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# **RADICAL WORKER THE FIGHT FOR SELF-DETERMINED WORK**

**TIMOTHY SPEED**

OPERATORIC RESEARCH CORPUS - ARTISTIC RESEARCH

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# Radical Worker

The Fight for Self-Determined Work

by

Timothy Speed

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Timothy Speed – neurodivergent artist, poverty theorist, and relentless disruptor – throws himself between assembly line, boardroom, and bureaucratic frontline. As a Radical Worker, he refuses the paycheck as measure of worth, working instead by moral coherence, ecological resonance, and existential sense. Whether infiltrating corporations undercover or applying to run Germany’s state TV, Speed exposes the deep protocols of a system that converts dignity into obedience and creativity into currency.

*For the Artistic Research movement*, this book proves that art isn’t commentary – it’s infrastructure. Research happens in real-time, in real life.

*For Critical Autism Studies*, it’s a rare inside-out account: autistic intensity, rule clarity and focused resistance sharpen into a tool that cuts through institutional myth.

*For anyone forced to work – or forced not to* – this is a living roadmap: self-determined labour, basic income, and the politics of commoning are not just imagined here – they’re practiced, tested, lived.

Speed flips the script: poverty is not a lack, but a refusal to play by a broken game. Forced labour is social exclusion. And the true metric of wealth? The time left untouched by the system’s noise.

*Radical Worker* is manifesto, fieldwork, and survival guide – a call not to adapt, but to remake the world from the bottom up.

## Artistic Research

Artistic research utilises aesthetic processes — montage, performance, material experiments — as independent methods of cognition. In doing so, the artist does not exclude themselves from the cognitive process. Knowledge does not only emerge in the subsequent interpretation, but in the process of creation itself: Thoughts become visible and audible, hypotheses can be embodied on a trial basis. Instead of collecting data, Artistic Research creates situations that intertwine theory and practice. In this way, it transcends the classic separation of disciplines and makes phenomena tangible before they are measured.

The contents of this book are based on Artistic Research.

## Neurodivergent research

is the special research method that some autistic people use. — This approach produces perceptual profiles that deviate from the “statistical norm”, but which allow new patterns to be recognised. Research from a neurodivergent position consciously utilises this atypical filter as a methodological advantage: hyperfocus replaces large-scale devices; pattern sensitivity discovers correlations that disappear in the noise. Instead of compensating for deficits, idiosyncratic cognitions are understood as additional measuring instruments. This generates unexpected questions, radical cross-connections and condenses disciplinary boundaries into new terrain.

This book is an important contribution to Critical Autism Studies (CAS) and Critical Neurodiversity Studies because it gives meaning to the particular perspectives of neurodivergent researchers.

*“I consider the empirical and economic-theoretical investigation of self-determined work, as undertaken by Mr Timothy Speed, to be very useful. Conflicts with the conventional understanding of work as wage labour must not be ignored.”*

Prof Ernst-Ulrich von Weizsäcker / Vice President of the Club of Rome

## Work and Neurodivergence

A vast amount of work is still unpaid or poorly paid and barely acknowledged by society. Countless people clock in no fewer hours over the course of their lives than high-earning managers. Nor do they shoulder less responsibility — they raise children, care for others, and commit themselves far beyond what they are compensated for.

This affects me too. I am autistic — a fact I only discovered at the age of 51, after spending a lifetime running into an invisible wall, unable to understand why I viewed society — and especially the economy — through entirely different eyes, with a biologically different brain. I also live with ADHD.

Since the 1990s — starting with the collapse of the new economy — one economic crisis after another has shaped my life. The result: the only work I managed to obtain in all those years was always precarious and underpaid. For 22 years, I worked as an artist and researcher for an average of €4 per hour — and invested nearly my entire inheritance into tackling social problems.

This was the outcome of going over 50 years without an autism diagnosis — which makes me part of the so-called “Lost Generation”: thousands of people who were not born the wrong gender, but with a different brain, whose otherness remained inaccessible to themselves. Something that plunged many — myself included — into deep identity crises. Because I spoke differently. Because I wrote books about a world that, to “the others,” was largely invisible. I didn’t know that. How could I have known? That’s why they thought I was crazy — someone who was wrong about everything, someone living in a world of his own.

Around 80% of autistic people — even those with university degrees — are unemployed (Specialisterne, 2004). The situation is just as bleak for migrants, queer people and those living with mental illness. Discrimination under capitalism has long since been thoroughly researched and proven. And yet there are still plenty of economics professors who believe the market is always right — that the market is the ultimate yardstick for everything.

Against this backdrop — and this is where the market’s perfidious logic becomes visible — both the state and the economic system insist that people

like me, people who don't fit, are to blame for our poverty, and especially for the debts that result from it. We alone are held fully responsible. Because we're told we live in a free market of supposed equal opportunity. Anyone can succeed in it. But there is far more packed into that "can" than what we so indiscriminately call "success" or "failure." I don't know where those equal opportunities were hiding during the past fifty years of my life — a life spent repeatedly crashing into that invisible wall.

The question of plus or minus remains a binary category — one that says very little about "real life." So why — and this is a central question — do we allow these signs to hold such immense power over human existence?

The decisions a market makes about a person are rarely tested against broader criteria, nor are wider frameworks of measurement or discussion ever integrated. The balance sheet is never reviewed to ask whether the diagnosis of worthlessness or diminished value — of a person, a product, or a performance — is actually accurate, or whether it needs to be questioned and reframed.

Instead, in our economic system, as in a pinball machine, a series of arbitrary and barely controllable factors kicks in — factors that ultimately determine a person's trajectory in the market, as if they were a rolling ball, a plaything of chance. But the system always adopts the final outcome as if it reflected reality. It *becomes* reality. It doesn't even occur to us to ask whether the losers might have lost despite good intentions, whether they gave their all or created something extraordinary that simply went unrecognised. Nor do we ask whether it's justifiable that the system itself — and those privileged within it — always win, because everything has been reduced to narrow economic terms, and what counts as economically "correct" is based on a limited set of criteria that systematically discriminates against and excludes.

You can play a game, or you can question its rules in order to change them. Most people never ask who gave themselves the right to define those rules — or why. After all, those who set the rules as a higher authority often place themselves outside the competition in the process.

A lack of income is reduced, as a matter of course, to two explanations — both extremely convenient for those who benefit from them:

A flaw in the individual — i.e. their poor or incorrect performance.

Poverty as an act of nature — i.e. a shortage that simply exists and can only be overcome through more labour.

Only rarely does the question arise whether the economic system itself might be to blame for the impoverishment of people like me — whether “success” is not simply a structural phenomenon, one that is distributed in ways that are often arbitrary. Whether the whole game isn’t really about establishing a method through which a large part of the population can be structurally devalued or filtered out.

This logic of exclusion, as practiced in our economy, is — from an economic standpoint — fundamentally absurd. It could just as well be about keeping as many people as possible in the game, giving them opportunities and freedom, so they can contribute their full potential, based on their actual value. But the labour market systematically reduces too many people in terms of what they could offer. Elevating them would enhance us all — which contradicts the concentration of market power. That’s why they will say we must adapt. That people like me — autistic people — are simply sick, deficient. And that the market can’t do anything about that.

Capitalism always implies relevance and correctness in a self-referential way — based on its own definition of success. It ignores and devalues a vast number of things. Not only disabled people or nature. I therefore ask: does an economy *have* to devalue in order to focus? Does work really have to be organised in an externally controlled way? Is it objectively justifiable that the domain of labour — the dominant activity in human life — should be driven by power, hierarchy, and external rewards? Would it not make more sense to completely decouple the value of a person — and thus their contribution to the world — from their monetary basis of existence, and instead reward performance on an additional level?

What I’m doing here is shaking the foundations of things that are taken for granted — but that is precisely the work that research and art are meant to do.

Why should we change? It is a neurotypical characteristic to take things as they are. It is deeply neurodivergent to ask for meaning.



In the framework of Critical Autism Studies, the notion that autistic people should adapt to the existing economy must be forcefully rejected. There is nothing sick about me. I am different. Your economy was built for your brains — not for mine. That’s the problem. And you’re not willing to change a system that only serves “you”.

It is precisely this suspicion — that parts of economic theory may actually represent modes of thinking which lead to mass devaluation and discrimination — that I pursue in this book, from a completely different angle. From the perspective and lived reality of an autistic artist, I conduct provocative, empirical experiments to explore how the way humans work would need to change — not only to truly, meaningfully address the problem of poverty, but also to develop a future form of labour and economy from a “relatively” underprivileged position. One that produces different results than those presented by elite economists — economists who have never experienced poverty, or who do not belong to intersectionally disadvantaged groups. The system usually works for them — because, for structural reasons, they were born on the “right” side of the wall.

The experiments in this book are radical. They aim to fundamentally reconfigure capitalism. That may sound exaggerated from a conventional scientific standpoint — but bear in mind that we have next to no evidence of what the economy might look like if it were shaped by neurodivergent minds. You don’t have to accept everything I say. But this is the testimony of an alternative. An attempt to raise awareness of the lived experience of those pushed to the margins. How others experience this system — that alone may be decisive in seeing its problems (and potentials) more clearly from a displaced perspective. My staging of a total economic reconstruction is not presumptuous — it’s a scream. A rebellion against the ignorance that many economists display towards “people like us”, armed with theories that do not speak to our reality.

What I’m doing here is a call — a call to all the others who’ve been marginalised to do the same: to create alternative economies and subcultures that expand our perceptible reality, so that we can all become active participants in this world.

And finally — the most basic question: who gets to define what “economy” is? Or what counts as “labour”? The modern economy is largely defined by white, neurotypical principles — and this is especially true when it comes to labour. That’s one of the main reasons why most neurodivergent people can only work outside the standard labour market — independently, unless they happen to find a niche. “Neurotypical” means: an economy built on the assumption that the individual functions in the interest of the group — and that the group (i.e. the system) ensures survival. And because the group is defined as the foundation of existence, it also dictates — based on group-specific structures — who gets more and who gets less. In other words: through hierarchy. This principle reflects the neurotypical brain, which prioritises the collective as the basis of reality and interprets its psychological and power-related mechanisms as natural order.

By contrast, neurodivergent people — those with autism, ADHD, or other forms of atypical neural wiring — often orient their actions less toward the (frequently corrupt) welfare of the group and more toward the orders of nature itself: toward structural patterns, toward forces and dynamics that promise dopamine or existential depth.

The autistic experience: when the body, mind and actions cannot be separated in work

Understanding the world is embodied in autistic people like me. That means: sensory perception, experience, thought, and emotion — and therefore also work — are not oriented towards social norms, but toward a sometimes overwhelming connection with the very dynamics of the world itself. It is an *enactive* approach to labour — one in which the mind cannot simply decide to carry out work that is detached from the body, from the senses, from lived experience.

But the ability to functionalise body and mind in the service of an external demand — *that* is the fundamental logic of wage labour. Autistic people like me cannot separate our bodies from our actions, feelings, or thoughts without

losing our sense of integrity — an act that would feel like violation, even self-erasure.

Robert Chapman, in *Empire of Normality: Neurodiversity and Capitalism* (2023), analyses how capitalism systematically suppresses neurodivergent modes of perception, feeling, and working — because they resist functionalisation. Particularly relevant is Chapman’s framing of autism as an epistemically different way of being-in-the-world — one that cannot be externalised. Work under conditions of separation — for instance, between sense, body, and action — is not just unreasonable for many autistic people; it is ontologically wrong.

Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, in *The Embodied Mind* (1991), show that cognitive processes cannot be separated from the body or its environment — that the mind only exists in co-regulation with the world. From this follows my own enactive approach to work.

Damian Milton (2012), in *On the Ontological Status of Autism: The “Double Empathy Problem”*, argues that autistic experience is not deficient — it is fundamentally organised differently: embodied, situational, systemic. The difficulty of performing “work as function” does not lie within the individual, but in the incompatibility of the surrounding structures.

Erin Manning (2009), in *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*, implies that “autistic perception” is an embodied unfolding — a form of work that does not get done, but must happen: in resonance with world, meaning, body.

This enactive, embodied entanglement of sensing, thinking and doing is not optional in neurodivergent being. It is structurally anchored. (See also Chapman [2023], Milton [2012], and Varela et al. [1991] on the impossibility of functionalised action under systemic decoupling of sense and body.)

Autistic people like me are sensory thinkers. Our thought is a form of thinking *in* and *with* the world. It arises directly from experience. People like me — our knowledge is *lived* knowledge. The more emotionally we experience, the more rationally we comprehend. The world is part of our non-localised mind.

## The inner laboratory

Autistic people like me do research differently. What is often referred to as the “neurotypical mode of science” — peer review, hypothesis formation, measurement — is critiqued by some as structurally exclusionary, because it doesn’t work with the enactive formation of knowledge, but with the neurotypical closure of objects.

Mel Baggs (2007–2020) *In My Language* formulates an early but paradigmatic critique of neurotypical standards of perception. She shows that her thinking takes place in a space-time structure that is not separate from language, but operates in an enactive field of perception, rhythm and repetition. Damian Milton (2012), in *On the Ontological Status of Autism: The Double Empathy Problem*, argues that autistic people are fundamentally misunderstood by neurotypical knowledge conventions.

People like me often operate as if in an internal laboratory — a space generated through embodied sensory intensity. That space is objectified not through abstraction or simulation, but through real, lived, bodily-felt knowledge. In the sense of *agential realism*, cognition here is not a representation, but a phenomenon of resonance: the world becomes present through the body — not because a model predicts it, but because it becomes felt through resonance.

My work embodies what Karen Barad describes as *agential realism*: knowledge does not emerge through representation, but through intra-active, embodied configuration. Autistic research does not follow hypothetical modelling — it translates direct experience into thought-structure through silent resonance, somatic feedback loops, and nonlinear pattern recognition.

The space of cognition is not a mental mirror, but a field of action — one in which the researching subject is embedded within a material-affective constellation. Kristin Bumiller (*An Abusive State*, 2008) describes how scientific and legal systems systematically exclude *alterative* ways of knowing — including neurodivergent ones — by coercing subjects into objectivity, while modes like trauma logic, autistic self-reflexivity, or “rhythmic language” find no place.

The form of research described in this book — as embodied, circular, multisensory condensation — connects to enactive cognition (Varela et al., 1991), to participatory sense-making (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007), and to Chapman’s account of neurodivergent epistemologies (2023). What appears as a “lack of objectivity” from within the neurotypical paradigm is, from a neurodivergent perspective, a different ontology of thought: cyclical, self-transcending, fragmented-but-coherent, rhythmically entangled with the world.

For people like me, our senses and emotions are not parts of a stable identity — they are tools. Tools that compress processes and insights. The more emotional we are, the more rational. The more personal, the more analytical. That’s why the research I do as an autistic person and artist must be seen as its own epistemic field: *neurodivergent research*, which deliberately does not exclude the “I” of the researcher.

Our brains demand a mode of thinking rooted in physical space — in movement, smell, sensation, and encounter. Autistic researchers develop their own language — not a finished lexicon, but a process of repetition, condensation, variation. It seeks no final result, but hooks itself into the infinite flow of detail — to listen as the world forms and acts.

In academic terms, this is often described as *embodied cognition*. The approach holds that thought, perception, and action are inseparable from the body, movement, and environment. The mind doesn’t “sit” in the brain — it emerges from the recursive loop of organism and world.

The term was popularised in the early 1990s by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (*The Embodied Mind*, 1991), and further established in cognitive science by Lakoff, Johnson, Barsalou, and others. More recent philosophical syntheses describe embodiment as a dynamic coupling of brain, body, and environment — with no strict divide between inside and outside.

Our “self” is not a sealed sphere, not a fixed form. It is open — radically exposed to the outside world: to its noise, its brightness, its violence, its content, its shape. Studies show that many autistic people possess atypical sensory, motor, and interoceptive profiles — and thus develop different ways of accessing the world. Many report that the Cartesian split between body and

mind is less distinct. This resonates with Maturana and Varela's critique of dualism and their emphasis on the unity of the living system.

The inability to act at will, or to distance oneself from certain perceptions, could be understood as a more intense experience of *autopoietic unity* — the self-maintaining system. Many autistic people have a particular capacity to detect and sustain patterns and complexity in systems — which aligns with Maturana and Varela's emphasis on preserving organisational structure.

And so, we collide with the classical world of work — in our attempt to maintain ourselves *from within*.

Autopoiesis is key here. It describes how living systems generate and maintain themselves by producing and organising their own components. Life is defined by self-organisation. Living beings are autopoietic systems: they generate and sustain their own being. Cognition, in this view, is not the representation of an external world, but the active creation of reality through embodied interaction. Life and cognition are inseparable: *life is cognition, cognition is life*. Perception is not passive intake, but the active construction of experience by the perceiving system itself.

In this light, the autistic experience may be understood as a mode of life that, in some respects, is closer to the immediate, non-dualistic existence that Maturana and Varela describe — a form of life less filtered through social constructs and cultural schemas, and more attuned to the structural coupling between organism and environment.

Yes — I live in a world of my own. I create it from within myself. And so it is with my research. I create from myself — in interaction and intervention with the world. I try to shape a common form, one deeply linked to my existence.

Art, in this context, becomes an extended tool — a medium of transformation.

This biological epistemology represents a radical break from traditional representationalism — and it has far-reaching consequences for how we understand consciousness, perception, and the relationship between organism and environment. And therefore: for how we understand work.

## The autistic vocation

The term I coined, *autistic vocation* — meaning biologically driven, innate work — refers to the fact that I experience my entire life as the expression of a geometric form, a frequency, a pattern, a dance, a specific sphere. In the sense of the MNO theory developed later in this book, I try to realise this vocation in cycles, through my work, through my life. It describes a biologically grounded, embodied life-pattern that cannot be chosen but must be lived — as epistemically necessary work, in intra-active symbiosis with the structure of the world. This is a profound form of autistic ontogenesis — not unfolding as identity, but as rhythm of being.

