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## The artwork and its documentation in the age of post-internet media.

### Introduction :

After a first-degree year at art school, I began searching for some experience outside my self-expression in the studio. Following a couple of free and paid jobs as an artist's assistant, I ended up as a multi-task technician for the Zabdulowicz art collection. This mainly consisted of stacking artworks on shelves, screwing in and out wooden transport boxes in a large storage hall. It was my first confrontation of the artwork as a commodity where I could feel a complicit relation with the artwork in its circuit of exchange. I was quickly realising the compromise brought by this job: it was giving me the financial support for a lifestyle which that fuelled the production material to be stored and organised at my daily job. I started to question the art practice that I engaged as an art student, and asked myself why artists seems to be so seductive and attractive for so many people, questioning what the artist eats, how the artist dresses, where they were born, how he grew up, their sexuality and couldn't see else than an erotic combination toward the collector, and just started to be frustrated. I began to feel resistant towards being a content producer and started to create an emphasis on the condition and format of how the content is received and valued. My practice needed to operate within the systems of content valuation itself.

By all means an important reference for the project concerning this essay is the « Monte Carlo Bond » experiment by Marcel Duchamp in 1924 at the gambling table of Monte Carlo. He created bonds for financing a system of wagering on roulette that he was developing. The company he formed needed the issuance of 30 shares at an assigned value of 500 fr each. Even though the work is deliberately humorous the bond was intended to be a legal document, all copies of bond bearing the signature "M.Duchamp" were to be considered a official documents, entitling their owners to collect shares in the dividends of their company. The bond feature a diagrammatic, overhead view of a roulette table, crowned at the summit by a portrait of Duchamp taken by his close friend and confidant Man Ray. In this Comical portrait, Duchamp presents himself literally "transformed through shaving cream" into what Jozelit call a chimerical figure, perhaps resembling a faun or evil..."

The question I'd like to ask in this essay is whether art can be an interesting strategy to against the very method of its commodity. I would like to argue here that exploring cultural values at work today involves a high degree of participation with their mode of distribution and valuation. I will focus this essay about the practice revolving around the idea that monetary valuation may be the best form for resisting towards the artwork as a commodity. I will narrate how my research drove me to establish a gambling startup and interacting with the Tech scene in London. In order to carefully present the nature of this work, I decided to write about the implication of this project in relation to domain like contemporary art, but also digital music streaming and also venture

capitalism that I interacted with across this project.

The essay is arranged in a chronological manner describing the consecutive steps of my research and the development of the project. The initial part will talk about the financial relationship between the work of art and its documentation, I will argue for. Having argued I will follow in the second part to my research and concept on content monetisation to the theoretical mechanism of this project,

## **Chapter 1: The artwork and its documentation :**

There was a considerable problem in the last years of Andy Warhol's life, where the foundation in charge of authenticating Warhol's works was deciding which work is original or not, but Andy himself would in the same time start to sell those very signing to new collectors as artworks in themselves. This flipping act produced the ironic situation of Warhol's collectors buying authentication papers from other collector's artworks. Collectors would naturally start to complain, realizing the value they were holding were not necessarily accredited to the work of art, but of those very certificate, throwing into question the importance that should be assigned to an artist's signature.

When everyone thought Warhol, ingenuity was about disintegrating authorship or the concept of celebrity, the author McKenzie Wark comments Warhol's ability to understand better than others the internal structure of finance within art making : « From Warhol comes art as financial instrument, art completely separated from anything but a container function » (Wark). In his essay « Design for New World » McKenzie describes Warhol's vision that art was going to be "a future trading business". He starts this essay with a familiar statement : « Art is about rarity, about things that are unique and special and cannot be duplicated. And yet the technologies of our time are all about duplication, copies. » (Wark). He points out here the well-known reference of Walter Benjamin's conception of the aura of an artwork. Benjamin notably theorized one of the most enduring model in which art belongs to a place: « In even the most perfect reproduction, one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art, its unique existence in a particular place. » (Benjamin.W(1935)) However McKenzie points a more critical aspect of Benjamin's conception: the assumption that mechanical reproduction constitutes an absolute loss for the work of art, « Since the historical testimony is founded on the physical duration, the former, too, is jeopardized by the reproduction, in which the physical duration plays no part. » Benjamin.W (1935).

