the antagonistic and public display of excessive wealth accumulation by bankers left uncorrected in the wake of the credit crisis, this riot was recognized by Bauman as “a revolt of

4 Zygmunt Bauman, “Interview—Zygmunt Bauman on the UK Riots” *The Social Europe Journal*, August 15, 2011. www.social-europe.eu/2011/08/interview-zygmunt-bauman-on-the-uk-riots/ Accessed September 15, 2011.

frustrated consumers” and “the mutiny of the humiliated.”

As Bauman realizes, a bucolic time of neighborhood is long since past (if in fact it ever existed) and with it the rosy view of social housing as an idealized community bereft of antagonism, competition and contradiction. Yet Bauman, like other commentators, recognizes the centrality of housing provision in a debate about the behavior of young poor as well as opportunistic urbanites. The complex bricolage of aspiration and degradation at large in many inner city areas, plays out patch by patch. Income levels swing enormously, bringing proximate the high visibility of financial accumulation wrought through gentrification, sometimes on the same street, where absolute poverty rubs shoulders with affluence, mimicking, at local level, the image of a financial market relentlessly gaining through the same transnational fiscal politics that produce catastrophic global poverty. The damage wrought by such capitalism in inner cities, as elsewhere, does not simply affect the quantity and quality of cheap housing provision for those unable to pay, but assaults the very core of the idea of its provision. Young people, in the UK in the summer of 2011, not only demonstrated physically that we live in a world of private privilege in which their rights to civic space are increasingly eroded and any commitment they might feel towards their community is undermined, but, in the form of their riots, acted out that privatization with the destructive energy produced by its psychic affects.

The fact that the 2011 riots in the UK were inarticulate has been picked up in many quarters, often, by the right wing press and by many politicians (including many on the Left), to bemoan the undeserving nature of a generation of people brought up on benefits and without respect for themselves or others (pointedly, without respect for other people’s property).⁵ Slavoj Žižek called the incidents a “zero-degree protest, a violent action demanding nothing.” Asking “[w]hat should the poor do? What *can* they do?” in the context of austerity brought about by banks that are then not punished, he continues;

5 For a good example of Left(ish) criticism of the riots which focuses on correcting youth behavior, see David Lammy, *Out of the Ashes: Britain After the Riots* (London: Guardian Books, 2011). Lammy was the Labour Party MP for Tottenham at the time of the riots; Tottenham was the first site of rioting.

As with the car burnings in the Paris banlieues in 2005, the UK rioters had no message to deliver. ... This is why it is difficult to conceive of the UK rioters in Marxist terms, as an instance of the emergence of the revolutionary subject; they fit much better the Hegelian notion of the “rabble,” those outside organized social space, who can express their discontent only through “irrational” outbursts of destructive violence—what Hegel called “abstract negativity.” ... On British streets during the unrest, what we saw was not men reduced to “beasts,” but the stripped-down form of the “beast” produced by capitalist ideology.⁶

Such a capitalist ideology is based on the construction of surplus value through, amongst other types of ownership, property ownership. At base is an ontology of objects that are marked through their ownership, through their destination as owned (“commodities”), and through their value transformation through ownership. These objects may be those looted by rioters in London or Manchester, or they might be objects produced for the art market by flexible and hospitable artists. David Harvey explains the process simply:

Landlords collect rent because the land and properties they own are scarce resources. Rentiers make money from royalties and intellectual property rights. Asset traders swap titles (to stocks and shares for example), debts and contracts (including insurance) for a profit.⁷

Since, as Harvey reminds us, capitalism is not a thing but a process, in order to thrive it must continue to flourish through new mechanisms for growth and is only frustrated by the imposition of limits. An historical example of attempts to impose limits is Keynesian capitalism, through which benefits made through capital were redistributed within the boundaries

6 Slavoj Žižek, “Shoplifters of the World Unite,” *London Review of Books*, (London: LRB, 2011). See www.lrb.co.uk/2011/08/19/slavoj-zizek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite Accessed September 15, 2011.
7 David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2011), 40.

of nation state and used to invest in such ideas as the welfare state. However, such an investment—in worker’s housing, health and education, with a commitment to wage negotiation through worker’s representation—does not produce the requisite instability for capitalism to function at optimum profit, thus undermining the simple goal of all capital.