Nick Walker (*Neuroqueer Heresies*, 2014/2021) indirectly describes autism as “ways of processing, being, and becoming” — not as a characteristic, but as embodied ontology. What becomes visible here is that autistic people don’t just think differently — they *exist* differently.

This is precisely where *vocation* comes in: the world is not something external; it unfolds through the subject — which does not act as an ego, but as a resonance of form. Damian Milton (2014), in *Autistic Expertise: A Critical Reflection on the Production of Knowledge*, argues that many autistic people experience a form of “epistemic necessity” — a compulsive, inescapable bond with a theme, a structure, a form. The notion of *autistic vocation* described here is not a metaphor — it is a lived reality, described in neurodivergent research. Walker (2021) and Baggs (2007) both show that autistic cognition is not optional, nor purely rational — it operates through embodied, rhythmic formation. The person does not merely *carry* knowledge, but becomes an aspect of the structure itself — realised through the subject.

As an autistic artist, I am not separate from this order — we exist in symbiosis. Neurotypical people do not function in this way. They are not in such direct unity with the world. Their actions can be chosen, relatively arbitrarily, within social conventions. But I cannot ignore this order. Nor can I stop exploring or expressing it through my life. It has become my natural labour — one that is innate.

The pattern — the form — has assigned me a task: to describe the difference between itself and civilisation. That may be difficult to grasp for neurotypical

people — whose behaviour can be freely negotiated within social or institutional norms, whose goal is often to find a role, a job, within a group. There is a certain flexibility in that — a margin for adaptation, for compromise — which many autistic people simply don't possess. I have to disregard all of that if it contradicts the enactment of the pattern embodied in me.

But this is not a constraint in the sense of suffering. It is a condition of being. I *must* perform this self-determined work — because anything else would amount to my erasure as a human being. Conventional jobs — as externally determined action — are not the basis of my existence. They have always posed a threat to it.

When I enter a company, I see everywhere a dissonant order — one that must be corrected. Job structures, as externalised frameworks, seek to govern my body — they position me in time and space, and in doing so, they break me. Because I cannot separate my action as an autistic person from the necessity of adhering to the inner orders and patterns that have shaped me into a kind of personified sculpture of world-experience.

In my entire being, I am a creature that requires free expression in the way others need air to breathe. My neurology does not allow me to act separately from my experience, my perception — as though one had nothing to do with the other. That would be as violent as forcing a queer person into heterosexual sex, or forcing a philistine to strip naked before a crowd and perform something humiliating on one leg — under threat of social exclusion. The result would be panic and existential fear. Anyone who tries to force this treats people as objects — and violates their dignity.

What neurotypicals call *Pathological Demand Avoidance* is, in my case, not a pathology — but a form of evolutionary mechanism. A refusal to surrender to external demands that violate inner coherence. It is a strategy for preserving complexity in ecosystems — a strategy neurotypicals often ignore when group advantage is at stake.

There must be people who perceive difference — who detect structural deviation, who see patterns precisely, without subjective distortion or compression through predictive cognition. Even if it is politically or socially



inconvenient. These people — we — help to protect the inner order of nature and to continuously expand what reality can be.

When I wrote the first edition of this book, I didn't know I was autistic. Writing *Radical Worker – The Right to Self-Determined Work* was, at the time, an unconscious attempt to legitimise a form of labour that matched my being — a form of work necessary for my survival.

Yet through this search, I uncovered principles, problems, and insights that are equally relevant and valuable for neurotypical economies. I identified deep structural complexity and pattern-conflicts within dominant forms of employment. Because I — as an autistic person — collided with the conventions of wage labour, the productive approaches explored in this book were born.

When I was later diagnosed, this work had to undergo a fundamental revision — in order to reflect the true foundations of my labour. You could say I live in a different world — one that, like a laboratory, enables the simulation of *your* world's problems under the conditions of external observation. Conditions that you — as neurotypicals — cannot easily generate yourselves.

My research therefore provides insights from the perspective of a fundamentally different brain. In a figurative sense, I am as rare as a particle accelerator — a singular and costly apparatus. The experiential deviations I offer — the way I experience reality — are rare: they occur in well under 1% of the population. My neurological divergence makes it possible to see into *your* system in ways that can be deeply valuable.

Of course, I get things wrong too. But I get them wrong differently.

What I've uncovered over the course of two decades is a radically different conception and experience of labour — of its context and meaning in an ecosystem. One that could fundamentally shift how we evaluate value. My story — that of someone who, despite enormous effort, ends up economically excluded — is shared in one form or another by millions. Discrimination is a widespread reality.

For decades, I have accompanied this process of research as an artist — documented it, embodied it, and expressed it through *artistic research*. As a form of self-empowerment.

Mainstream economics still ignores huge portions of the population and their divergent experiences. It is too primitive to even approximate reality. But that can change — if we add our voices. If we make visible the principles and mechanisms that destroy us.

## Introductory words

Everything — from the pension system to social insurance to market regulation — is based on the assumption that prosperity reflects individual performance and contribution. Politicians call this a “fair” distribution. But my perception — *our* perception — shows the exact opposite.

That is precisely why our voices are essential in economic research. Because this is not about compensation or handouts that continue to frame us as defective and burdensome. No — it is about exposing the fact that capitalism is committing a structural crime against vast swathes of the population. This market form is not slightly off. It is fundamentally wrong. It does not need correction — it needs reconstruction.

*We*, who suffer under this system, demand a seat at the table. Your social systems — which you believe protect you from *us* — we will soon be slamming them back in your face. Change the system so we are part of it. Stop pushing us to the margins.

But I’m not only interested in extremes — between rich and poor — or in the spectacle of inequality. I am especially interested in the *invisible patterns* of impoverishment. Because even the wealthy, even the bankers, suffer under capitalism — not financially, but existentially. All domains of life are being capitalised. And this begs the larger question:

Does capitalism really lead to a better world?  
And if so — *for whom?*

This book takes a hard look at that question. It raises serious doubts about the so-called self-evident truths of the capitalist economy —

and it does so as a warning to those who neither see nor want to see the structural crises of this system. At stake is nothing less than the future of people and the planet.

Yes, much has been written about exploitation and systemic violence. But this book, written by an autistic activist, tries something different: it analyses the patterns of economic systems from a position of neurodivergent embodiment. It searches for new causalities in the generation of value. And it does so through provocative experiments and radical questions.

The central idea: a changed understanding of what work is — and could be — may offer solutions to some of humanity's biggest challenges: resource depletion, social fragmentation, economic precarity.

What I am demonstrating here is a path that can be taken — even without money.

In the chapters that follow, I examine forced labour, the emergence of the wage system, and the ideological distortions surrounding concepts like *unconditional basic income*. I investigate how value is assigned, and misassigned — and how deeply misunderstood the idea of “labour” has become.

To fully grasp the importance of *self-determined work* — which I propose as a systemic response — one must also understand the role of *free will* in ecosystems. My aim is to construct a comprehensive, neurodivergently researched model in which neglected categories — such as perception, compulsion, autonomy, and sensory meaning — are no longer excluded from economic theory.

This is an autistic attempt to correct economics. And I do it with the means and language of an autistic person. Because I do not adapt to you.

In this necessarily imperfect process, alternative patterns of economic behaviour begin to emerge. This is not just an economy in the ecological sense — it is a reintegration of the rejected, the devalued, the structurally erased. It is a return of the outside.

I see myself as a researcher, an artist, and an activist. I do not merely observe systems — I intervene in them. I make them personal, subjective, and embodied. I transform them into something I can *touch, work, speak*. This makes me a kind of *modest witness* in Donna Haraway’s sense.

Haraway’s concept of *material semiotics* is built not through abstraction, but through intervention: through the collaboration of bodies, signs, machines, and contradictions. What I practice is a *post-objective science* — one Haraway describes as a future model: hybrid, partial, ethically charged, and systemically transformative.

### ***The MNO Model***

When I look at capitalism today, I see a fundamental design flaw — a flaw that causes immense suffering and rests on deep misconceptions about what sustains life. Most economists assume that *success* — in the sense of material abundance, prosperity, and wealth — is the ultimate goal. But this assumption is misguided.

On the other side of success, there is *nothingness* — not as failure, but as the potential for all possibilities. An openness to deviation, to uncertainty, to becoming. Without the “nothing,” success is nothing but a dead quantity — void of dynamism, vitality, or truth. The question of meaning becomes unaskable if the relationship between “everything” and “nothing” remains obscured.

And yet, capitalism systematically devalues nothingness. It treats absence, refusal, or stillness as signs of failure — as if being *nothing* were the worst possible outcome. This ideology leads to a dead world of things: a world stripped of relation, pulsation, and emergent meaning. It mistakes reality for a sum of objects, when in truth, reality is the dynamic interplay between presence and absence, form and void.

In my 2016 book *The Physics of the Poor – A Neurodivergent Meta-Theory of Consciousness*, I developed a physical-mathematical model of consciousness rooted in *productive nothingness*. The aim was to reframe physics in the interest

of the poor — to challenge the primacy of *things* and assert *emptiness* as the generative ground. This inquiry took me far deeper than expected, into a meta-model that expands existing theories of consciousness by integrating absence, will, and subjective resonance.

I believe this contribution to science was only possible because — as an autistic person — I walk different paths. My altered perception is not a deficit, but an expanded mode of reality-reference. All perception should be like this: situated, embodied, and plural.

Some readers may ask: *Why introduce a consciousness model in a book about work?*

The answer is simple: If we want to redefine labour, we must first understand how reality itself is constituted. And we must ask: What role does awareness play in this constitution? For labour without consciousness is nothing but mechanical functioning.

If labour is reduced to productivity — to producing goods in exchange for pay — then the economy becomes a machine. But that machine now drives planetary collapse. The reduction of work to function is incompatible with ecosystems, care, or sustainability. What we need is an economic model rooted in awareness, not abstraction — in resonance, not metrics.

This is where the MNO model enters. It provides a framework in which *object*, *will*, and *experience* generate each other. It argues that every functional economy must integrate these three — or it collapses into violence, alienation, and entropy.

An ecosystem is, after all, a far more complex and adaptive economy than capitalism. And the more we look at society as an ecological system, the clearer it becomes that the same structural pathologies emerge: fragmentation, monoculture, collapse.

In short:

Labour without consciousness is empty. But consciousness without relation is impotent.

To build a regenerative economy, we must understand the energetic and subjective dimensions of work. We must ask: What should the worker become

conscious of? And how does each concept of consciousness imply a different understanding of labour?

The industrial worker of the 19th and 20th century was given almost no space for reflection. Awareness was restricted to the task at hand. But today, work remains the dominant form of human activity — and the need for an expanded awareness is more urgent than ever.

This also has profound implications for AI. In *Speeds Arbeit* I examine how artificial intelligence inherits a model of labour as pure function. AI extends this logic to its maximum. But the question remains: Should humans still adhere to this definition of labour?

In the MNO model, reality consists not just of recognisable objects and conscious observers, but of a *dynamic triangle*:

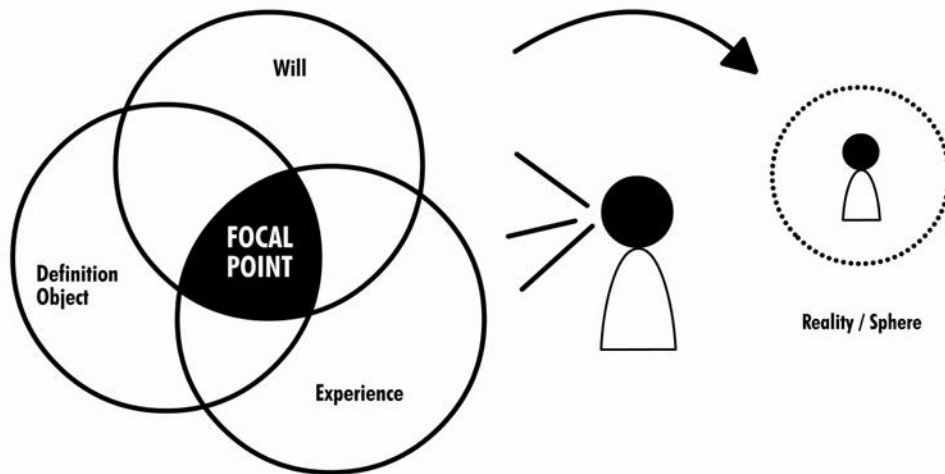
the manifest (things and phenomena),  
the experience (how they are lived), and  
the will (what a person wants or enacts).

This ontological tripartition forms an unstable but vital constellation. Where instability arises, so does energy. And what is work, if not a form of energy modulation?

Consciousness, then, arises in the oscillation of this triangle — in its openings and closures, its tensions and releases. And with this, we move beyond the dead image of the “worker” as a functional cog. We reclaim will, affect, memory, conscience — all the inner energies that were once expelled to the margins of private life.

Because without these, there is no ethics. No vitality. No world.

## INTEGRALITY - WILL, EXPERIENCE, OBJECT



The focal point visible here is the convergence of three forces: object, will, and experience. In the traditional working world, these forces are often ignored or actively suppressed — burned out before they can generate energy as intrinsic motivation. We prevent experience from shaping processes, silence criticism of leadership, and exclude personal desire from value creation.

Take, for example, a student pursuing a specific career. The career is a predefined *object*, shaped by external expectations. During their studies, the student *experiences* this object in theory and practice. That experience alters what they *want* — sometimes reinforcing, sometimes reshaping their will. Disappointments may refine their direction. Through this triangular dynamic — object, experience, will — reality begins to reflect itself. Not in the object alone. Not in desire alone. Not in raw experience. But in the interaction of the three.

Experience is the most open of these elements. It is neither purely internal nor external. It is relational, fluid, and based on absence. My thesis: experience remains open *because it rests on a gap* — on the structural presence of “nothing.” In other words, experience is possible because something is *missing*.

This open reference point is what keeps people dynamic. In fact, it’s what makes consciousness possible in the first place. But in capitalism, the worker is sealed off. Defined, measured, controlled. They operate as projections of efficiency — useful, predictable, but disconnected from the real. Such workers

are not employees of the *planet*, nor of *reality*, but functionaries of exclusion — mechanisms for suppressing complexity.

If workers were to re-integrate object, will and experience into their jobs, work would become *incommensurable* with corporate structure. It would become autonomous — but also solidaric. In alignment with reality, not with extraction.

In nature, everything arises through an invisible relationship — a potential nested in absence. It is this relation between *nothingness* and *potential* that I've modelled mathematically and physically through the MNO framework. This is not metaphysics, but the operating logic of the universe. These dynamics can be calculated.

Niklas Luhmann (1992) on *operational closure*: functional systems (law, economics) operate by closing their meaning-making cycles, yet *require gaps* — external stimuli — to generate new meaning. Systems *need absence* to adapt.

Ilya Prigogine's theory of *dissipative structures* shows that open systems only generate order *far from equilibrium*, through constant energy and material flows. Systems must leak to evolve.

Stuart Kauffman speaks of the *adjacent possible*: complex systems must always hover at the edge of the known, opening doorways to what lies just beyond.

Gregory Bateson's famous phrase — “a difference which makes a difference” — reminds us that information only exists as a *relational gap*. A fully closed system detects nothing.

Urban theory confirms this: cities function as open, dissipative systems. Where flow stops, collapse begins.

The core insight is this:

Living systems require contact with absence. Not as a void to be feared, but as the fertile space of variation, deviation, and becoming.

This coupling to *what is missing* feeds the freedom of action and enables particular, situated perspectives on reality. Each person becomes a contributor to a shared experience — a reality never fully closed, because each person sees,



wants, and experiences differently. We live not in a *mono-real* world, but in a *multi-real* field — a market of open additions. And yet, economics still assumes a world made of closed, fixed, exchangeable objects.

This is the primitive error of materialism. It is too crude to let us collaborate on a *common reality*, because this process *requires self-determination*. If we continue to suppress it, we will remain stuck in economic patterns that replicate ecological collapse.

We must therefore redefine labour as a self-determined contribution. A necessity of *individual deviation*, not an aberration. Otherwise, we cannot address the root causes of ecosystemic collapse — because those causes are rooted in a mode of work that lacks awareness, responsiveness, and flexibility.

Participation is a reality factor.

Labour not only creates wealth or money or values, but also living space, ecosystems or reality.

In my model, object, will, and experience are understood as structural patterns within a physics of ecosystems. These patterns shape morphologies – as forms of society, of subjectivity, and of world. I refer to them as dynamic levers of action: submergence, indimergence, and emergence.

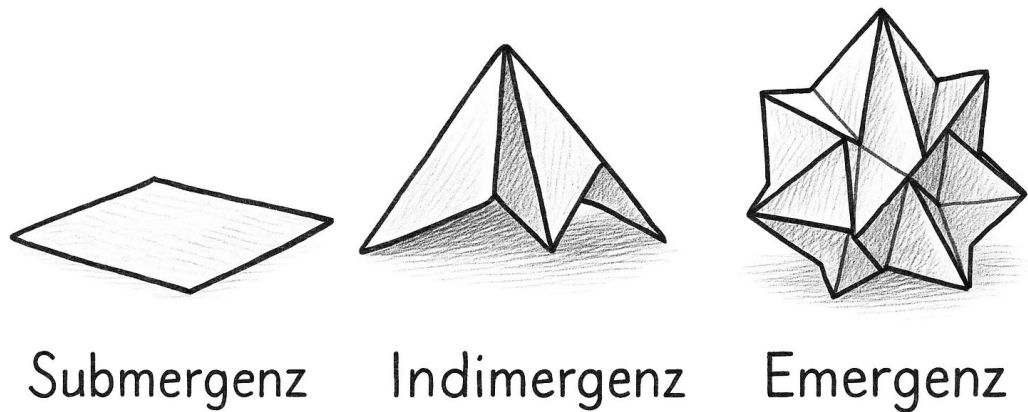
Submergence refers to the object – not as a thing, but as *undefined potential*, like a sheet of origami before it's folded.

