



# Introduction New Mobilities, Alternative Autonomies

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*Mobile Autonomy* detects, in both theory and practice, what modes of economy and working modalities artists and other professionals develop to create their work in contemporary social, economic and political conditions. Can they develop sustainable structures to uphold their artistic autonomy? How can they organize themselves in a world in which they need to be increasingly mobile and flexible? Are there complementary practices and can they learn from each other? Can other professions and even institutions such as unions learn from the artists' experiences of self-organization too? And, the other way around: can artist and creative professionals learn from alternative organizational models?

While repressive liberalism is occupying our world and life system, classic institutions such as universities, hospitals, parliamentary bureaucracies and museums are under pressure. On the ground this means that all kinds of employers and workers find themselves in post-Fordist conditions in which work becomes flexible, mobile, project-based, and temporary. Permanent employment is on the way out and is being exchanged for the statute of the freelancer, promoted by governments and multinationals: this is as good as it gets. Artists have been familiar with these precarious conditions for a long time already, even long before the concept of post-Fordism was launched. Do they, based on this shared experience, have interesting operational models to offer?

In *Mobile Autonomy* theoretical insights are mixed with hands-on practices, examples and art works. Learning to reflect on and deal with contemporary artists' working conditions in practice was our main ambition in compiling this book.

Contributions come from internationally high-profile theorists and artists or collectives who have proven themselves in developing lucid thinking and performative dealing with the contemporary post-Fordist conditions in a repressive-liberal political and economic context.

In the first chapter 'Common Precarious Autonomy' artist Thomas Hirschhorn takes the lead by describing his own practice in an interview as 'singular', 'precarious' and political. But by doing this he makes us understand immediately the complexity and subtlety of those (sometimes fashionable) concepts. Hirschhorn: 'I am only interested in what is really political: the Political with a capital 'P' that implicates and asks "Where do





I stand? Where does the other stand? What do I want? What does the other want?" The political with a small 'p', which simply comments and forms general opinions doesn't interest me and never has. I am concerned with making art politically. I am not concerned with making political art.' This is also very present in the text and image archives concerning the 'eternal flame' project that he contributed to this book.

Political philosopher Isabell Lorey elaborates those notions in a more analytical way. By doing this she provides a lucid insight in how precarization is governmental nowadays, but at the same time she points at the potentials that it delivers to build a new autonomy. By giving a historical social contextualization of the latter concept, Lorey can be very critical about it: autonomy is a bourgeois male construction that has to be redefined.

While Lorey gives a sound analysis on a broader social level, sociologist Pascal Gielen looks at how autonomy may function in the art world. By using the metaphor of the car industry the sociologist concludes that auto-mobility has had its day. If artist want to stay mobile and autonomous they need to build other organizational structures, which Gielen calls a collective traveling caravan. In the parallel historical shifts from liberalism to neoliberalism, from Fordism to post-Fordism and from modern to contemporary art, artists needs to build up their own artistic biotope if they wish to escape from governmental interference and free market solutions. The cooperative can be seen as an interesting model to develop such a new mobile autonomy.

A Dog Republic (Jean-Baptiste Decavèle, Nico Dockx, Yona Friedman, Helena Sidiropoulos and Krist Torfs) publish here both their recent revolution and constitution manifestos, proposing thereby a call for barking conversations amongst all of us, which could go beyond notions of individualism and collectivism. Through shared curiosity and strong complementarity in between the different dogs' friends they bring forward new points of view in our daily life situations such as politics, philosophy, communication.

In the second part, 'New Autonomous Attitudes', artists, curators and theorists explore possible attitudes and collaborative strategies for artists and curators today.

Raqs Media Collective provide us with very hands-on guidelines by elaborating the concept of the 'nautonomat'.





Based on their own experience of organizing an open seminar they propose flows, beverages, sight lines and other highly original tools to develop good collaborative practices of exchange and collective learning as an art form.

Oda Projesi decided to publish here the transcription of a conversation that they organized in 2014, after the ANA (Astrid Noack's Atelier) residency in Copenhagen in 2013. Within this workshop project, they worked on the issue of 'motherhood' related to everyday life production. The inspiration comes from the very need of being artist mothers and wanting to participate in – for example – residencies and other work environments together with their family while keeping up a sustainable social life.

By his own comments and in a sort of 'polylogue', Erik Hagoort explores the working mode of affinity with the founder of 6108NORTH (Chicago) Tricia Van Eck, photographer Kirsten Leenaars, archivist, artist, curator and educator Jason Pallas and artist, curator and writer Caroline Picard. The Orpheus Chamber Orchestra has a horizontal organization structure without a conductor and is seen as an exemplary model of organizing such new ways of collaboration and of understanding each other in very different (artistic, private and public) settings.

The social anthropologist Jonas Tinius describes how such a collaborative network is organized for mainly performing artists in Germany on the www. The cobratheater.cobra network seems to be a highly functional and operational working model beyond classic (mostly government-sponsored) company structures and beyond the performance entertainment market. Cobra is a system worth looking at and learning from when we want to make free theatre or free art again.

Curator, theorist and 'projectarian' Kuba Szreder elaborates the attitude of 'radical opportunism' to describe the autonomous possibilities of the independent curator of today. This pragmatic operational mode is a possible way of dealing with the opportunities the contemporary artistic, economic and political context delivers us, while staying critical and political.

A special intervention for this book is made by Louise Osieka on the work of Jef Geys. On May 9th, she recorded a monologue as an attempt to describe and interpret Jef Geys' oeuvre, with autonomy as a voluntary guideline. An interesting discovery is that his work exists in undermining exactly the autonomous character of the art work and the artist. This monologue will be





fed with some images from Gey's archives, specially put together for this url audio-contribution by Louise Osieka.

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