[O]nce we have abandoned the idea that there is a need to put a floor on the economy’s overall level of demand, then it follows that job protections and other social welfare programmes no longer have any justification as they did within the Keynesian framework, as a tool for promoting stability. Rather, welfare programmes only contribute to the employment problem by maintaining workers’ wage demands at artificially high levels. Hence, under neo-liberalism, we return to the pre-Keynesian idea that social welfare can be justified only on grounds of public charity.⁸

We need to understand the concept of social housing not as a charitable concept (the provision of housing for those who are too unfortunate or “too lazy” to find jobs), but as a political construction within a wider economic debate. As such, on the one hand the provision of housing based on means-testing maintains social division and props up a Keynesian model of “fair” capitalism, in which mechanisms of profit-making are tied to the necessity to maintain certain standards within the producing classes, including supporting workers when they are out of work; on the other, it is an equitable ideological aim to be instituted within any socialist democracy. Post-Keynesian (neo-liberal) economics suggests otherwise: that social housing (just as health and education) must be privatized in order to promote indebtedness and thus allow for the increase in the invention of speculative devices (such as sub-prime mortgage lending) at the same time maintaining a divisive politics of charitable donation within a governmental regime.

Different forms of subservience are clearly marked here, both capitalist, one “leashed,” the other “unleashed,” to

8 Robert Pollin, “Resurrection of the Rentier,” *New Left Review*, issue 46 (July/August 2007): 147.



use Andrew Glyn's term.⁹ Speculation, risk, and the build-up of increasingly precipitous financial devices structured into daily life, cost-cutting (otherwise known as unemployment), the globalization of trade and labor, all contribute to the basic contradiction placing "locatedness" and fixity against non-fixed, deterritorialized and speculative accounts of housing. This contradiction produces the anger that propels people in UK's inner cities to destroy property, at once mindlessly, like Hegel's beasts, but also as a pointed retort to excessive object ownership in the flexible phantasmagoria of global capital. If artists and hedge-fund managers are able to promote an idea of virtual and precarious ownership on the basis of their cognitive and/or financialized capital, then the UK looters of 2011 are *in fact* lacking in ownership; property-less. Not simply because they do not own their house, but they have no rights to ownership—of their city, of their territory.

From social welfare to the (art) market

Robert Pollin, reviewing Glyn's book, points to basic contradictions in maintaining (the politics of) a welfare state system within neo-liberal capitalism: slow economic growth trends in the OECD result in reduced tax income and downwards wage pressure throughout the globalized labor market. What is the point of maintaining a welfare state system if what it does is suppress profit by making people too comfortable? In addition he points to the reliance on major donations to political parties, where "a most likely scenario is that effective political forces would become, on the contrary, increasingly aligned against welfare state intervention."¹⁰

Increasingly, we are thus reminded that a house is not simply a home, not a place for sociability and communication, but an economic—and thus speculative—machine. We are also reminded on a consistent basis that a house is an individual—and thus individually financialized—unit rather than a cooperative, collective or shared amenity: in this way the privatization of our life space matches the general privatization of our intellect. Thus,

9 See Andrew Glyn, *Capitalism Unleashed: Finance, Globalization, and Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

10 Pollin, *op.cit.*, 151.

the idea of "social" housing—of a house as a fundamental and therefore basic building block of civic life built at a communal scale—has been replaced by an owned and privatized object of speculation—just like, in fact, an art object.

Contemporary art, like a house (including, increasingly, social housing), is also an economic and speculative machine, and this despite the many well-designed, often collaborative and user-friendly artistic projects that attempt to intervene directly into the politics of housing. Both fields are directly affected by their marketization, both struggle to safeguard their autonomy within a general field of material and knowledge production. But whilst social housing has become or is becoming privatized following in the footsteps of its highly lucrative partners in the private sector, art's putative engagement with the social has always been made in relation to its double privatization: that rendered through its fact as a private market-directed object and that rendered through the method of privatization endemic in its individualized and autonomized process of production and reception.

Artistic, architectural and curatorial initiatives over the past five decades have variously depicted and intervened in the unevenly developing condition of social privatization, including in the field of housing, with mixed results. On the one hand, exemplifying a romanticized ideal of nomadic homelessness and/or urbane aestheticization, on the other developing discrete practical interventions in particular communities and situations. Artists, architects, planners, and curators house spaces for social activity in its widest sense—from city-scale community commissions to temporary shelters for small performances and invisible acts of citizenship. A language of interdisciplinarity ("border-crossing") and social commitment ("participation") is utilized in many artistic and curatorial projects. Yet the same initiatives often fall prey to temporal and flexible, market-friendly ideals about the lives and long-term needs of potential users. The political mechanics of provision are neither sustainable nor realistic, particularly in comparison with the very real crisis in housing or any other provision caused by contemporary political disengagements with the idea of social provision. And whilst the same disengagement from the general social provision affecting housing is affecting contemporary art (state funding for culture, where it ever existed, is also being withdrawn), not only could the effects be said to operate on different scales, but

on the mechanisms of survival. Often the terms of privatization and individual ownership upon which neo-liberalism relies are precisely the terms through which art is produced.