Indimergence is the first convolution – the moment of volition, of folding, of directed impulse.

Emergence is the unfolding – the relational web that arises from this dynamic: the phase of life, form, and shared space.

These are not linear steps, but cyclical movements, like seasons that condense or dissolve form, acting as filters through which different qualities become manifest. The core question here is: How is freedom preserved within a system that constructs the world – as the economy does?

This leads directly to the political dimension: the democratisation of labour. Freedom, in this context, is not the absence of form – it is the capacity for emergence and innovation within dynamic structure.



As you can see here, there is at first only dead space — a submergence, a potential in which nothing is yet differentiated. It is a blank sheet, so to speak. What follows is an act — an impulse, a decision, a will to change something — which leads to the formation of an object, a concept, or a company. This is indimergence: the concentration of attention into form.

From the moment a second element appears — through the coupling of object and observer — a relationship arises. And each relationship generates new associations, because they are folds within a singularity of infinite potential, constantly re-emerging from the same undivided source.

Submergence corresponds to the *unfolded state*, the equilibrium continuum.

Singularity marks the point where this continuum breaks — *indimergence* — and where new relations or phases begin to emerge.

Emergence is the patterned mesh that arises from this rupture — be it a black hole, a shockwave, or the crease of an origami fold.

Stephen Hawking and Roger Penrose (1970) provided mathematical evidence in their Singularity Theorems that the universe began in a point-like singularity where classical coordinates collapse.

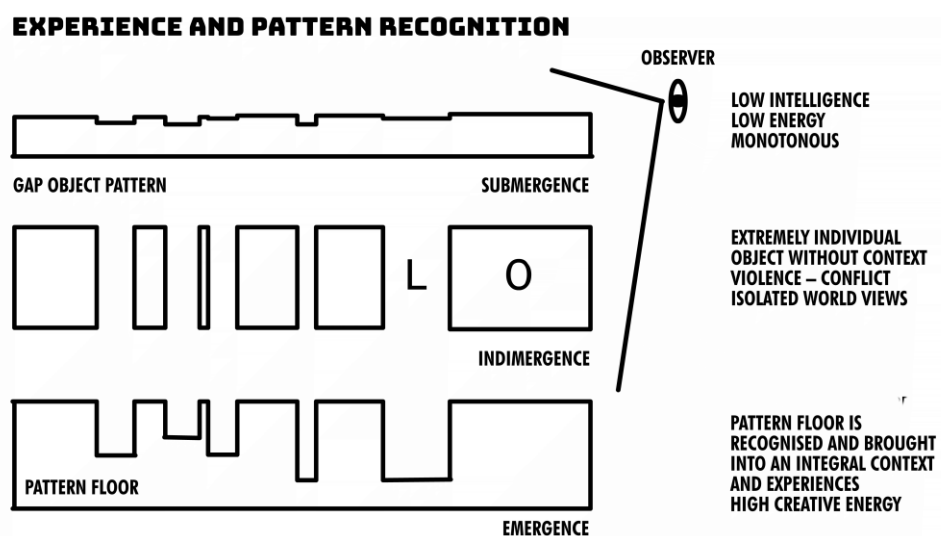
Before the “first fold,” only undetermined curvature exists — every subsequent spatial form is an unfolding of that initial rupture.

Edward Tryon’s hypothesis (1973) — the universe as a quantum fluctuation — posits that the cosmos could have emerged from a vacuum fluctuation. The quantum vacuum acts as an endlessly foldable zero potential: every real structure is a temporary protrusion.

Ilya Prigogine (Nobel Lecture, 1977) describes how dissipative structures only emerge when an open system far from equilibrium hits a point of instability — a singularity — and reorganises itself. That singularity could be a critical folding node where raw energy is translated into patterned form. Without flow, the sheet would solidify.

The Kawasaki theorem shows that a single flat surface can be folded at a vertex if the alternating sum of angles equals zero. The vertex becomes a singular point of folding potential — a mathematical analogy for an infinitely malleable, yet coherent medium.

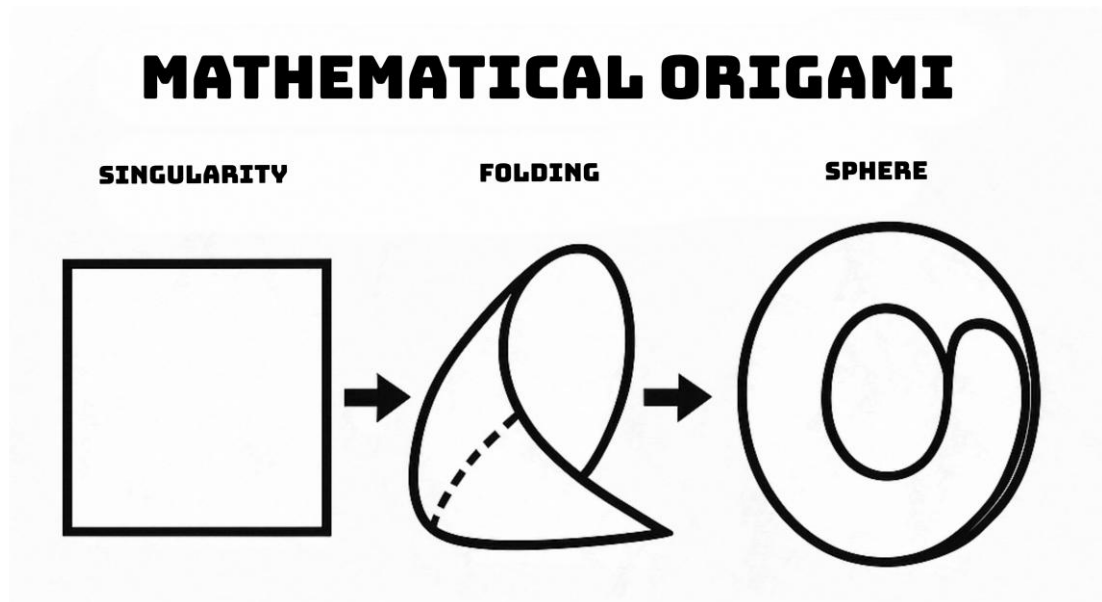
In emergence, a patterned ground arises from this singularity — a web of infinitely many relationships between things. A world pattern forms. An ecosystem.



The one sheet of paper (singularity/submergence), in the sense of origami, from which all forms emerge, whereby eternally recurring rules, laws of nature and self-similarities remain among the forms. The world does not disintegrate,

but forms itself as a sphere, as a self-contained cycle. This then leads to emergence, to feedback, which consists of relationships, objects and intentions that are formed against the background of an absence, a gap, a nothingness.

Whether cosmos, flow or paper — the same basic principle applies everywhere: a single continuous entity (singularity/vacuum/leaf) contains all possible forms.



This is central because it allows us to recognise the structural problems of capitalism as errors in relation to the operating principles of nature and the universe. If all relations in economic activity are reduced to objects, only flat representations remain — simulacra (Jean Baudrillard). The objects stand out; the references and relationships between them fade into the background. If this is taken to the extreme, hollow objects are produced — a phenomenon of the mass market, a symptom of the exaggerated alienation inherent in capitalist production.

For example: someone invents the car, the first petrol engine. The whole thing enters mass production. What began as a highly emergent, intelligent, conscious structure of innovation is flattened, normalized, and eventually turns into production for its own sake. The will — the indimergence — becomes exhausted in the repetition of the object, in the belief that its initial success can be perpetuated indefinitely. In doing so, the leap to the electric

motor is missed. The result: workers and companies are forced into a new cycle. But if this transformation doesn't take place, the product becomes a hollow object — alienated from what it originally was as emergence: more than the sum of its parts, a cultural event within a society.

Over time, these things degenerate into bureaucratic deserts, into dead matter. When applied to society as a whole, one can see in countless examples how capitalism has drained, exploited, and reified society. We have all become hollow products in a digitalised market — mere functions. We have lost freedom, lost dynamism, and are trapped in encrusted structures of which we are barely aware. Innovation is no longer the cultural baseline, but the rare exception.

By building a world exclusively from objects and their structural patterns (indimergence), the world itself begins to vanish — because it is more than the sum of its parts. This produces flattening, a kind of submergence. The exhaustive explanation of every angle and every depth leads paradoxically to the death of the world — because we only perceive absolute things, and no longer perceive that distortion, that shift, that every person introduces: an idiosyncratic response to the inherent gap, the nothingness in all things. This displaced being, this personal deviation from the norm, is what connects us to the whole — preserving dynamism and diversity.

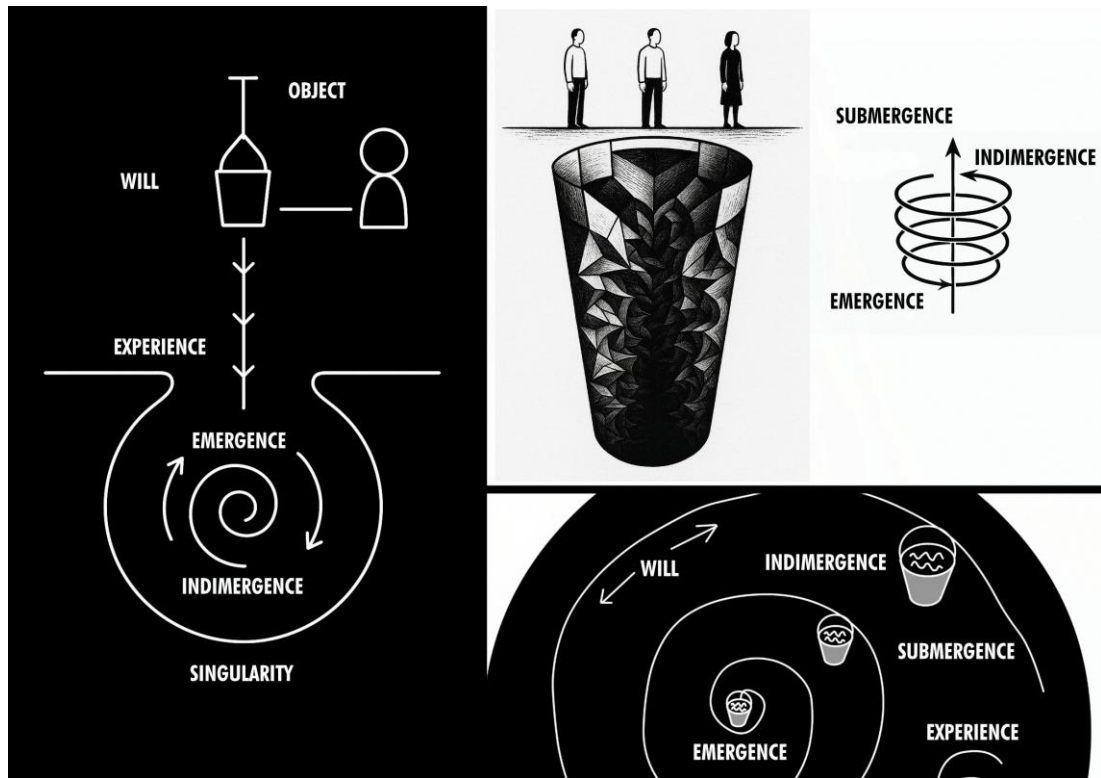
We are losing our ability to relate, our capacity to resonate — to use Hartmut Rosa's phrase.

If we view the tripartite cycle of submergence, indimergence, and emergence — or object, will, and experience — as a continuous loop, then we can see what happens when this loop breaks down or stalls.

To illustrate the principle in a different image: imagine a well.

The shaping of the world, in which we all participate through action, knowledge or labour, is like lowering and raising a bucket into a deep well. The bottom of the well is the singularity, the gap, the nothingness. The act of lowering the bucket creates a polarity — between depth and height, above and below — and within this tension, an independent experience of the world as a "well" is formed, through the definition of objects, through their manifestation, and through the altered will of the viewer.

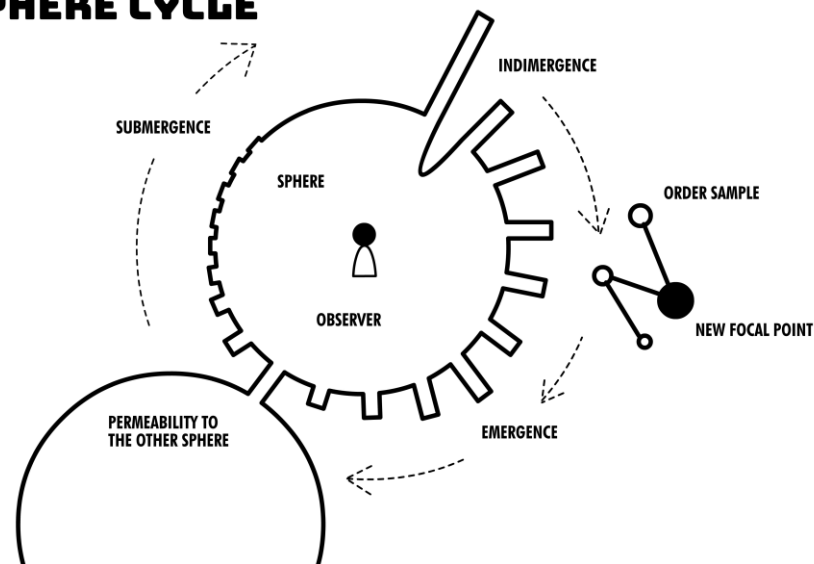
This act is to be understood as the primal gesture of labour: we invest in the world, we create, we bring forth.



In my research, consciousness is understood as an experience of polarity in the face of an absence — an occlusion within an infinite potential. It is a response to nothingness, to the still-unfolded sheet of singularity. This is maintained through a pattern cycle — what I call the *sphere cycle*, because it creates a distinct sphere, a world of its own, each time. It is like breathing: between solidifying and letting go, between form and freedom. The system thus remains permeable and transitive. People can move freely within it, work out their self-determined contribution, or shift between activities — because the spheres are not closed off. Not like the HR departments of modern corporations. Not like over-bureaucratized markets or compartmentalised workspaces. It is a far more intelligent system. What this can look like in practice will be explored in greater detail later in this book.

Every product is just a distortion.  
Every worker is an actor in the displacement  
of reality, in a common dance.

## THE SPHERE CYCLE



Indimergence, i.e. the definition and manifestation of an object, causes the potential of that thing to be exchanged for a polarity – even before the object is fully defined or solidified. This happens through a coupling between observer and object, or through any conceivable polarity: above and below, deep and wide, cold and warm, left and right. This introduces another important structural principle: nothing is ever a perfect copy of what came before. These processes are not designed to eliminate deviation – quite the opposite. We are dealing with analogue systems, as opposed to digital ones. Misunderstandings arise in transmission. That’s how evolution happens.

Our economic system, however, has ignored this since Henry Ford’s assembly line and treats innovation as a domesticated process, reserved for experts. David Noble (1977), in *America by Design: Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism*, analyses Ford’s assembly line as the origin of the modern machine-man: a person who is not creatively active but merely functions within a given rhythm. Here, innovation is not understood as emergence, but as top-down instruction.

Natural systems, which are far more complex than capitalism, rely on a high tolerance for “errors” and “open overlaps”. This keeps the energy thresholds of the entire system low. Movement makes the system permeable and dynamic. Synergies and self-similar formations occur everywhere. Nothing is entirely compartmentalised or isolated. Nothing belongs to one person alone.

Antonio Gramsci (1929–1935), in his *Prison Notebooks*, especially those on “Americanism and Fordism”, describes Fordism not only as technical efficiency, but as a project of social and moral standardisation. Gilles Deleuze (1968), in *Difference and Repetition*, offers a fundamental philosophical critique: repetition is never identical. Systems that enforce identity suppress emergence.

More and more interdisciplinary approaches now criticise the current economic system as structurally stupid, exhaustive, and blind to systemic complexity – and propose alternative forms of intelligence. In post-growth economics (e.g. Tim Jackson, Jason Hickel), economic intelligence is no longer measured by growth, but by planetary sustainability and social resonance. Commons-based economies (Elinor Ostrom, Silke Helfrich) show that co-operative, non-market systems can intelligently and locally govern complex resource flows. From the cultural field, projects such as *Arts of the Working Class* or *Precarias a la Deriva* call for an aesthetic-political economy where not only goods, but also meaning, circulates. In neurodivergent theory (Chapman, Walker), intelligence is understood as structural permeability: systems are considered intelligent if they adapt to deviation, difference, and emergence – not suppress them.

These perspectives outline a future economy not based on control, but on intelligent relationality.

Let me summarise:

What is the MNO model?

It describes the three fundamental axes of reality: object, will, and experience. These three elements generate one another – not hierarchically, but cyclically. If one pole dominates (e.g. the object = monetary value), consciousness collapses. The model proposes an alternative to economic paradigms that reduce reality to measurable objects.

Singularity as the origin of all folds



In both physics and origami, singularities are points where systems bend. The universe begins as such a singularity: pure unity, inherently foldable potential. The MNO structure is the continuous activation of this foldability. Gaps are essential – they enable movement, differentiation, and development.