Whereas McKenzie comes to a dramatically different conclusion, he tells us that the reproduction is far from making the work of art obsolete, « the reproducible image gives it instead a new kind of value ». McKenzie explains that the electronic reproduction creates a unique function for the artwork itself: « It is the reproduction of the work, electronically rather than mechanically, that perversely enough makes it rare. » Wark.M(2016) In like manner, the historian and critic David Jozelit in his book "After Art" describes as well in contra to Benjamin, « that it is saturation through mass circulation, the status of being everywhere at once rather than belonging to a single place that now produce the value. » Jozelit. D. McKenzie says and concludes in his essay that the artwork has only become a subordinate of its reproduction « the copy creates the

provenance of the artwork. », and concludes to a situation where : « not just individual artworks but art itself is now a derivative of its simulation. » Wark.M (2016). In one word, the copy precedes here the original.

As a demonstration of this statement, I would like to concentrate now on the artwork from the perspective of recent market strategies appearing inside the art market. Indeed, McKenzie shows us that artistic and financial abstraction have a lot in common. As can be seen in the financial market recent techniques are used to secure loss of investment, they are generally speaking called methods of hedging. In many markets this usually involves buying a forward bonds, options, or futures that help to ensure future price before an investment, a small expenditure serves to guarantee returns later. (Redhead, Keith (1997)). In like manner, we observe similar techniques being applied for the art market. This new art-bond format can take place as any kind of object (conceptual, imaginary, virtual...) but for the most part I would like to argue here that the visual documentation works particularly well for such financial instruments.

In a recent app called ArtBinder- which enables galleries to present their portfolio of artworks through simple touchscreen, collectors can browse the inventory of galleries around the world, the experience is compelling and seamless using the power of the cloud. The collector might decide to buy or not the work and maybe to reserve it or see it later in person all by moving images around, straight from the app. In such case, I want to show that it is the JPEG file that mattered first and it is the JPEG file on which the transaction depends. Similarly, another app called Wydr is also interesting that utilizes the same like/dislike structure popularized by dating app Tinder: swipe right if you want to buy what you see, swipe left if you don't. "Wydr changes how people interact with art," says co-founder Matthias Dörner told to the magazine Tech Crunch. Again, the main thing traded here is the images just as Jozelit popular claim « Images flow like currencies, anywhere the market will take them » (Joselit.D (2012)). The simulation here is not worth much at all, they are poor images (Hito Steyerl (2009)) therefore they might be easily and speculatively manipulated. But what's important to realize here is that the images as free gifts are also not antithetical to the commodity of the artworks. Because of these systems, the documentation have taken a former role in the exchange of contemporary art. And so it is now reasonable to say that the artwork itself has been detached by its copy. The physical form is utilize as a minimal form of security against loss of investment. Just as Warhol brightly suspected, it's the certificate that matters.

Correspondingly, by reviewing some of the emergent production of contemporary art, I would like to give another viewpoint in the relation to the artwork and its digital documentation. Indeed, we've seen a curious move from the last 5 years in contemporary art practices : this shift is commonly named as the « speculative turn » or object-oriented practice ». The art critic J.J. Charlesworth writes in the magazine art Review « For a while now, the metropolitan art world has been excited by a new way of thinking about artifacts, object and things, one that treats them as if they possessed a sort of existential autonomy, independent of us mere humans ». (Charlesworth.J (2014)). In the light of the financial instrument described below, I will to showcase in the next paragraph how these practices have reinforced the exchange of contemporary itself. In order to do this I will follow Stefan Heidenreich breakdown of « Contemporary materialism » (Heidenreich (2016)).