In Northern Europe and, to a lesser extent, North America, versions of the welfare state supported a certain stasis within the articulation of art's role within society. In this scenario much, but by no means all, art was funded indirectly by the taxpayer, to produce a variety of social benefits that ranged from autonomous aesthetic engagement to community inclusion. However, over the past decades the terms have slowly—but violently—shifted. If the welfare state art model was confusing—on the one hand promoting an “arm's length” principle of arts funding in which no artist should be seen to be instrumentalized, and on the other proposing art as a common and shared social good with vague but generally cohesive benefits—then the capitalized model blows such niceties out of the water. Not only should artists not expect the (ever-diminishing) state to support its role, but museums and galleries must understand that their survival depends on collaboration with the private sector. Now, more clearly than ever in the West (and without interruption in other parts of the globe), if an artist wants to make a project on a local housing estate, she is most likely to have to go to the commercial housing sector to secure funding. The space between commercial and state sector housing provision is, of course, also diminishing, making such collaborations vastly more complex on fiscal—and political—terms: most UK social housing, for example, is now delivered through commercial collaboration or initiative. When Housing Associations now plan new developments, they must sell off the best-appointed apartments on the private market in order to subsidize lower rents or prices on the rest.

Within the geopolitics of its distribution, the welfare state, its funding policies, and its treatment of artistic and creative activity as a separate-but-connected domain from social life, produced many ideas that were good in many ways: a political commitment to equality of access to social support, free access to museums, cultural funding, a national health service, etc. Yet it also produced certain patterns and typologies of action in the public domain (reliance, entitlements, consensualizations). In the field of art this has become particularly apparent as people and organizations struggle to stay afloat in the new regime of selective privatization. Art's assumed and singularized autonomy from the



rest of the field of social production, so long defended by artists, curators and commissioners, was, as a product of modernism, supported by the welfare state for many decades. Now that state support for the arts is receding rapidly, a contradiction is set in place: the very independence produced through modernism, with its strong argument in favor of autonomy as a principal of art's social relation—meaning that art's indirectly affective (rather than directly political) properties *are* its sociality—is now the factor that keeps art afloat economically, even as some of its actors struggle to resolve the political contradictions they now face.

In an article tracing the history of the rise of art investment as an alternative asset class, from the Mei Moses Art Index to the present,¹¹ Andrea Fraser writes incisively about the politics of the art world's involvement in—and reification of—increasing inequality caused by neo-liberal capitalism. Analysing what she calls “a successful culture war that has effectively indemnified class hierarchy and privilege with educational and cultural capital, rather than economic capital,” Fraser says of the current cuts to arts funding in Europe and the non-existent public arts budget in the US:

□ The pain of cuts to cultural budgets is hard to compare to the impoverishment inflicted on millions by mass foreclosures and job loss; the bankruptcy of pension plans, cuts in public sector wages, in healthcare, in support for the unemployed, for students; with steep increases in the cost of education, etc. Anyway we can always turn to HNWIs, who continue to privatize profits at pre-crisis rates. And as our survey of Top Collectors shows, many of our patrons are actively working to preserve the political and financial system that will keep their wealth and inequality growing for decades to come. ... How can we continue to rationalize our participation in this economy?¹²

□ She continues, “Let curators and critics and art historians as well as artists withdraw their cultural capital from this market.”

11 See the Mei Moses® Fine Art Index at the art investment advisory site: www.artasanasset.com/main/Accessed March 20, 2012.

12 Andrea Fraser, “L'1%, C'est Moi,” *Texte zur Kunst*, issue 83 (September 2011): 122.

At the very least, we must begin to evaluate whether artworks fulfil, or fail to fulfil, political or critical claims on the level of their social and economic conditions. We must insist that what art works *are* economically centrally determines what they *mean* socially and also artistically.”¹³

This is, in my view, not only true of what art works mean economically in terms of their participation within cycles of cultural capital accumulation, but also in their claims to autonomous and individualized meaning-production. This is linked to art’s value—not set, but always speculative.