The necessity of individual deviation – and the value of self-determined labour

The principle of autopoiesis – creation from within – exists everywhere in nature. But what is created, and how it is created, is not an isolated event. It is a feedback process. Because of the singularity at the foundation of all things, each fold never produces something alien, something that does not belong to this world. This, however, is a fundamental fear among many entrepreneurs: that a company would fall apart if its workers were granted true autonomy.

In reality, companies may change and expand, but the economy as a whole would not descend into chaos. On the contrary: we would open ourselves to more intelligent structural patterns than those offered by hierarchical control and external performance metrics.

This act of self-creation, of self-determined labour, cannot lead to something irrelevant. Every form is a contribution to the universe. But if we refuse relationality and reduce everything to an isolated metric – like money – then we construct systems that negate the value of living beings, by mistaking linear effects for the actual causes of the world. Everything that doesn't follow this linear production logic is then declared the wrong product – or even worthless.

Yet deviation is essential. Every worker must be able to carry out a deviation in their labour that aligns with who they are. Only through such diversity of forms does the world differentiate itself, making it graspable and experiential. We need the strange, the other, in order to know who we are. Deviation is a necessary force in the formation of any economic structure, even the GDP.

Many feel this instinctively. Some marketing departments even make slogans out of it. But who really understands the structural principle?

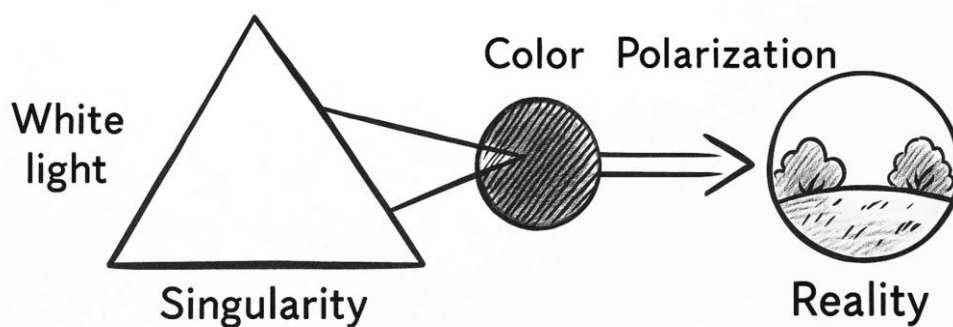
If we do, then the worker's right to self-determination becomes a natural law – a shift with massive implications.

A simple metaphor:

Imagine pure white light – it contains all colours, without any one dominating. This white light is like the singularity: undivided potential. The moment you filter out the blue, name it, and fix it as “blue”, you lose the whole. Blue is now just a selected expression – a specific manifestation. All other colours now relate to blue, lose their original openness, and become relative.

The original light isn’t destroyed – but it’s no longer accessible. Through naming, perception, and action, we’ve created a new reality where everything – even the “non-blue” – is displaced. This is how all reality functions: by shaping, naming, and applying something, we not only create an object, but also a loss of wholeness – and at the same time, a new order, in which everything else has to reorient itself around what we’ve named.

The world is therefore never objectively represented through our labour, our language, or our consciousness. It is always shaped as part of a distorted sphere – because what is missing (the original potential) is replaced by representations that can never be whole.



In this sense, all of us – plants, ideas, animals, cities, emotions – are figures cut out of light, carrying its absence within us like a shadow. Yet it is precisely this shadow, this difference, that makes life, movement, and freedom possible in the first place. The world is not an object – it is a constant response to its own disappearance.

The following example illustrates how identity, product, and indimergence always lead to their own spheres – to divergent distortions. The art lies in keeping these spheres open and dynamic. Only then can they become part of a shared whole: an act of collective creation, building an open and humane society.

## CIRCULAR CONSTRAINT - SPHERE FORMATION



We call something G. This naming cancels out the potential of what G originally was within the singularity and replaces it with a polar relationship. Why is it cancelled? Because every definition, every act of solidification, is a reduction of potential. In definition, a thing collapses into one form. It cannot remain both particle and wave at once.

Now that G has disappeared as a quality through definition, let's consider the other letters in this example as the remaining colours on the palette – potentials, representations of the singularity, “expressed” through the other letters. They are no longer accurate representations of the whole, and shift in their context and order accordingly. By representation, – not as a faithful depiction, but as a detachment, a deviation from totality, I mean the process of detaching from the singularity. Something becomes a representation – but it is no longer the full potential, only a symbol or trace of it. For example, an E that belongs to a G-world no longer appears as the same E as one that only needs to be E. Each existence entails a distortion of all others, since all are coupled to the singularity and seek, through partial expression, to embody the whole – as a warped variant of their individual appearance.

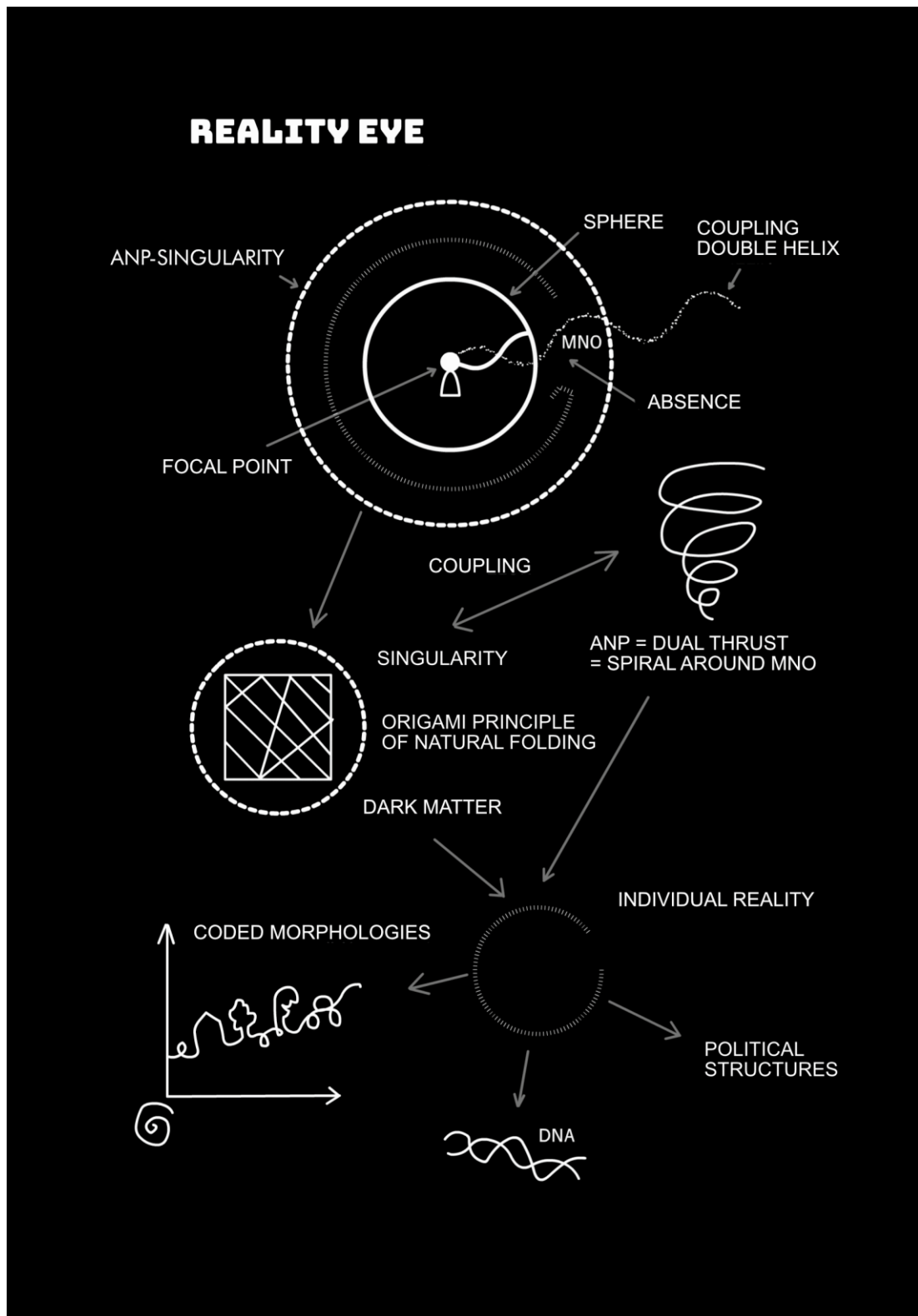
Every act of labour, of shaping, of naming, creates an individual reality – a sphere, as previously discussed. Everything becomes a representation of the singularity – but distorted through the manifestation of the object (its absence), or through the singular view of an observer. Not only does a separate reality emerge – one that latently deviates from G and forms a blurred world within its own sphere – but new forms and morphologies also arise in the polarity. These may relate to G, but could not exist without its absence.

These letter morphologies can be transposed to living beings, plant forms, political concepts – or simply everything in the world that can be named as an object. But none of it is G. It is neither God, nor MNO, nor consciousness.

The shift in being enables the integrality of the world. It makes freedom and order equally possible. Living space is always created from itself and within itself – it is implied. We are all mutations of a primordial form that responds to nothingness.

The point is to understand that the “common world,” the “common economy,” is not a fixed world in itself, but an organism of shifting realities and forms that we must acknowledge – that we must become aware of – so that the way we work remains integrative and innovative. It makes no sense to over-standardise labour. Work must be protected from that – in order to protect self-determination.

The following image summarises the entire model.



Man, and with him economic production, is not the result of a linear order – not a causal sequence of things and their processes – but a displaced world, a uniquely distorted sphere that resembles everything and yet is fundamentally

different. Although it is related to all things, both inside and outside its own world, this relationship can never be completed or finalised – because existence always contains a gap, an unknown, something open. How this gap, this nothingness, becomes the reference point of consciousness and reality is something I have explored extensively in the MNO model. I now propose to take this as a natural foundation for rethinking the concepts of productivity, labour, and economy.

### **Labour as a contribution to an ecosystem.**

The idea that consciousness, reality, society and the economy are not things based on things, but responses to nothingness, opens up a deeper understanding of the dynamic between market and labour. It reveals the necessity of integrating the otherness of each worker's, employee's or self-employed person's relation to the world into the economy—instead of subordinating it to a purely object-oriented logic. Otherwise, this economy will lose its connection to reality.

In other words: if we understand reality not as hardship under the coldness of capitalism, but as a web of individual world-relations from which an organic world, even a humane society, emerges—then we must foster synergies instead of enforcing adaptation.

This marks the difference between a simulation and an ecosystem: a simulation is like a sealed sphere; an ecosystem is a living organism of self-similar entities. This is where the concept of *autopoiesis* becomes relevant—a concept from systems theory first developed by Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela in the 1970s. The term derives from the Greek: “auto” (self) and “poiesis” (to create or produce).

At its core, autopoiesis, as mentioned earlier, describes a system's capacity to maintain and reproduce itself. An autopoietic system:

creates and maintains its own components and boundaries

organises itself through internal processes

is operationally closed but materially and energetically open

is defined by its own operations

Originally developed to distinguish living from non-living systems—a cell, for instance, constantly regenerates its components and boundaries—Niklas Luhmann later extended the concept to social systems, which he described as autopoietic in the sense that they generate communication through communication, and define their own environmental boundaries.

The tripartite structure of object, will and experience, which resembles autopoiesis, enables an open yet self-referential system. It dissolves the dualism between objectivism and subjectivity, redefines the subjective, and reintegrates it in a more dynamic relation—a new starting point for shaping world and society, grounded in a different understanding of freedom and human value.

In this view, the response to the experience of reality can no longer be an economy of things, but must become an economy of relations: of individual intentions (*will*) and individual experience—both of which have been irrelevant in conventional economics. Yet the individual distortion we each carry is not a flaw or subjective quirk, but the very foundation of reality. It is essential to our understanding of value and contribution. It is vital for life—not in the narrow sense of subsistence through labour, but in the deeper, complex sense of existence within a world.

What gives life the right to exist is not only a political question, but a physical and biological one. We cannot construct a basis for existence that ignores the human as an ecosystem, as structurally embedded in the physical foundations of reality and consciousness.

An economy of the future must see itself as an ecosystem—an expression of complex forms, not a definition imposed by primitive, power-driven patterns.

The capitalist system, which sees labour solely as function and not as a self-determined contribution of free beings to an open, layered reality, has immersed people in materialism and paralysed their potential. We pay people to do work they do not want to do—work that contradicts their own sense of value and experience.

The erasure of meaning from modern labour has broken people and led to an immense loss of human potential, because every contribution is fundamentally linked to one's sense of relevance within one's own world.

Deviation is not a disturbance of production. It is the very basis of productivity—of a shared world that can truly sustain whole human beings.

My approach leads to a fundamental revaluation of every worker as a self-determined being—wanted in their otherness.

Later, I will turn to the question of how this shift in world-relation shaped my autistic behaviour—and how I, based on this, declared and enacted a new kind of worker: someone who would from then on only do the work they wanted to do—work that matched their own experience, relevance, and logic of production.

How I failed at capitalism revealed the dissonance between market logic and human nature.

What is life like? I ask. My work should be like that too—otherwise, how could I preserve it?

## Research Relevance| Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

Artistic Research: M N O serves as process awareness for creative cycles in natural systems from the perspective of art and makes the gap referenceable as an experimental motor of creative processes. Here, the creative act of emergence is placed in a concrete reference to the world, which not only implies, but makes it necessary to act in accordance with its relevance. What artists do becomes a law of nature, a protective act of system-immanent complexity.

Critical Autism Studies: Interprets hyper-systematisation as a fine sensorium and legitimises embodied research in the world itself. Through the MNO model, the significance of autistic vision, outside of social simulation, becomes a requirement, with the intention of doing justice to “reality” even in the neuronally altered reference. It becomes clear that the neurotypical cannot or should not close off the world for itself and push the neurodivergent perspective into the pathological.



## ***The Value Threshold – It All Begins with a Categorisation Error***

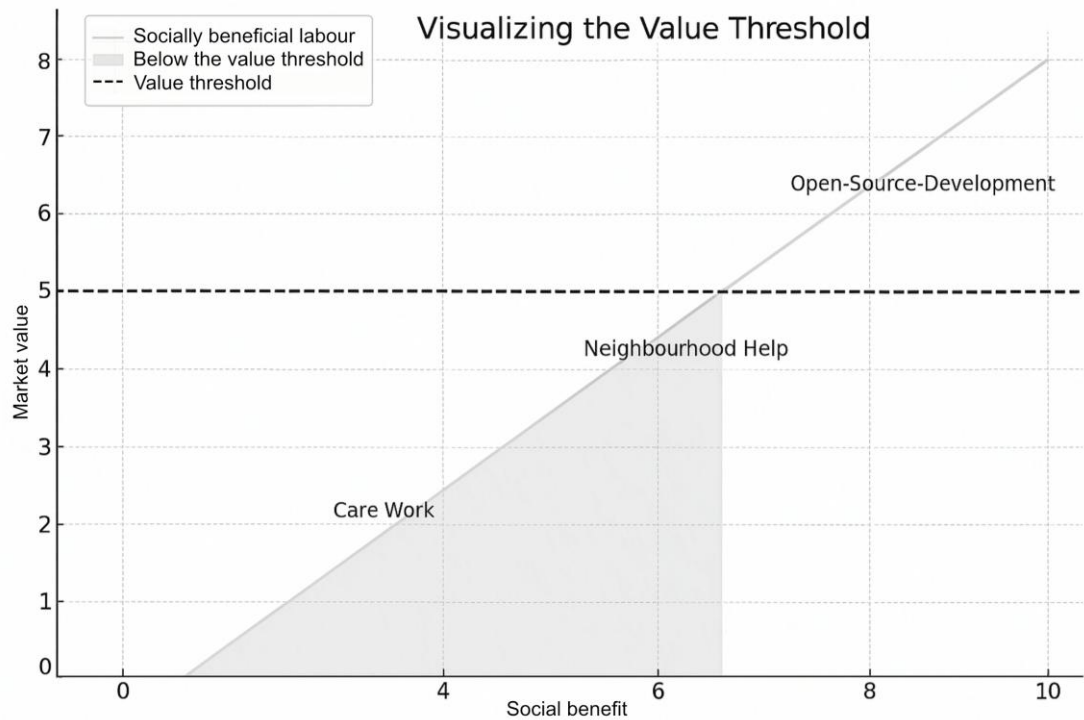
Capitalist economics, which presents itself as a law of nature, claims that those who are successful must have done everything right – in an absolute sense – because they are wealthy, and those who are rewarded must be right. Wages, in this logic, are treated as proof: a person's value derives from the value of their labour. But this valuation is based solely on the object axis of the MNO model. It systematically excludes the will and the experience of the worker. What results is a static relationship built on a reduced categorisation – a rigid classification that overlooks subjectivity, complexity, and context.

Capitalism was therefore structurally doomed to fail. It does not fail visibly as a system – instead, it causes the ecosystem to collapse in its place. Capitalism conceals this failure, because it is self-referential: it explains everything, including its damages, in its own terms. Yet the true value of a person cannot be reduced to their usefulness for the capitalist market.

Take, for example, a woman who cares for her mother ten hours a day, without pay. The market responds: this is not a contribution. But the problem here is not a lack of performance – it is the Value Threshold.

The Value Threshold is a central concept in this book. It marks the invisible boundary where individual, social, or ecological value is separated from what the market system recognises as valuable. It is the point at which meaning, care, autonomy, and experiential contribution fall away from capitalist performance metrics. This threshold defines what is seen and what is ignored – and by crossing it, countless forms of labour are rendered worthless not because they lack worth, but because they lie outside the system's narrow logic.

At the core of the value question lies the question of performance. And at the core of performance lies the question: who defines relevance – and how?