Briefly described, speculative realism is at first described from a primal concept called « non-correlationism » defined by Quentin Meillassoux in his book « After the finitude ». This terminology refers to the "the idea according to which we only ever have access to the

correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other.” (Steyerl.H). For here, Meillassoux’s intricate lines of argumentation would go beyond the focus of this essay, but the consequence on art of speculative realism are not difficult to draw out. According to the writer Suhail Malik, the very concept of anti-correlationism frees art from the aesthetic considerations and the involvement of a beholder. For him, under these ideological premises of non-correlational thinking, the existence of an artwork requires neither human perception nor consciousness, it simply exists with and without you. However, Malik draws further conclusions into a demand for what he calls an exit of contemporary art: « The demand here upon contemporary art is strictly non-trivial: it removes subjective interpretation or experience as a condition or telos of the artwork, and therewith collapses the entire edifice of the contemporary art paradigm » (Malik.S (2013)). Moreover, the American Philosopher Graham Harman calls in an article « The Art without relation » for an art without literalism : « while the artwork must have a depth beyond how it is encountered by the spectator, the human is less a spectator than a co-constituent of the artwork itself » (Harman.g(2014))

Although the demand « against relationalism » (Harman.G) is appealing, the german writer Stephen Heidenbach demonstrates in his essay « Freeportism : as Style and Ideology » the consequence of this philosophy onto art practices « that goes straight from the artist’s studio to the storage facility, without ever being publicly displayed or shown to anybody. » Stephen Heidenbach (2016). He precises in responding directly to Suhail Malik : "It offers an ideological framework for today’s dominant art practice and is uniquely adapted to the current state of markets and financial feudalism, satisfying a demand for speculative assets hidden in the treasure chambers of freeports. » Heidenreich (2016). Even if Malik takes a careful attention not to assign any of his demand to any artists references or art prediction, Malik’s ambition may be contradicted by the very practices it generated. As an illustration, I have simply chosen few names taken from the top 10 emergent artists suggested by the website Artrank. I’ve picked names such as Anicka Yi, Yngve holen, Josh Kline... In the case of Anicka Yi, the perishability of her medium is interesting in relation Heidenreich freeportism concept. **Someone** says in her gallery statement, that her works creates « a visual experience that might distance the viewer » or « expose an uneasy relationship to the «value » often associated with artworks ». In fact, the ephemeral or the unaccountable format are common approach that may resonate to Malik’s earlier claim. Since a collector portfolio is visible anytime with such networks like Artbinder using artwork documentation, I believe that placing the resistance against the commodity of the artwork in its very medium isn’t the appropriate approach. It may in fact in the best case simply fragilise the security of investment related to its physical property. We see here again the importance McKenzie description of the art work as derivative which helps to justify that the failure of this Malik’s ambition brouhght by Heidenreich.

Given these points, we have seen in this chapter the intricate relationship of the artwork with its documentation when it come to its circulation on the art market. However If these image have such great importance, my thesis in the next chapter will be to emphasis their potential of being valued in themselves. From this I will hypothesis its effect on the content itself. It is in like manner than Warhol’s amusing initiative for the signature of the certificate itself. I will present upon this my research towards a gambling startup.

## Chapter 2 : Content monetisation

Given the description in the previous chapter of the intricate relationship between the artwork and its documentation, I have shown how the art-world has found the digital copy as a new force for the scarcity of the artwork. This goes against other industries who famously suffered from the sudden abundance of supply since digital reproduction, and forced to radically shift their activity. (Paul Mason (2016)) Having considered the reasons and purpose for finding alternative forms of digital content monetisation, I would like to showcase the research that I have started beyond the scope of contemporary art.

At first I began to learn more about the business of surplus information by setting up a personal routines of reading TechCrunch, TNW, Wired, Gizmodo, Mashable, hearing about stories and gossip from the epic "unicorn" of tech innovation businesses, such as Elon musk plans for a coming exploration to Mars to the flamboyant marriage between Evon Spiegel (founder of snapchat) with the Victoria Secret Angel Miranda Kerr. But as I was discovering the economy, I rapidly confronted myself with the paradox between the notion of information free flow and extracting a stream of revenue to fund its further development. « As our economy becomes increasingly dependent on information, our traditional system of property rights applied to information becomes costly fetter on our development » Mckenzie. Altogether, It is not difficult to understand that advertisement has become the unique form of revenue for the so-called information economy. To understand its importance, I will outline a perhaps redundant but needed history of publishing monetisation. It will provide the framework for the further proposal in this essay.