The inherent values of art are entirely unregulated and it is this that fuels the art market, along with the competitive nature of its speculators and the obscurity of its primary market (and in this sense the art market is very like any other capital production—its completely unregulated nature is in fact more pliable than most). An inherent set of flexible determinants are often presumed to set the value of an artwork, these determinants produced from within the milieu of art itself and distributed via milieu-supportive people and organizations—curators, art schools, critics, prizes judged by these people, etc. In contemporary times, even more than in previous periods, these criteria are not assessments of the use of materials (paint, film, wood, etc.), the distinction of discipline (sculpture, painting, film-making etc.), nor the mastery of technique (life-like representation, fine detail etc.), but rather, the original, innovative, critical contemporaneity of the artwork itself. This mechanism proposes the value of all art, whether the work in question is an obscure, inaccessible, and ephemeral piece, or one taken directly from studio-factory to dealer’s backroom. All art value is linked in a network of reputational making, and in this sense it is both profoundly social—it’s value is made through social-professional networks—and profoundly anti-social; elite. Further, just like the revenue the rentier capitalist makes from “pure relational distribution,” the art object’s value is based on scarcity and uniqueness.¹⁴ In the framework of



cognitive capitalism, where the borders between rent and profit are broken down, “the role of rent not only is a mode of collecting the wealth generated by labor, but also constitutes a mechanism of de-socialization of the common and of political, spatial, and socio-economic segmentations of labor power inextricably.”¹⁵ Contemporary art, to borrow Carlo Vercellone’s phrase regarding the “Art of Rent,” “no longer has any understandable or recognizable relation to any process of production.”¹⁶

How might we imagine house-objects and art-objects functioning differently, unhinged from their participation in the uneven circulation of capital? In her book on Russian Constructivism, *Imagine No Possessions*, Christina Kiaer quotes Aleksander Rodchenko writing from Paris in 1925, “Our things in our hands must be equals, comrades, and not these black and mournful slaves as they are here.” She writes persuasively of the history of the period, just before and during the first stage of Stalin’s New Economic Programme, as artists’ and designers’ attempted to liberate objects—possessions—from their status as commodities in order to bring into production what she describes as “socialist objects.” Whilst Kiaer’s general view is that Constructivism failed to write this concept into the development of Marxism, thus rendering their experiments in theater and fabric design (for example) merely tendentious (to use Walter Benjamin’s term), there is within this idea of the object a tool that might be useful in thinking about housing. If housing were to be understood as a socialist object—not a slave to capital but rather a tool of emancipation, not a possession—then the financial crisis may never have taken place. This sounds naïve and obvious on one level, but it is the basic tenet of what we have come to know as social housing and it is a description, containing a commitment, that we have lost—and one that art, in its current ontological state, is at pains to reinvest. Kiaer further states, “Capitalism, in its honing of the commodity form to [fetish] desire, has a profound weapon that socialism cannot simply cede to. The Constructivist counterproposal to this weapon is the object-as-

13 *Ibid.*, 124.

14 Suhail Malik and Andrea Phillips, “Tainted Love: Art’s Ethos and Capitalization,” in *Contemporary Art and its Commercial Markets: A Report on Current Conditions and Future Scenarios*, eds. Maria Lind & Olav Velthuis (Berlin: Sternberg, 2012).

15 Carlo Vercellone, “The New Articulation of Wages, Rent, and Profit in Cognitive Capitalism,” www.generation-online.org/c/fc_rent2.htm Accessed March 12, 2012.

16 *Ibid.*

comrade.”¹⁷ In these terms, the solution is simple: we need to learn to value social housing as an infinitely more productive form than private housing. We need to return the concept of profit as social profit. What then of the private art object and its value—what of its future? If, in the end, Constructivists such as Rodchenko, Popova, and Stepanova, played around the edges of production—tolerated in certain parts of factories, producing images and objects of an already skewed Marxism that would go on pretty quickly to become political fetishes—how different were they from contemporary artists?

Rodchenko and his comrades were builders—romantically, builders of ideas as well as objects; practically, builders of objects that transferred between ontological zones: props in a political process, unique art objects, everyday utilities, etc. Popova and Stepanova’s fabrics, produced in the new socialist factories of the USSR, were in effect, always luxury goods, marketed paradoxically with the language of high fashion, as Kiaer attests. The house, in its private instantiation, is a luxury good. In neo-liberal democracies, the highest esteem a person can accumulate is in the building—and designing—of his or her own house, own chateau, own manor. This is no better exemplified than in the building of a private museum, whereby stratospherically rich collectors buy in the services of world-renowned architects to make jewel-box landmarks that are then opened to the public. Here, the house is an artwork, a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, totally owned, both psychically and economically. The artist is a self-builder. The rich man is a self-builder. The yachts at Venice, with their open invitations for cocktails to socially engaged artists, facilitate the perfect and paradoxical nexus of new “social” housing. The poor can only stand and stare.



17 Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge: MIT, 2005), 1.