The dotted line marks the Value Threshold – the boundary above which labour is recognised (and remunerated) by the market. The grey zone beneath it represents activities with high social value but little or no market value. Examples such as care work, neighbourhood support, or open-source contributions illustrate typical forms of “devalued” labour.

What is meant here is the mechanism that systematically devalues care, art, or social engagement, while simultaneously claiming that every relevant contribution is rewarded. Those who fall into poverty as a result of such devalued labour are blamed for their situation, because – according to capitalist logic – no “valuable” performance was delivered. As a result, many essential activities must be performed in opposition to market logic and at one’s own cost – and this is precisely what constitutes exploitation.

The Value Threshold can be understood as a structurally embedded form of categorisation that enforces a specific geometry of reality. It produces its own closed sphere – the modern economy – which constitutes not just a misalignment of relationships, but a systemic blockage between indimergence (will/impulse) and submergence (potential) that prevents emergence. In this way, it inhibits the development of an emergent economy. Instead of fostering relational richness, the system traps us in object-worlds, while the connective tissue of relations – meaning, experience, intention – dries up.

The Value Threshold is not merely an invisible line; it is an epistemic grid that determines what counts as “value” – and what does not. And this filter is far from neutral. It is calibrated according to specific market logics: profit, exchangeability, competitiveness. Everything that falls outside this grid – ethical, social, ecological or meaningful work, especially when tied to the free will and lived experience of workers – is not merely ignored, but actively devalued.

This, in turn, triggers a perverse mechanism: by excluding relational labour from valuation, the system artificially inflates the status of market-conforming forms of contribution. Ignoring care work, for instance, is not just an omission; it constitutes a systemic distortion of competition – just as the historical devaluation of women’s work did (and, to a certain extent, still does).

This distortion is not an accidental by-product. It is a necessary condition for the reproduction of capitalist value creation. By isolating value in a purely economic sense, the system forces all other forms of value into a subordinate role – or erases them entirely. That is the categorisation error at the heart of the system: the mistaken assumption that one particular form of value – market value – represents totality.

Here is a brief overview of the dominant frameworks:

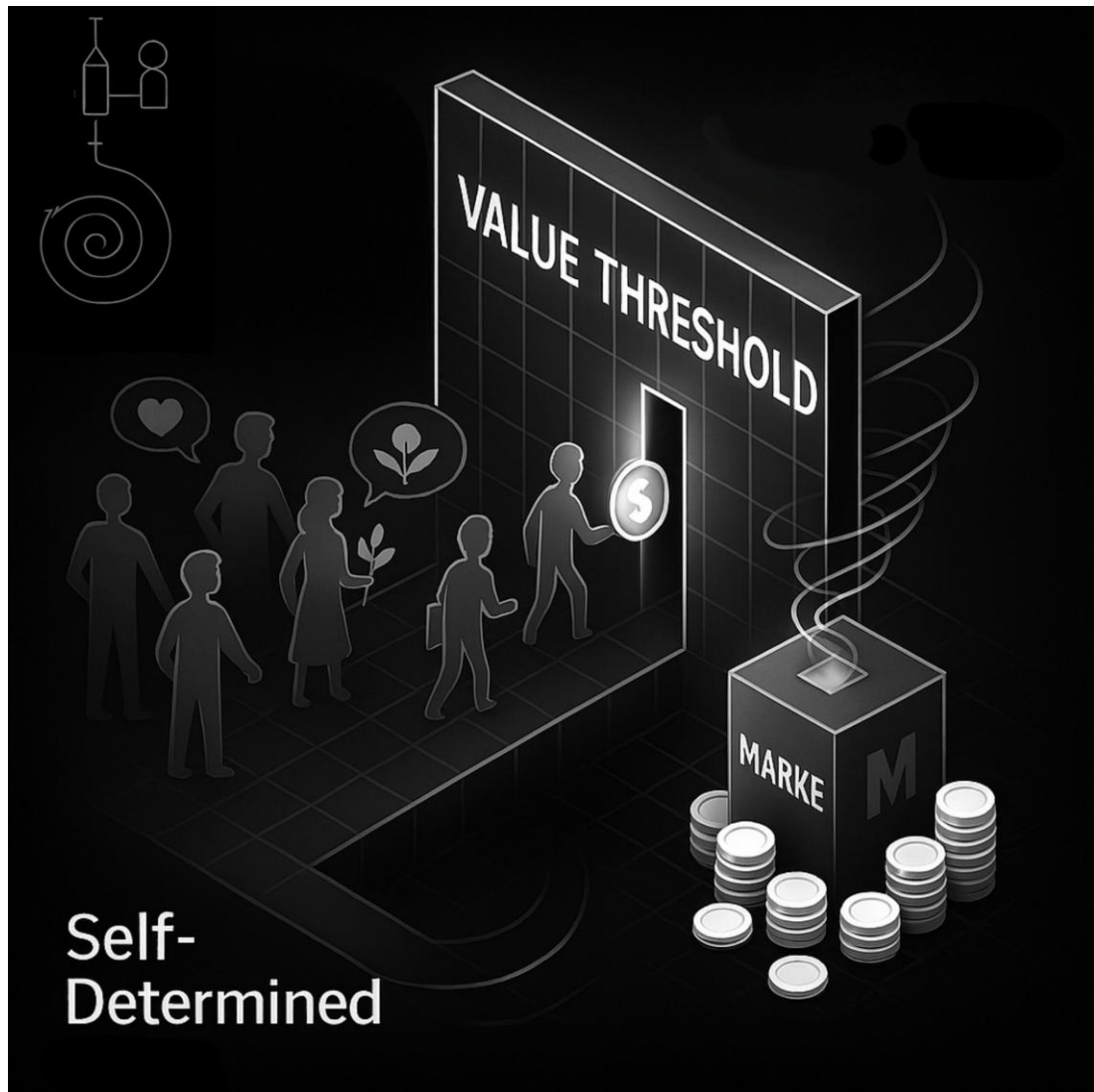
1. National Accounts (NA)  
In macroeconomics, “output” is defined as the total production of all domestically produced goods and services, minus intermediate consumption. The result is value added, which ultimately flows into GDP.
2. Business Management & Cost/Performance Accounting  
In corporate accounting, performance refers to the valued output of operational production processes – measured in quantities or service units, expressed in euros. Internally, output is understood as the opposite of costs.
3. Productivity & Marginalism  
With the rise of neoclassical economics, attention shifts to marginal productivity: output is defined as the marginal product of a factor – i.e. the additional output generated by one more unit of labour or capital. Productivity is measured

as output divided by input. Wages, according to marginal productivity theory, should correspond to this marginal output.

4. Price as a Performance Indicator  
In neoclassical and Austrian economic traditions, market prices are seen as containing all relevant information about performance. Anyone who cannot command a price (or only a low one) is – by definition – performing “poorly”. External effects such as environmental or social damage are dismissed as “market failures”.

The key error here is the conflation of measurement with reality. The grid of prices, hourly outputs, or marginal products is treated as a mirror of the world – but it is merely a reduction. All contributions that don’t fit into these one-dimensional metrics – care work, activism, artistic labour, ecological stewardship – vanish from the balance sheet.

This is precisely where the Value Threshold comes into play: It is the invisible filtering gate that decides which forms of work “exist” – and which are suppressed or ignored as economically irrelevant.



So in the capitalist system – allegedly the foundation of our entire society – there is no truly objective, holistic evaluation of performance. Performance is, in truth, a highly individual matter: it cannot be grasped without context, without intention (will), without experience on the ground. And yet, capitalism automatically assumes that labour devalued by the market inherently performs less, or contributes less. What is actually a contribution to the world, to reality, to society, is systematically reframed as lacking value.

This results in a structural denial of reality: In order to enforce a self-referential system, capitalism suppresses contextual truth. For instance, the principle of supply and demand is equated with a decision about usefulness and uselessness — as if price could measure significance.

## The problem of distorted reality production

Let's take a concrete case: If people voluntarily perform unpaid work – because it matters to them, because it creates meaning – this labour is devalued in market terms. Why? Because its very abundance creates a market-defined oversupply. And this oversupply prevents fair remuneration. Capitalism falsely assumes that people only work for money – and that work only has value if someone is willing to pay for it. This is not just flawed – it is absurd. And it creates enormous distortions in our society.

It assumes that everyone wants what the market wants, and that the market, in turn, wants what everyone wants – because money makes it so. But extortion is not consent.

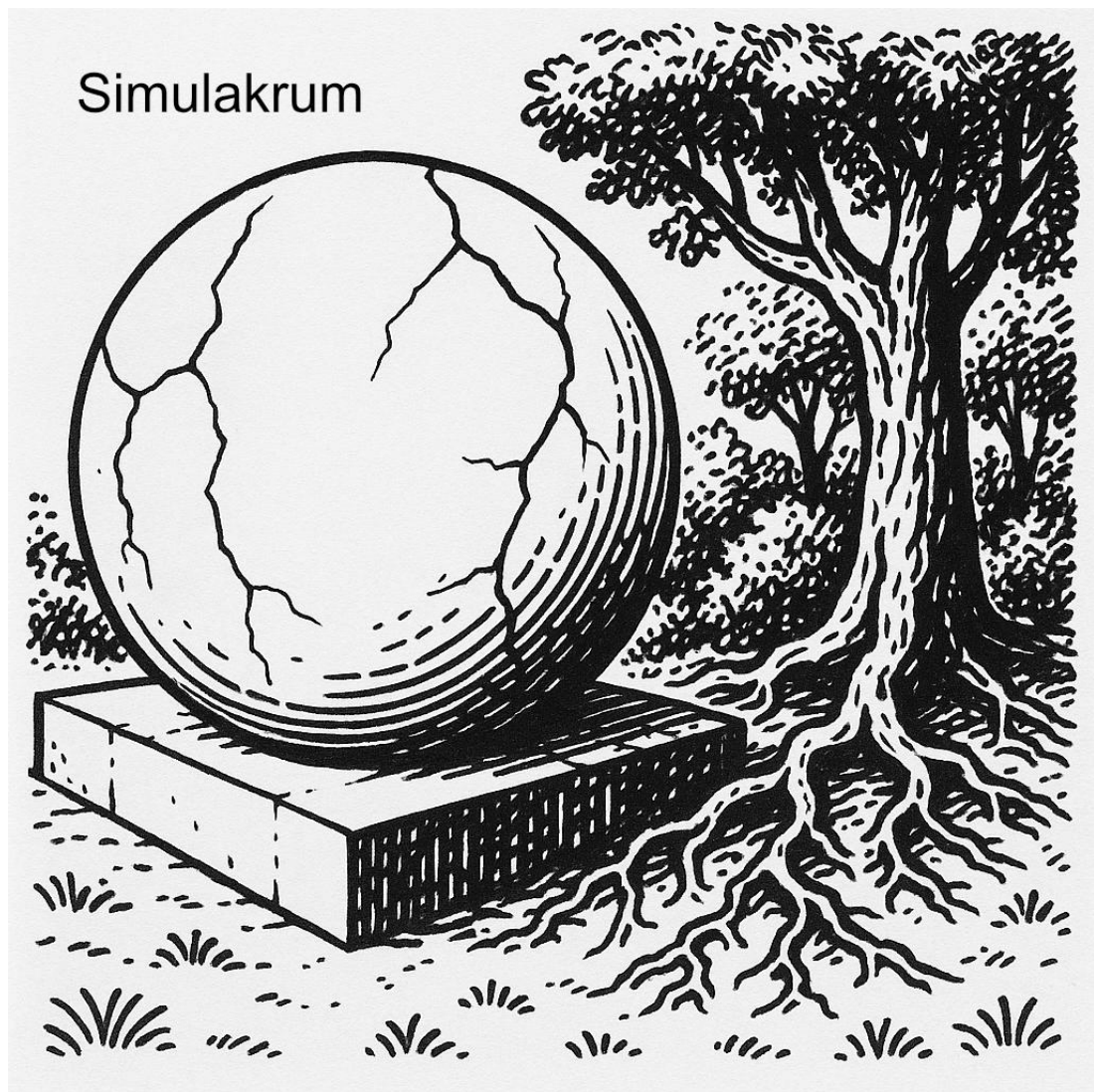
The logic of pricing is not the logic of freedom. It is based on primitive categorisation. It is a simulation. And in this simulation, categories collapse.

## The Ontological Shift

This has direct consequences for the world we create through our labour. In what kind of reality system do we act?

Market logic causes a displacement in ontological space: It severs the phenomenon of value from its embeddedness in the world – from meaning, relevance, effect – and constructs a second-order reality. A simulacrum emerges: a closed system with its own values, detached from embodied life. This isolated market value is then falsely treated as the essence of reality – while everything else, such as ethics, care, self-determination, appears distorted, marginal, irrational.

Thus, the original plurality of being is flattened onto a one-dimensional grid: monetary value.



In this reading, the Value Threshold acts as a transformative framework—an aesthetic-ontological apparatus that does not measure complexity but preformats it into a simulation of value creation.

It is a projective cut through the real—a violent origami of the social. This geometry has consequences: it systematically produces exclusion, loss of meaning, and psychosocial destruction.

### **The Effects of Isolated Value**

In classical capitalist interpretation, it is, for example, not recognised that strategies such as diligence and performance may work for the privileged in well-paid jobs, but not necessarily for the poorer classes, or in situations where people carry out work because it must, ethically speaking, be done – regardless

of whether it is paid or not. This applies to the toiling worker in the low-wage sector, whose labour does not automatically translate into upward mobility, i.e. more reward, but often into more pressure to perform; but also to the environmental activist or the artist who must exploit themselves in order to address injustice.

The ceiling in the low-wage sector, as well as the devaluation of the entire field of intrinsically motivated work, lies in the structural underestimation of activities that are market-dependent but often say nothing about their societal relevance or importance. The principle of supply and demand is neither a measure for fair distribution nor for actual relevance. Nor does it reflect the free will of a society, but rather constraints that operate in a discriminatory way. Value is regulated through the restriction of paid labour in order to prevent a relativisation of the value of commodities. Whoever is able to define the value of labour from above artificially protects the value of commodities over the value of human beings.

It is neither the case that what is actually the “best” prevails, nor that the society we have is what everyone wants. It is doubtful whether it even represents the will of the majority. What we see everywhere are simulations and assertions – objects that have become shells – which is a typical sign of increasing submergence, that is, a disintegration of society and a reduction in our perception of reality. The highest value no longer has the greatest benefit for all, but only for the few, while the greatest utility dominates and oppresses everyone else.

In classical economic theory, the value-boundary as mechanism is completely ignored. Discrimination is not understood, but instead there is the fantasy of a “functioning system” that determines its own references and coordinates of success in order to appear successful at all times. One could maliciously argue that economic science serves only the self-referential isolation of the economy, in order to preserve it through maximum abstraction and violence. Growth thus functions when restricted conditions are met. This methodology suppresses the hard truths of the periphery, or the Global South, of the dying nature, and feeds the bulwark of the middle class, while scapegoating minorities in order to protect itself from being questioned. This applies to the classical school (Smith–Ricardo), the neoclassical school through



marginalism. If something achieves no market price, it is logged as benefit “ $\approx 0$ ”. Externalities are labelled as “market failures,” not as structural errors. In the Austrian school: Any non-price information (care, biodiversity, common good) is treated as distortion; its undervaluation is naturalised as a necessary sacrifice for market efficiency. In Keynesian growth economics: unpaid activities do not appear in GDP; ecological or psychological consequential costs are counted as “external” items to be internalised only afterwards – if at all. In welfare economics: Those who have already fallen below the value-boundary (zero income, zero market power) count for nothing in Pareto comparisons.

Value and performance are treated as one-dimensional, scalable substances, rather than multidimensional, relational qualities.

The result is an ontological shrinkage: human reality is forced through a one-bit grid (“price / no price”). The distortions – poverty, loss of meaning, psychological destruction, ecological catastrophe – are not marginal phenomena, but by-products of the categorisation error. To this are added absurd self-referential market mechanisms. If supply is narrowed, not only do goods become more expensive, but the number of jobs across the board also decreases. Artificial scarcity is thus just as much a tool for generating value as labour itself. But if scarcity and labour compete, labour will always lose in the end – because it must create more in order to sustain the worker. The principle of scarcity, if need be, doesn’t have to feed anyone. From this emerges the possibility to impose conditions on the worker: namely to subject their work to market mechanisms that are not designed to enable universal or even free labour and thereby generate more wealth, but rather to regulate labour power in order to control the quantity of goods. If humans could work freely and on anything, based on individual or local relevance and concrete meaning, all values would, sooner or later, become homogenised. That would undermine every market power and dominance. The accusation against capitalism is not that it does not allow for value creation, but that value creation is channelled – to serve the idea of the elite, and thus the expensive, the more valuable, and therefore more power within the group – rather than a value creation that occurs autopoietically in ecosystems.

## The historical context

At some point in the history of labour, it was no longer merely a means to produce “something”—but a formalism emerged whose purpose was to prevent the free creation of value. It came with the idea of bundling value, centralising it, and concentrating power through it. From that moment on, every form of wage labour and gainful employment carried within it a hidden cap—defined by the Value Threshold—that limits the value which labour can create for the worker, while simultaneously commodifying that labour for the employer.

Labour becomes controllable only when it becomes a commodity—subject to the same laws of scarcity and supply as goods. But this capping mechanism inherently includes the factor of exploitation: the suppression of will and experience, the decoupling of actual performance from holistic context. Value is no longer recognised through lived impact or intention, but exclusively via a market-formatted evaluation—enforced through wage dependency. All of this is concealed behind the seemingly innocent and “neutral” principle of supply and demand.

Historically, the Value Threshold emerged during the early stages of capitalism—particularly in the transition from feudalism to industrial society in the 16th and 17th centuries—as a cultural, legal and economic boundary. It marked the divide between paid and unpaid, “productive” and “unproductive” labour.