The economy of publishing has long processed as a simple model during « the Guttenberg publishing time » (Shirky.c(2008)), whoever owns the economic power of the machine, also control the delivery of information. The information price is defined by the publisher in relation to the cost of the printing press. This model can be applied to other technological invention of others media from the 20th century (radio, television etc....)."Whether is it is the printing press or a TV tower, owning the means of production is expensive," (Shirky.c (2008)). Undoubtedly, the internet has been a real game changer with everyone becoming a new potential content producer, driving the price down to zero with an horizontal production that have low commercial value. In short, this is what the media theorist Clay Shirky calls « mass amateurisation » (Shirky.c(2008)). Despite this fact that consumers could produce, share and consume content with very low cost barriers, new models have still emerged to find new ways of creating alternative and artificial scarcity. « the creation of monopolies on information and the vigorous defence of intellectual property » (Paul Mason p.143(2016)) Indeed since the cost to transmit advertising to consumers is now sufficiently low, more ads can be transmitted to a consumer than they can actually process themselves. (Shirky.c(2008)) Therefore consumer's attention has become a main factor to convert non-consumer into potential buyers. Amazon works, for example, by offering to sell you things based on your previous choices. For the 4chan founder, Christopher Pool, the "data has become the oil of the 21st century" but the consequence an darker issue of this economy are vast and complex and would go beyond the focus of this essay. Overall these opposite economies function similarly to information filters coming from two opposites ends :

- The pre-publication filter : it corresponds to the traditional publisher economy with a brainy editor hired to select the content in advance by predicting the future market demand.

- The post-publication filter : it functions with content aggregation, the more we aggregate the more expensive it is to filter and use the behaviour of the newly called "prosumer". This model can be divided in two major place the algorithmic (machine based curator) and collaborative (crowd based curator) filters.

This framework allows now to further explain the ambition of an alternative monetising model which rest by opposition at the very moment of publication. If all the value is created by content moderation, is there a publication format that would make users realise the value of their own attention and implicit curation. If the attention is the new scarcity, can users value their own attention ?

At the beginning it is the simple idea that ads shouldn't be the only way to monetise content on the internet. I intend to describe here a curation neither "before" or "after" but at the present time of publishing, this means a filter around the very disclosure of contents. My first idea was that layers and steps of publishing could be created and unravelled by the users allowing the users to become the publisher themselves. I found that from this, new revenue streams could be made by the viewers directly to the creators. These questioning pushed me first to write down the concept and began to identify my monetisation scheme into a gaming format. The thesis is that gamified monetisation for content discovery may create new form of revenue for both the author and supporting audience. I will best describe its mechanism in the following steps:

1/ At first, the content is segmented in parts that becomes symbolic shares of the content itself. The number of shares are defined by the author.

2/ The content is first published with limited number of shares (number defined also by the author preferences) that can be bought by the users. But each time someone buy a share it reveals multiple new shares, therefore new parts of the content. Consequently, the content is revealed progressively to its popularity.

3/ The price of shares is directly correlated to its number available : the more shares/content information are visible the more the share-price rise. For this reason, it means users earn from having other people betting at higher prices after them. Let's say if someone saw a content with a low share-price (few parts of the information available), but still thought was going to go popular with the the low information accessible, you'd want to "bet" thinking that its value would go up once it became popular. However, if a content was not interesting to anyone else after you've betted on, you'd lose it.

4/ Contributors retrieve their bet anytime at the average share-price. There is no trade or re-sell of the share allowed, therefor it is not a trading market).

5/ All gains are splitter between the author and the users.