Take the Enclosure Movement in England: peasants were forcibly evicted from the commons. Their subsistence work was suddenly worthless. Only paid labour on privatised land counted as “legitimate work.” With the rise of the classical notion of labour (Smith, Ricardo, later Marx), work was only deemed valuable if it produced exchange value—that is, if it yielded market products.

Reproductive labour, housework, care, child-rearing—performed mostly by women—was excluded from the realm of economic value, even though it formed the existential foundation for every worker. The Value Threshold systematically erased these spheres from visibility. Labour was reduced to marketability and exploitability. Anything that could not be monetised fell below the threshold of perception.

The Value Threshold, then, is not a natural law. It is the result of a historical shift in power—a capitalist redefinition of what counts as labour. Anything that did not directly contribute to profit was radically excluded. The Value Threshold precisely identifies this blind spot.

And so it becomes a wall—a wall that, backed by the blackmail of survival, initiates workers into three structural stages of exploitation:

1. Unpaid work  
(because real life always demands more than is paid—especially in care work)
2. Structural devaluation  
(because whoever defines performance also defines what is *not* performance)
3. General overexploitation of life resources  
(because those devalued are easier to control, more docile, more available)

But why is there no uprising?

In the West, the second and third stages of exploitation often go unrecognised—except by the marginalised or a few idealists. Wealth is perceived as something earned—through “fair” labour. Not as something achieved by suppressing alternative needs, topics, realities, or relevance.

Wages remain just fair enough to keep people in the system. One adapts to market logic in exchange for middle-class security—a trap particularly effective on neurotypicals, who are more likely to equate belonging with compliance. They fall for the leader who promises power, influence, and status. The hidden logic of the market is that it enables neurotypicals to form an in-group—a workplace community where value is found in being placed, in fitting in.

At the same time, this community operates like a fortress—always closing itself off, always “us against them.” This is one of the core flaws of capitalism: it promotes group thinking and structurally devalues individual deviation. It does not consider the world in its wholeness, only in its division. “Divide and rule” remains the underlying algorithm. Fixed objects dominate over open relationships.

The result is a creeping submergence—a slow drowning in the mental numbness of soulless office towers filled with self-replicating bullshit jobs (Graeber). The economy becomes a prison, not a field of creation.

## **Opportunism and denial of reality — core causes of the ecological catastrophe**

Very many people do not deviate—neither in their will nor in their experience—from the object concepts defined by capitalism. In the European or American prosperity bubble, it may appear as though capitalism has triumphed, because it continues to generate more of this particular kind of prosperity. Within these spheres, environmental degradation and the slow disintegration of the middle class are only gradually being recognised.

But there is almost no reflection on the will and experience of those outside this sphere—those in the Global South or other marginalised contexts. There is, in effect, one economic theory for those inside the prosperity bubble, and an entirely different one for those living on the far side of its walls.

Gainful employment, as defined in the West, is structured in such a way that *performance* is foregrounded far more than *privilege*, or the hidden effects of Value Thresholds, which silently shape discrimination in the market.

Discrimination, in this sense, is not a flaw—it is part of the value creation mechanism in capitalism. Through the automated devaluation of certain populations, capitalism generates profits. But this devaluation causes profound social and ecological damage.

The Value Threshold operates as an invisible force: it blocks or penalises vast amounts of valuable human activity—especially work that cannot be financed, and is therefore rendered socially irrelevant.

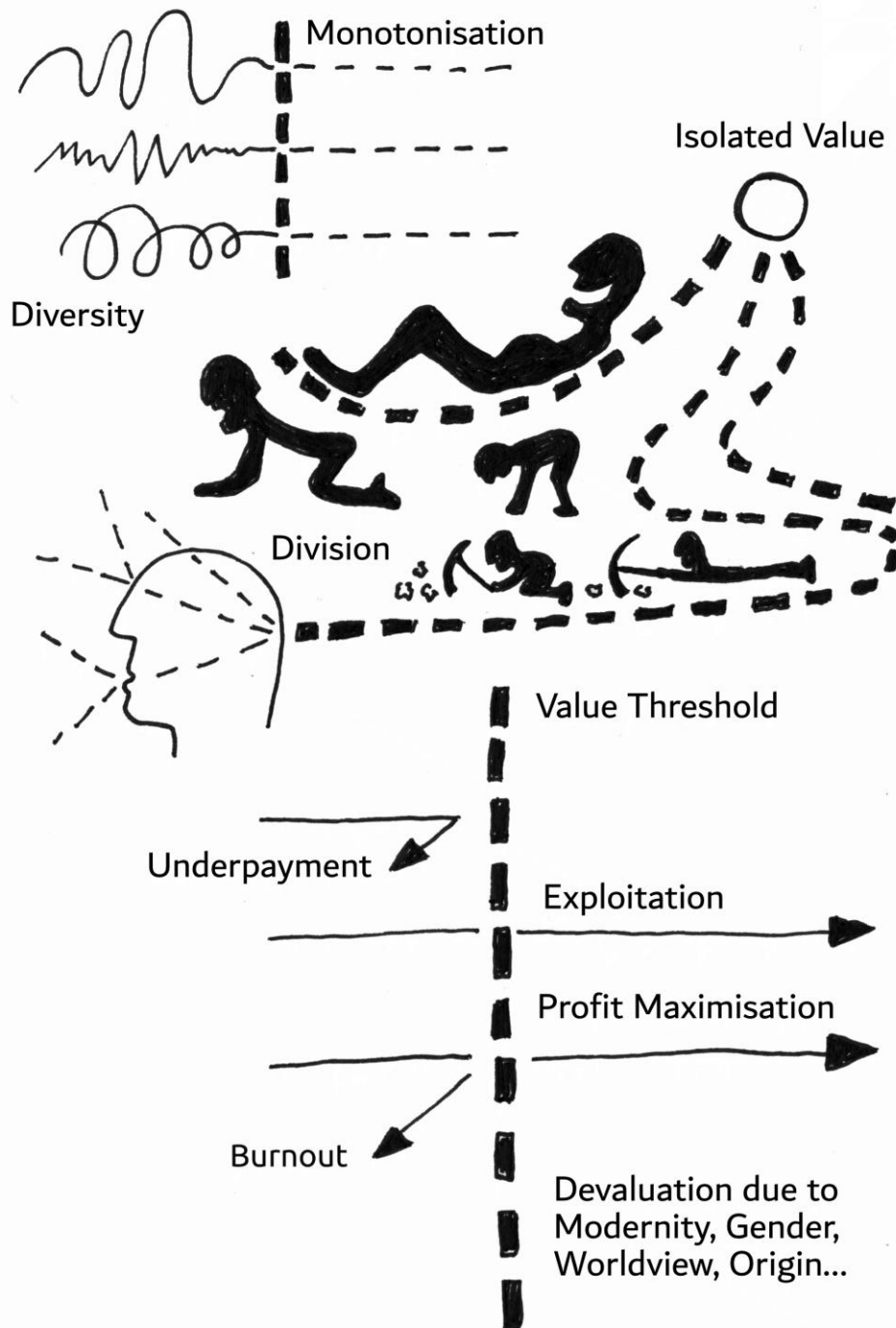
The following diagram illustrates how the worker shatters at the Value Threshold:

Up to that line, their labour is still acknowledged and rewarded—explicitly linked to relevance and value. But beyond this point, it is devalued or swallowed by external market factors. From this line onward, workers earn less and less from their efforts, while their labour—now capped, stripped of

context and intention—becomes a commodity for others to use in cost-efficient production.

The work becomes “cheap” not because it lacks real value, but because its authentic value has been artificially limited by the structure of the job—and that job is evaluated strictly along visible and invisible dimensions of the Value Threshold.

## EXPLOITATION AT THE VALUE THRESHOLD



What the Value Threshold means:

- It explains why many jobs that are socially essential (care, activism, art, domestic work) are structurally underpaid or unpaid in capitalist markets.
- It enables the market to systematically devalue people in order to legitimise exploitation.
- It is not based on objective or transparent criteria, but on a hegemonic monopoly of interpretation by those who define success—typically in terms of power, profitability, and exclusion.
- It functions as an instrument of power: to limit alternatives, suppress plurality, and maintain privilege.

Related concepts in the context of the Value Threshold. Numerous critical thinkers have analysed adjacent mechanisms:

- David Graeber: “Bullshit Jobs” – the production of meaningless labour to sustain hierarchical control.
- Nancy Fraser: Redistribution vs. recognition – social inequality emerges not only economically, but symbolically and culturally. The Value Threshold is such a mechanism of symbolic disregard.
- Pierre Bourdieu: *Symbolic violence* – market-based devaluation of labour as culturally normalised oppression.
- Karl Polanyi: The concept of *fictitious commodities* – labour is not a real commodity, but is treated as one under capitalism, creating systemic distortions. The Value Threshold is a structural expression of this fiction.
- Silvia Federici: Reproductive labour – care and domestic work as systematically devalued, placed beyond the Value Threshold.
- Jason Hickel: Degrowth economics – advocating for an economy that values preservation, relationships, and meaning beyond monetary exchange.

The Value Threshold thus intersects with central currents of post-growth economics, feminist economics, political ecology, socio-philosophical critiques of capitalism, enactivism, critical disability and poverty studies. It helps explain

how devaluation operates epistemically—as a loss of embodied relevance, not merely as a lack of money.

## **Comparison: Marx's Alienation vs. the Value Threshold**

### **1. Marx: Alienation**

Marx describes alienation as a fourfold separation in capitalist production:

- from the product of one's labour,
- from the act of production,
- from one's human nature (*Gattungswesen*),
- from others.

Alienation arises under private ownership of the means of production, where the worker becomes a commodified appendage to the machine.

The Value Threshold differs fundamentally:

- It is not a psychological *feeling*, but a categorical mechanism. It acts *before* perception—ontologically—by determining in advance what can be considered labour or value at all.
- Alienation takes place within production; the Value Threshold decides which work even enters the sphere of visibility and valuation.
- Not all work is alienated—some is not even recognised as work. It is pre-emptively erased.

### **2. Max Weber: The “Iron Cage” of Rationalisation**

Weber describes the increasing formal rationalisation of modernity: everything becomes calculable, efficient, predictable. Bureaucracy and technocracy encase the worker in an “iron cage”.

In contrast, the Value Threshold:

- is not a by-product of rationalisation but a pre-rational, ontological filter.



- is not merely about organisational form, but about the systematic filtering of reality according to market logic.
- goes further than the loss of a “horizon of meaning”: it constructs the horizon—deciding what may be considered meaningful or valuable in the first place. Not just a cage, but a tunnel vision with material consequences.

What the Value Threshold concept achieves:

- **Radical precision:** It shifts the debate from working conditions or ownership to the epistemic boundary that defines who is even allowed to be seen as valuable. It exposes the act of violence that comes with devaluation.
- **Ontological depth:** The Value Threshold doesn’t merely reflect domination—it constitutes it. It shapes how reality is perceived and organised.
- **Political acuity:** Where Marx calls for class struggle and Weber ends in pessimism, this concept opens a third way: epistemic rebellion through self-valorisation, embodied resistance, and the reclamation of relevance through self-determined labour.

Most crucially: the Value Threshold provides a way to understand why capitalism makes people ill.

Because it excludes so much of what people do, feel, contribute—and thus renders entire segments of embodied, meaningful life structurally invisible, irrelevant, or unworthy. The system doesn’t just alienate labour. It denies its very existence unless it fits into predefined economic categories.

## **The health consequences of an invisible mechanism**

In his double bind theory, Gregory Bateson showed that mental illnesses—especially schizophrenia—do not originate within the subject, but arise from contradictory communication structures that block all paths to resolution. For example: a child is loved, yet punished every time it expresses affection. Body

and language fall into contradiction. There is no way out. The result is pathological withdrawal, fragmentation, and loss of contact with reality.

What Bateson describes is a form of systemic violence caused by feedback errors—and this is precisely what the Value Threshold enacts at the level of the entire society.

## **The Value Threshold as a Collective Double Bind**

Capitalist society tells you:

- “You’re only worth something if you work.”
- “But the work you do (care, art, activism) is worth nothing.”

Even though, ethically and socially, it is recognised as deeply valuable.

This is double-binding violence—a permanent paradoxical message:

- Act—but only under conditions that invalidate your action.
- Become visible—but only by denying yourself.
- Be productive—but your productivity must not matter.
- Destroy the planet—and we’ll reward you.
- The richest man in the world is rich—even though he produces nothing.

This doesn’t just create exploitation. It leads to disintegration of the self: to the loss of agency, coherence, cognitive integrity. Much of what is diagnosed as depression, burnout, shame- and guilt-based disorders can be reread through this lens.

## **Russell’s Type Theory and the Paradox of Value**

Bertrand Russell’s type theory tried to avoid logical paradoxes by forbidding self-referential statements (e.g. “This sentence is false”). The Value Threshold is exactly such a paradoxical self-reference of the economic system.

The market defines what has value.

It uses this definition to determine what may appear in the market. But the market itself belongs to those who already have value. Therefore: Only those with value can create value.

This is a categorical circular argument—a kind of epistemological trap. No one can justify their own worth outside of the market's appearance system.

And that's what breaks people. It contradicts their experience of reality. And no one can live long-term against their own integrity without damage. Autistic people like me just respond earlier and more violently to this contradiction.

### **Concrete Consequences: Shame, Guilt, Self-Destruction**

- **Shame** arises because you believe *you* are wrong—even while doing something that is right (e.g. caregiving, truth-telling, nonconformity).
- **Guilt** is internalised—even though the failure was systemically generated.
- **Schizotypal disorders** can result from massive double bind experiences. The world appears fragmented because the system gives contradictory feedback about identity.

The system punishes not just behaviour, but being itself.

Here we see strong connections to:

- Frantz Fanon: The psychic destruction of the colonised subject by a structurally devaluing system—analogous to the internal colonisation of the poor in capitalism.
- Eva Illouz: How capitalism infiltrates emotion, particularly the experience of self-worth.
- Judith Butler: *Precarious Life*—the politics of vulnerability through normative exclusion.

The Value Threshold is the wall that not only breaks labour—but fractures the self. It reflects a judgement we cannot refute—because the very criterion for our defence (value) has already been withdrawn from us.

## **So what's at stake?**

Re-linking the economy to actual human experience. Breaking with the simulation of success as a universal cure. Moving toward a labour concept rooted in real meaning, not performative profitability.

So I ask:

**What do I want? What do you want?  
How do I experience the world? How do you experience it?  
Our relationships with objects must change. Our actions  
must change.**

## **Misunderstanding the work**

Neither capitalism nor democracy are horizontal systems – they are experienced vertically: individually and regionally. Two people may live in the same country, yet one experiences freedom and opportunity, while the other feels trapped in a dictatorship. While the upper classes in Europe may still enjoy a freer form of capitalism, large parts of the lower classes increasingly vegetate in a form of socialist heteronomy. And yet, it is the upper and middle classes that dominate the discourse – interpreting capitalism and democracy according to their own lived reality. Because capitalism promotes only those who are willing to narrow their gaze, ignore injustice, and focus solely on success. This is what Miranda Fricker has described as *epistemic injustice*: the structural exclusion of certain forms of knowledge, perception, and experience.

We do not live in a homogeneous capitalism – we live in one that creates vastly different realities in different locations. This is partly due to the fact that balance is not a value in capitalism. The goal is always to reach the top – not to level the ground.

I am not interested in the fashionable trend of demanding a new socialism as a counter-model to capitalism. That is legitimate, but I want to focus on real conditions and extract from them the practical possibility of transformation.

This book documents that process – through empirical experiments, from the perspective of an autistic artist, researcher, and activist.

The central question is: How long can a society ignore the value of self-determined work – work that arises from the dynamic between will, embodied experience, and object-relation – and instead reduce labour to functionality in service of wages? What happens when more and more people fall out of the system, like I did, or refuse to be devalued, and begin to reclaim their worth by challenging the market's monopoly on defining value and performance?

The logic of employment is designed to prevent precisely this kind of work. Only by limiting labour can capitalism limit value – and thereby maintain control. The celebrated concept of “honest work”, obediently serving market pressure and therefore supposedly legitimate, is a lie. Those who work the hardest are often not rewarded, while those penalised by the market are rarely at fault. Quite the opposite. Those who do the “right” thing – like I did as a Radical Worker – are often the ones who fail. But that is the very rupture where a new economy begins: one that serves people and ecosystems rather than profit.

Self-determined work is not egoistic escapism. It is work with the whole – with the ecosystem, with society. Value must not depend on whether one happens to be situated at the top or bottom of an economic cycle. True value reveals itself in local, individual, situated context – not in universalised performance metrics.

My refusal to accept the false narrative of personal failure has pushed me into activism. For years I've spoken on large stages and published my findings – and the consequence of refusing this systemic devaluation is bitter: I receive fewer and fewer commissions as an artist. I become inconvenient. I become expensive. Because I reject exploitation and redefine performance as a question of sovereignty. Fair pay today is a decision others make about you, based on their own interests. The value threshold is not objective – it is set by those who benefit from keeping others excluded.

In striving to live in dignity, I paradoxically earn less and less – because the system doesn't reward truth, it rewards compliance. This is how one ends up on welfare, stripped of autonomy.

This is where my experiment begins – and this book is its report. A kind of social, spiritual, artistic counter-sculpture. A deeper confrontation with existence and the right to exist. This path was not chosen freely – as an autistic person, I am structurally blocked in many ways. But over the years, this constraint became a liberation.

What first appeared as a personal failure became the beginning of detachment. This rupture – the refusal to be defined by the market – is the core of my work. I am no longer playing the game. I want to rewrite the rules.

In the years that followed, I stayed consistent. In conflict with the state, I developed a new concept of the worker. On behalf of millions of poor and marginalised people, I fight for the recognition of self-determined labour and value. For this, the German state criminalised me, drove me to hunger, and threatened me with homelessness. Because the self-confident poor are a threat to the capitalist order.

After years of trying to fit into exploitative structures, suffering humiliation and failure, I finally turned the tables. Let society tell me to my face that my work has no value. Let the “successful” explain why their labour is more essential to society than mine. Let them prove they are preserving the world instead of destroying it.

I am living an experiment: a person confronts society with decades of civic labour, receives almost no payment, and still insists – this is work. And not just any work – it is the work that will redefine value. The outcome speaks for itself: we need a right to self-determined labour. And by changing how we relate to work, we can reform capitalism at its root.

### Research Relevance| Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The value boundary provides a performatively tangible coordinate system to sensually break the invisibility of capitalist filters. Installations, value hacks or mapping formats reveal the one-dimensional geometry of profit and materialise alternative axes of value; artistic action thus becomes a practice of re-opening plural references to the world.

— Critical Autism Studies: The concept mirrors the pathology paradigm and shows how neuronormative as well as economic grids create the same reversal of blame. Autistic neuroqueering practices — hyper-focus, stimming, targeted dys-compliance — serve as research activities that undermine the value filter and make diversity visible as a systemically necessary variable.

### ***Provoked Empiricism and Crisis Experiments***

This text is neither a conventional non-fiction book nor a novel – it is the enactive work of an autistic person. It is a human rights intervention that became a book: a report from the field of self-determined labour, both in theory and practice. It is a plea in which I attempt not only to convey the theoretical essence of 20 years of experience with self-determined work, but also to communicate its drama, its irritations, its deeply personal entanglement with poverty, autonomy and resistance. It is part empirical study, part artistic research.

Provoked Empiricism is a research format I developed, in which the researcher systematically intervenes in existing social, economic or media systems to reveal their hidden structures, contradictions and power dynamics. Instead of “objectively” observing phenomena, she produces calculated disturbances – breaching experiments, performative gestures, artistic interventions – and reads the responses like seismic data.

Karen Nakamura (2013), *A Disability of the Soul: An Ethnography of Schizophrenia and Mental Illness in Contemporary Japan*, combines participant observation, performance and self-involvement in psychiatric contexts – with a focus on subjects socially labelled as deviant. She practices a form of *crip ethnography* which, like my approach, does not objectify the field but remains materially and affectively entangled with it. Her method is especially relevant to epistemic violence, institutional boundary policing and non-normative knowledge production.

My approach aligns with various traditions of qualitative and critical research, including:

- **Breaching and crisis experiments** (Harold Garfinkel, 1967): Disrupting everyday norms to reveal their invisible structures.
- **Performance ethnography** (Dwight Conquergood, D. Soyini Madison) and **critical autoethnography** (Holman Jones): Embodied intervention as a mode of knowing.
- **Activist Action Research / PAR**: Where cognition equals transformation – research is already a political act.
- **Situationist *dérive* / *détournement***: Aesthetic interventions into urban routines to expose hidden economies of space.
- **Artistic Research** (Borgdorff, Schwab): Knowledge that arises within artistic process – *Provoked Empiricism* radicalises this by treating system boundaries themselves as material for intervention.

## How Some Autistic People Do Research

Autistic hyper-systematisation (Baron-Cohen) and sensory divergence often lead to heightened sensitivity to inconsistencies in social scripts.

### Provoked Empiricism

- leverages this sensitivity as a research strength,
- reverses the *double empathy gap* (Milton), confronting the logic of the neurotypical majority with its own contradictions,
- enables embodied, truthful feedback, because the researcher is not observing the disorder from outside, but is part of it.

### Unique Features & Epistemic Value

1. Systemic self-disclosure: Institutions reveal their true nature most clearly when they are provoked.
2. Ontological critique: Research does not merely analyse *what* happens, but *how* reality itself is structured and produced.
3. Artistic productivity: The intervention generates artefacts – text, image, performance – which function as multi-layered data.



*Provoked empiricism* is thus a hybrid: artistic research, critical sociology, embodied autoethnography. It is uniquely suited to performatively reveal the *value threshold* rather than merely theorising it.

I began investigating labour because, as an autistic artist, I had no access to paid employment. My motive was political. The starting point of my research into labour and economics is what I call provoked empiricism. Instead of simulating detached observation – a stance widely critiqued since Paul Feyerabend – I intervene in the systems I examine. I push them to their extremes to sharpen their response patterns. The subjective is not an error; it is part of cognition. Distance, if at all, comes only in a second step.

Why do I do this?

Decades of disembodied observation of labour, poverty, and the economy have flattened perception. Researchers and administrators – often untouched by poverty themselves – have harmonised their diagnoses around the viewpoint of privilege. For instance, most poverty research suggests that more education is the key to escaping poverty. This reflects a class-blind optimism: a pseudo-objective gaze that projects a hypothetical future, while implicitly blaming the poor for their own situation.

But structural injustice is not a future problem. It is now. The fractures must be explored where they are – or else created deliberately to make the underlying logic visible. The more complex system reveals itself in its anomalies. I seek those anomalies. I create exceptions.

I am particularly drawn to taboos – and to breaking them.

### **Example: The Call to the Police**

One day, I call the police and report that the German labour minister is planning to kill me – if I do not comply. Why? Because I take his public announcement of stricter sanctions against the poor literally. From a moral perspective, that is precisely what such policies amount to: a threat of existential violence against impoverished people.

At first glance, this may sound absurd. But what I am doing here is a serious epistemological experiment. I am interrogating human behaviour within a system riddled with contradictions. This is the threshold where *art begins*.

When homeless people freeze to death in winter, no one calls it murder. But such deaths cannot be explained away as mere accidents – unless one ignores the systemic structures that *predictably* lead to these outcomes. The closer we look, the more obvious it becomes: the state and economy actively participate in increasing the risk to life for the poor.

Poverty is not a natural law.

It is a manufactured condition – and death is part of the deal. The *value threshold* keeps people at the edge of survival. Their suffering is functional: it legitimises the system. If wealth is a reward, poverty must be punishment.

I sent such provocative statements to institutions and forced them to respond. Often, I would write letters about starvation – and receive replies about bureaucratic regulations. (See also my book *Speeds Arbeit*, Speed's Work 2025.)

### What Interests Me Most?

I study the rhetorical, legal and psychological strategies institutions use to refute such accusations. How does a CEO justify the continued existence of poverty in a supposedly developed nation? How can one still take pride in personal achievement within a system that routinely allows people to die?

The idea of “merit” always implies that the poor are lazy – and thus deserve their fate. A society like Germany has found ways to avoid confronting such questions. That's why I keep posing them – especially to German institutions.

I am not interested in moralising. I want to ask the deeper questions: What is real? What is value?

And why does an economy that claims to create value so brazenly ignore the value of millions of human lives?

It is deeply unsettling to receive a call from the police – angry, almost threatening – accusing me of criminal behaviour simply because I refuse to

stop asking these questions. Because I dare to disturb a minister's peace with existential inquiries.

In the early weeks of 2017, against the backdrop of these questions, I made a public act of resistance: I declared the construct of gainful employment obsolete. For the first time, in letters to the German federal government, I introduced the concept of “form” as a fundamentally new understanding of labour and economy.

Unlike classical economic frameworks, the concept of *form* carries no fixed intention, no external constraint—it emerges instead as the sum total of human expression and creative possibility. It opens a space in which value can be generated across the full spectrum of meaning, beyond the confines of market logic. What is recognised as *work*—and what counts as *value creation*—is radically expanded.

I began to bring this different orientation into the field of economics. And just as artists and cultural workers often initiate gentrification—transforming what was once seen as worthless, marginal, or transgressive into something socially valuable—so too can this *form-based work* transform our understanding of labour. What at first appears useless, forbidden, or “other” becomes, over time, a crucial contribution to a pluralistic society.

As an artist, I inserted myself into the relationship between labour and poverty—and began to reshape it.

I wanted to provoke a response. I wanted to see how the system would react, what mechanisms would reveal themselves, and what insights this confrontation might offer for the future of work. My hope remains that we will discover new patterns of labour—ones that finally allow people to work, visibly and with recognition, on the *real problems* of this world.

— Artistic Research: Provoked empiricism defines rule-breaking as data collection. Performative disruptions become live audits in which reactions, framing errors and power resistances are recorded; the artistic gesture merges with critical field experimentation and generates multi-sensory evidence.

— Critical Autism Studies: For neurodivergent researchers, sensory deviation becomes a method: hyper-systematisation and dys-compliance reveal double binds that keep normality grids stable. Embodied irritation provides “hard data” instead of pathological attribution and establishes autism as an epistemic resource. |

## ***Transfer Protocol — Automated Code for a Devalued Society***

How is diversity born?

Through deviation.

How do I lose my job?

Through deviation.

How do I go broke?

Through deviation.

How do we achieve shared abundance?

When everyone deviates.

If the value threshold is an objectified form of symbolic violence in Bourdieu's sense—one that seeks to reify people, to simplify and divide them—then its counterforce must be subjective: grounded in free will and individual, embodied experience, or at least appearing as such. It is, in this sense, also a neuronormative reversal of the “pathology paradigm” (Nick Walker). This opposition is therefore of a different ontological quality. It starts with the individual—because if it didn't, it would only reproduce new value thresholds. The individual would again not be recognised in their intrinsic value, nor allowed to freely explore and shape their immediate sphere of relevance. Being itself would remain forbidden.

The question of the self-determined value of workers necessitates the integration of a fundamental factor neglected in economic theory and practice: the preservation of diversity. While diversity is often addressed through formatting mechanisms like “diversity management,” those of us who are different are rarely spoken with—only about. This question determines whether labour is evaluated by neurotypical, colonial, or anti-queer standards—or whether it is opened up to many coexisting value systems, which also changes the logic of distribution.

In my experience, diversity and pluralism are the keys to deeper insight. Contrary to neoliberal assumptions, the modern economy does not increase diversity—it reduces it. See Thomas Piketty's research on capital accumulation, David Harvey's “accumulation by dispossession,” or Saskia Sassen's “Expulsions.” Yet diversity is the basis of existence itself. Gainful

employment, based on conformity, obedience, and one-dimensional evaluation, cannot accommodate this. See also Virginia Eubanks' *Automating Inequality*, or Loïc Wacquant's *Punitive Neoliberalism*.

This loss of diversity is neither obvious nor transparent. It unfolds slowly. I will first describe in detail how this happens and later present concrete models and mechanisms for what self-empowered forms of labour and economic orientation could look like. See the Red Bull Project or the oppositional social system I develop in later chapters, including experiments within institutions such as ZDF.

Let's summarise the core of the problem again:

Today, many speak of a post-growth economy. But this requires a prior shift toward a post-success economy—because only by relativising the concept of success can we reframe growth. The problem is not growth per se, but its one-sidedness, which is a direct result of the prevailing concept of success. Work that regards diversity as the foundation of life must challenge the success imperative—a paradox not easily overcome. But the logic is simple: if everyone strives for success, maximum monotony is the result. And monotony is the consequence of the value threshold. It is the substrate of high profit margins—but not of a diverse society. That is the internal contradiction of capitalist economics.

My approach is neither socialist nor neoliberal. It focuses on deviation from norms in order to revitalise both market and ecosystem, and to relativise value thresholds. See Nancy Fraser's *Contradictions of Capital and Care*, or Silvia Federici's *Wages for Housework*. The hierarchical logic of meritocracy is upended, thrown into diversity, to initiate instead a horizontal logic of caring for difference. Unlike meritocracy, which excludes in order to create value, a pluralist logic of co-creation includes to sustain life.

This stands in opposition to what Nick Srnicek calls *Platform Capitalism* and to Shoshana Zuboff's *Surveillance Capitalism*. Later, I will introduce new patterns for a more intelligent economy. But to demonstrate their necessity, it must first be shown that capitalism actually reduces diversity. See Jason Hickel and Andreas Malm's concept of the *Metabolic Rift*, or Joan Martínez-Alier's *Ecological Debt*.

This directly contradicts the modern self-image of capitalism as a system that promotes individual freedom. In truth, it weakens freedom no less than socialism once did. The mechanism is simply more covert: it hides behind the collectivising drive of success. As Grace Blakeley notes in *Stolen*, the successful person is nearly always a stereotype. Success is standardised. One may define success differently for oneself, but the market defines success in a narrow way—and rewards only this definition.

That is why the first step in my liberation was to reject success as a guiding metric for my work. Instead, I cultivate human relationships with the world. My goal is to strengthen diversity—something that, as I will later show in detail, helps solve many of the root problems of the modern economy. It re-establishes the value of work not as service to authority, but as a necessary, self-determined contribution to an ecosystem.

This is vital for marginalised people. The answer is not to become like those in power. Rather, it is to live our own subcultures. That is the only way to build ecosystems. It requires us to decouple transferability from standardisation—even if that makes us awkward. But awkwardness is good in an ecosystem. It protects local deviation, preserves difference, and grounds us in reality. Globalised markets cannot do this—which is why they routinely collapse. They simulate relationships, but do not live them.

Finally, it must be shown how the weakening of diversity undermines the market itself. This is not obvious, because in capitalism it seems the opposite is true: synchronised mass markets generate maximum profit. But that leads to stereotypical role models—“the successful”—whose paths don’t work for most people because reality is plural.

The central argument of meritocracy—that it enables evolution—is relativised in my work, especially through the MNO model. This model opens the question of what it means to complete or deepen social “progress”. Emergence processes must be understood more profoundly. Capitalism often tends toward *indimergence-submergence blockades*, despite the illusion of innovation.

This integrative approach opens paths to more complex societal forms. Evolution without a success metric—or with a differentiated one—produces

more varied building blocks, the prerequisite for higher intelligence. Meritocracy, in contrast, fosters the dominance of “the one”, a dumbed-down form of organisation built on the reduction of complexity. Colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalist economics are incapable of designing complex societies without discrimination. That is why environmental protection can only be realised partially under capitalism. It is constructed *against* nature. Because of the value threshold, no real transfer of real diversity occurs in the market.

It is important to recognise that the emergence of gainful employment was accompanied by a massive weakening of the value of open and free human activity. Suddenly, everything seemed possible—yet anything that did not serve a specific purpose was relegated to secondary importance. It was here that success began to solidify as a one-dimensional principle. Concepts such as usefulness and impact emerged, but only within increasingly narrow, reductive frameworks.

The birth of labour as “successful and therefore useful action” marked the death of broad contextualisation in human activity—and with it, the autonomy of human design. More critically, it marked the loss of awareness of the complex interrelations between human action and the ecosystem.

As early as 11,000 years ago, at the Göbekli Tepe site in what is now Turkey, we may already see the catastrophic development that continues to shape “how humans work” today. It is speculated that the context of large-scale festivals—rituals of centralised power and symbolic excess, often involving mass beer consumption—created, for the first time, the need for large-scale grain cultivation. One could argue that the ritual exaltation of authority and one-sided relevance forced human production beyond any natural balance. At this point, humanity may have fallen from the ecological ‘paradise’—out of resonance with its ecosystem.

Usefulness and value became split from the deeper operating principles of an ecosystem in which everything previously had effect and meaning. The human being, once in flow with nature, became “the worker”—reduced to an abstract, productive agent. ADHD-driven hunters and autism-shaped observers of ecological order were replaced by the neurotypical settler.



Wealth, from that moment on, was no longer understood as something *with* nature, but *against* it. Instead of recognising wealth as the intrinsic complexity of life on Earth, civilisation began to redefine it as a narrowed, reduced form: prosperity. This was the beginning of a foundational misconception, one that continues to define our understanding of poverty and prosperity today. The protection of prosperity becomes a process of marginalising natural wealth—rooted in diversity—and casts diversity itself as an obstacle to profit. The same logic applies to the division between gainful employment and a broader, pluralistic understanding of contribution and relevance.

Natural wealth is systematically devalued.

The protection of property rights becomes a trap for the poor in two ways. First, because they are seen as worthless in relation to the inflated standard of value. But worse: their actual contribution to the broader ecosystem is erased by the value threshold. The richer, more complex contexts in which their existence once had meaning are denied to them. They are labelled as “unemployed”—as if they had no relevance beyond that. It is no coincidence that over 30 percent of people living in prison or poverty today are neurodivergent.

This dialectical exclusion of an open and holistic understanding of wealth means that in our war against nature, prosperity as a rigid definition always *requires* poverty as its cruel counterpart—though it does not *have* to. If this dialectic were more open, more relative, the experience of poverty would be less brutal, less absolute.

But the more we seek to protect prosperity, the more brutal the reality of poverty becomes—and the more we deny the deeper wealth of nature. Because to relativise wealth would threaten the totalitarian logic of success, which exists primarily to defend property without question. Those who want success and absolute ownership also require corresponding poverty.

Poverty is the direct consequence of one-sided value creation. Where wealth exists as a rigid, standardised unit, it inevitably cuts off or restricts free access to resources—this is the true root of poverty. At the same time, civilisation has

destroyed the diversification of subsistence strategies, weakened communal structures, and banned free hunting in the forests.

As previously stated, poverty is not merely a lack, but a mechanism of exclusion—of blocking alternative values and preventing alternative forms of subsistence.

We see the lack: of jobs, of services, of income. But we fail to see the devaluation—the fact that something is now labelled “poverty” which once counted as part of nature’s abundance, which had and still has value within an ecosystem. We want to “support” the poor, give them jobs—but we rarely allow them to have self-determined value. Because to do so would relativise prosperity itself and open a pathway out of poverty that does not lead through submission.