At this stage, we can imagine a network of participants producing a collective form of gambling. The early contributors earn from the newer participants contributing at higher prices, it may become a prediction market in which people bet for the future popularity of a content. This also means that contributors would want to promotes the content in their interest. This is possible as the content stays free to access/share at any point of the publication in steps (to be clear the contributors don't buy rights to access or use the content). Before considering this concept being applied to a certain context.

The music sphere is probably the first one that may have been famously affected by the information economy in the preceding paragraphs. Indeed, ever since mid-1999, when two teenagers launched Napster onto the internet and became the go-to source for young music fans, it irrevocably transformed the relationship between music and fans. Napster gave consumers the previously all the world's music, and was the core of an entirely new music ecosystem (Cortney Harding (2015)). It is now after more than fifteen years a simple delusion to expect the masses to pay for music. Even though, new business models have found a somewhat powerful way to balance the economy, it is the freemium model. It consists of giving a service away for free, possibly ad supported, an acquiring a lot of customers, to offer a premium value with added price services. These models are a good example of the artificial scarcity we mentioned in the last paragraphs : creating exclusives experience and intimacy to give a basic new reason to pay. It just seems that because fans didn't want to pay any more we have invented a new layer of « super-fan » that would pay for the others. For instance, Spotify has created now the largest streaming service and offering personalised discovery service for the paying members. Despite its global success, the company still live on an impressive rising deficit after 10 years of activity, which quadrupled by 4 in 2015 therefore struggling to fund the inside economy: a striking number where an artist needs 1,117,021 plays on Spotify to earn US monthly minimum wage, \$1,260. In her book « How We Listen Now » the journalist Cortney Harding explains that most of these buisness model have made a crucial mistake for the last 15 years around 'the assumption that most people care about music'. For exemple in an interesting number from the Midia Research-, only 15% of consumers are conerned enough about artists payouts on streaming to reconsider their music buying habits. Accordingly, I think one of the key aspect is to stop look at the fan as a consumer and realize the music itself may be not enough to make their fans care about their music. Maybe this can be made by making the fan an investor of the song. This is not about the kind of rewards that you may find in crowdfunding: Vinyls, signed tee-shirts etc... which only attract the super-fan mentioned below. The idea here is to re-attract the 85 percent by offering financial gains in a gambling format. This new format may give in return a more consistent amount of remuneration for the inside economy of the music industry. What if artists were able to set costs for their songs based on their perceived value, and what they know about their fans?

**Chapter 3** is not publicly available, Please contact me for any enquiry.

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## Conclusion :

We have seen throughout the three chapters of this essay, the progressive evolution of Bitobeat project. In the first chapter I demonstrated the importance of content monetization and valuation in order to be resistant to the work of art as a commodity. This brought us in the second chapter to looking at the basic idea for a certain gambling platform applied to the music industry. And to finish I have demonstrated my experience in being part of the Campus community as part of Techhub startup school, explaining my position towards tech environment. I have also shown some first work relating to technique and methods learn there.

Altogether, I am aware there is only one reason the program existed which to supervise the evolution of any kinds of ambition. I would say that I have putted myself in a submissive position with regards to the format of delivering ideas and myself. But the goal here was to play with full commitment the game of competition within the structure of this culture. I sometimes found myself disoriented by the environment with which I have interacted. The goal is to be fully serious in a cold sober way about this project to the point that But I feel this project has putted me in relation to question the traditional role of the artist.

To end, I answer the question open in the introduction of this essay with the Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani. In the essay « The militarization of peace » originally published in 2007, he draws attention to an obscure concept of military strategy developed by religious militant in a new wave of terrorism which « exploits its own dissolution as a new type of tactical line that totally blends with the enemy's lines. » Negarestani (2007). Such a configuration introduces radical instability and eventually violent fissions into the targeted system from within. Negarestani bring in a notion of « hyper-camouflage » that aims to pursue to even « the most attenuated extreme, a fighting and a surviving alongside the enemy. » in a « fluid form of infiltration. ». Whereas this reference may sound like a forthcoming Hollywood blockbuster scenario, to bring together to use it, to tell a story about hacking



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