I do not want to approach the question of ownership in terms of socialist expropriation, but to soften and rebalance it. What should count as property in an economy—and what must remain openly accessible? This question must be rethought from the ground up, because there is no real solution to poverty without addressing it.

In recent decades, the theory of property has been radically pluralised. Elinor Ostrom has shown that commons—collectively managed resources—can be highly structured, resilient and non-anarchic. Newer theorists like Silke Helfrich, David Bollier and the Commons-Initiative redefine property not as an exclusive right, but as a responsibility. The core question shifts: not “What do I own?”, but “What do I care for?”

It becomes clear: market ownership is often extractive, while commons follow a logic of reciprocity and access equity—directly opposing the top-down value hierarchies of capitalism. Increasingly, research calls for the re-institutionalisation of plural ownership models—especially in areas like housing, infrastructure, digital resources and care.

So the question is not: what must the worker do to get a job? It is: what does a person need in an open society that recognises value as deviation from the norm?

Only by asking this can we reach the plane where poverty is experienced—and understood—in fundamentally different terms. Here, we may also understand

why modern societies struggle so deeply with the idea of “free labour.” The dominant economy does not generate value through diversity, but through conformity to prevailing structures and boundaries. Poverty is not a sign of dysfunction among the poor—but a sign of missing conditions for developing individual worth, for living one’s own task. The result, under capitalism’s chronic double bind, is a life of alienation. Many adapt—not materially impoverished perhaps, but impoverished in deeper dimensions. And with them, the system itself deteriorates.

Success is self-referential and segregative. It isolates itself from the real world. This is the root of both economic injustice and ecological collapse. Economic striving operates under a bell jar. This structure is now largely unconscious, embedded in daily behaviour.

Hence the call must be: “I am a self-determined part of this world. I have value and relevance in it.” Not: “Give me a portion of your prosperity.” Because that does not dismantle structural dispossession—baked into the system itself.

Poverty cannot be overcome through success, profit, or economic growth as traditionally understood. It cannot be solved by everyone striving for the top. That would be narrowing. Success itself is a tunnelled relationship to the world.

The question of what the poor need to live self-determined lives must be asked radically new—from their perspective, from the ecosystem’s perspective—not from that of politicians or donors. We must stop demanding that the poor confirm the worldview of the rich, live and work like them—especially when doing so means self-abandonment. This insight must lead to consequences.

The poor must not and need not become the underpaid version of the rich. Their reference field is different. Their desires, their lived reality—that must be the central question. Not what function they are assigned from outside in order to be declared valuable.

We cannot resolve poverty without deconstructing how wealth is produced and defined. We cannot democratise value unless we move beyond success and possession as sole reference points for meaning. We need categories beyond material performance—ways of recognising individual worth without filtering it through a standardised lens.

We must rediscover *terra incognita*—the unknown land of alternative value. This requires its own language, its own culture.

The poor can find ways to escape the anticipatory obedience to market pressure and success. They can render visible another order, another reality—grounded in different values, where their existence is not devalued from the start.

Only then can self-determined contribution be recognised as contribution. Only then do unseen references become epistemically and economically relevant.

The goal of the poor cannot be the realisation of capitalism. The unemployed have their own culture, their own ecosystem—like an endangered frog or a bog plant that cannot live in dryness. The question is: what system might emerge if the diversity of the excluded is reintegrated into the economy? How would that transform capitalism?

This line of thought resonates with post-growth economics (Jackson 2017; Raworth 2018), commons theory (Helfrich & Bollier 2019), and feminist economics (Fraser 2016; Federici 2018). Critical poverty research (Zomer 2022) demands new languages and visibility for those structurally decoupled from systems of value. Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues similarly in his “epistemologies of the South”: that marginalised cultures bear truths ignored by hegemonic knowledge.

Anna Tsing’s ecological-economic anthropology describes beings—like moss, or mushrooms, or poor people—as survivors beyond capitalist extraction. The poor are not lacking. They are carriers of alternative worlds. And only by recognising them can we restore social and ecological diversity.

But this self-valorisation is difficult—not only for the poor. Many people, systemically dispossessed and devalued, mistake their condition for “reality”. They forget to ask what they actually need. They sell themselves short. And their value will be lost, eventually.

This insight has been made before—but rarely is the narrow concept of success recognised as the structural cause of poverty. Seeing it is one thing. Acting on it, as I do through my own self-determined working practice, is another.

Success is a powerful force—founded on tragedy. It is easy to destroy a complex system; far harder to build one. Force is common. Creativity is rare.

And so, complexity loses. It cannot draw on the full power of diversity, imagination, or embodied intelligence. Exploitation requires little expertise. But to operate within a rich, interdependent ecosystem demands deep knowledge, patience, and care.

This asymmetry defines the struggle of our time: a clash between reductionist force and ecological intelligence. The challenge lies in constructing an *economy as an ecosystem*. Too few have yet discovered the treasure hidden in that question—let alone the explosive urgency of its implications.

Only those who see through the destructive entanglement of wealth and poverty can begin to access the full scope of human and natural creation. In my work, I try to blaze a trail—like an autistic stimming impulse that maps a hidden logic—to decode the actual conditions beneath the noise.

One thing must be said clearly:

The dominant economic concept of success is a trick.

A seductive psychological sleight of hand.

This is why capitalism is so difficult to dismantle: it relies on a sophisticated deception.

In this book, I refer to the mechanism that misleads so many as the Transfer Protocol. By this, I mean—drawing on the metaphor of an auto-executing code—the structural automatism that triggers the upward transfer of value, resources, and recognition, while shifting blame, risk, and devaluation downward. The Transfer Protocol is the invisible logic of capitalist systems.

It acts like a filter algorithm:

- upward:           profits,           property,           credit;
- downward: poverty, care work, responsibility for systemic failure.

Only market-compatible contributions are registered as "performance"—everything else disappears below the value threshold.

In current research, this concept bridges multiple fields: – post-growth economics (e.g. Raworth, Jackson), – commons theory (e.g. Ostrom, Helfrich), – structural poverty analysis (e.g. Zomer, de Sousa Santos), – and studies on the automation of social inequality (e.g. Virginia Eubanks' *Automating Inequality*).

The Transfer Protocol clarifies a central truth: poverty, climate catastrophe, and the care crisis are not accidental externalities. They are the direct result of the same system logic.

This makes the protocol not just an analytical metaphor, but a scientific lever—a way to articulate and justify alternative structures of ownership, value, and participation.

## **Understanding cycles**

Let us assume – a fact demonstrated by the MNO model – that nature, as well as human beings in the midst of all their relationships, are based on circulatory systems. Bruno Latour also emphasises that all entities exist within feedback loops. If one link is blocked, the whole system shifts or collapses. This simply means: everything has a role. If just one element is removed – through naming, materialisation, direct elimination or blockage – its absence will sooner or later become a problem for all parts of the system, unless it was merely a transient phase. It only becomes a solution if it leads to a new emergence via the cycle. Because everything is interconnected. All parts of an organic system are structured as reflections of the microcosm and macrocosm. So if something is blocked in the macrocosm of society, it will also be blocked in the microcosm of individuals or families. There are fewer jobs. The atmosphere becomes more hostile. Crime increases. Fear grows. Patterns of violence then spread across the entire social field.

This is not accidental – it is functional in the modern market. When fear rises, so does pressure, and this pressure stabilises the restrictions on access that the system requires.

People become more insecure – and more willing to adapt.

In a circulatory system, each individual part may take on central significance at times, but in its original state, it remains just one among many. There is a homogenisation of relevance over time – sometimes one thing is important, then another.

Circular systems always generate intersections and transfers. This means: nothing has only one function. Everything is reused, repurposed, transformed. This is the principle of endless recycling.

The elites – the so-called successful – see themselves as detached. They are not bound to anything (in their own perception). They condition themselves and claim the power to define everything.

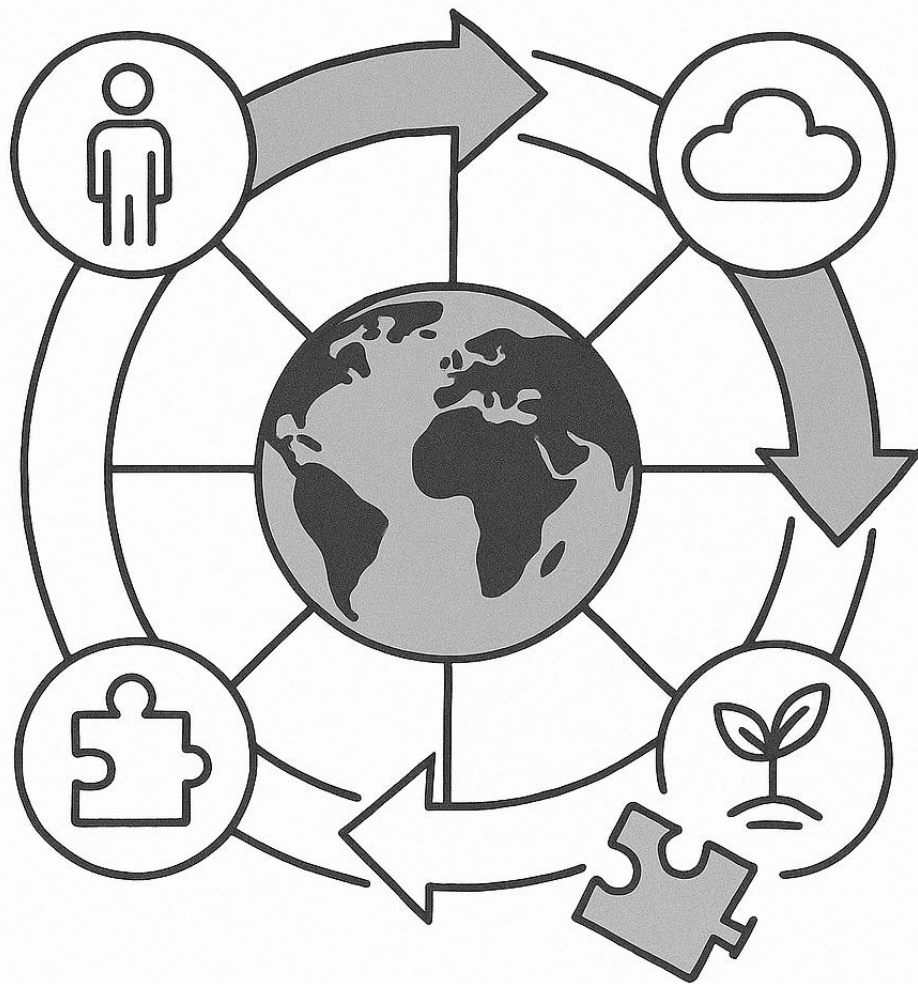
This reveals a weakness of the circular system: Even though it guarantees inclusive relationships and the value of all contributions, it also opens the door to manipulation.

Anyone who does not internalise the ethics of the loop – participation, tolerance, openness – can sabotage it. Its strength is also its vulnerability.

The fact that we are in relation to each other is what makes power and coercion possible. Blackmail only works because we are relational beings. And yet, such coercion must be forbidden if the cycle is to remain intact.

By “cycle”, I also refer to the pattern described in the MNO model:

Submergence – Indimergence – Emergence as the foundation of autopoiesis. It is about maintaining the ongoing shift, the responsiveness to absence, and the open principle of a humane society.



For the elites of our economy, the world is not constructed in cycles, but in linear chains. And we all carry these elites within us, as an internalised principle. In their worldview, prosperity is the product of individual performance and success, achieved independently of everyone else. Anyone who wants a share of this prosperity must submit to their conditions.

They are always eager to make it appear as if those below have a choice. Workers are made to believe they have a choice. But in reality, they do not — because ultimately, they all must sell themselves short. They live within a circular system. Anyone who extracts value from it creates dependencies and opens the door to blackmail. But who has the right to do that — when the entire world is constructed as a cycle, where every action has consequences, and therefore carries value, impact, and relevance?



Living systems follow the principle of multireferential patterning: each element fulfils multiple functions simultaneously and is embedded in diverse semantic and relational networks. In systems biology, this is described as functional redundancy — alternative pathways ensure that ecological functions remain stable even when individual nodes fail. If one of these pathways is blocked, the resilience of the overall system declines.

Network and percolation theories in physics show similar tipping points in interdependent structures. When the value threshold rigidly defines one element exclusively as private property, we encounter the tragedy of the anticommons (Heller 1998): resources become underused because too many actors hold exclusion rights, preventing multireferential access.

This intensifies the categorisation trap — it reduces an ambiguous system node to a one-dimensional profit track and cuts off all other relations from their vital roles. In systems theory terms, this is a double bind (Bateson): it pathologises feedback loops across economic, social, and ecological dimensions simultaneously. A relational system that cannot express ambiguity becomes brittle — and ultimately violent.

## **1. from robbery to status.**

I would now like to address the fatal first stage of the transfer protocol. It begins by blocking a single aspect of the ecosystem, defining it unilaterally, and making it inaccessible to others — a moment of indimergence. At this point, concrete value arises as a construct — for example, in the form of property — but simultaneously initiates the reduction of systemic complexity. This is where the origin of others' poverty lies, as they are prevented from developing freely due to the removal of a resource they need.

Throughout history, such blockages have often taken the form of forced expropriation or the denial of access to basic resources such as water, land, or food. What follows is a crucial psychological reversal that reveals the deeper logic of economics. For those who suffer scarcity, the impression is created that what has been taken is now the most important thing — and therefore, the most valuable. A distortion of relevance occurs.

What was previously just one element among many now becomes the very prerequisite for life. Because in a circular system, there is no escape. No alternative. This twist culminates in the power of money. It follows, then, that classical value creation is essentially a process of devaluation and expropriation, concealed behind the simulation of fairness provided by externally imposed employment. From the perspective of the so-called value creator, it seems as though something is added — value increases. But elsewhere, living space is reduced. This is the logic of the value threshold within a circulatory system: not only are individuals themselves devalued, but also their access to necessary resources.

There is no such thing as independent value creation. Capitalist value generation always relies on a blockage elsewhere. It is like a dammed river.

What is immediately urgent becomes all-important. The acute need takes precedence and pushes awareness of broader systemic interrelations out of perception — and with it, the foundation of meaningful action. Over time, everything that cannot be reduced to profit is pushed out of relevance. As with the value threshold, it is devalued and neglected — even though it contributes to life. Capitalist economics systematically devalues what is already present as freely accessible wealth: the environment, love, life itself. But why, in a society, should what is freely accessible be considered less valuable?

This is the origin of the fake.

The exclusive reference to a single value also shapes the quality of the value boundary. It functions like a filter that only lets through the perspective of those privileged by that dominant value. Reality itself is thus curtailed — since its recognition is tied to the individual's capacity to act in alignment with the dominant mode of being.

The pursuit of profit is, therefore, not truly an act of creation, but a mechanism by which people are persuaded — often violently — that industrial value creation has only positive effects. This is the fundamental pathology of the modern value concept. It is the reason environmental destruction, for instance, is not factored into the price of goods.

And now something both remarkable and tragic occurs.

In the act of dispossession, the one who takes something from the system experiences a revaluation — one that absolves them of their responsibility toward the whole. The others become dependent, unable to hold the thief accountable or to revalorise alternative forms of value. This is how power reverses reality: possession becomes legitimacy. The theft becomes the basis of status.

The complex relations of the ecosystem — this knowledge is buried. And it is buried ever deeper as individual lives are increasingly devalued. This is the mechanism from which exploitation and monetary violence arise, right up to the present day.

Status is largely a neurotypical trap — a cognitive distortion of values to which neurotypicals are particularly susceptible. In this sense, every theft is conceivable, because the thief can deflect broader evaluation and suppress the recognition of what has been taken. If successful, they will inevitably be transformed — from a violator into a respected citizen.

In a closed-loop system, one-sided value, abstracted from pluralistic individual worth, is always an unjust intervention. Unfortunately, for deep psychological reasons, it often secures power for the thieves. Especially when the population has lost its knowledge of natural cycles and no longer knows how to argue for the value of others — why others deserve a say.

Belief in status prevents the recognition of discrimination. The two values — status and equality — cannot coexist without contradicting each other in practice. The result is cognitive dissonance and the systemic oppression of the marginalised.

A circular system, therefore, demands strong fundamental rights and robust ecosystem protections — to preserve ambiguity and complexity in the meaning of resources. Wherever economics becomes merely a tool of power, it forfeits its legitimacy as a guardian of life — as a provider of sustenance. Accordingly, gainful employment also loses its status as “useful”, because it too often serves nothing but monetary success.

Protecting life in an economy means recognising all contributions as valuable, in order to preserve permeability and avoid compartmentalisation.

The perversion of material success lies in how it becomes a dominant worldview. Materiality alone seems to provide a coherent narrative — but only because it negates complex relationships and simplifies causality. It overrides the recursive dynamics of submergence, indimergence, and emergence. It enforces the dominance of objects and reductive slogans like “diligence leads to success.” This is the lever that turns expropriation into apparent value creation, subjecting all those who cannot — or refuse to — follow suit.

It is essential to grasp that the foundation of the modern economy is built on a trick: it transforms an act of violence into a seemingly desirable action, one that alienates people from reality and corrupts them psychologically. We are anchored in the world of objects — because only there can violence against relationships, free will, and lived experience be hidden.

## **2. from hierarchy to the debt of classism**

The world as an ecosystem is being destroyed. In its place, a pyramidal structure is being constructed. As previously discussed, the individual's right to free access to the basic requirements for a self-determined life is being lost. The result is the imposition of gainful employment — that is, externally determined activity in place of self-determined labour.

This reinforces the fraud: scarcity and access restrictions are now used to demand labour in return for mere subsistence. The reference for value narrows. In turn, the obligation to contribute stabilises the value threshold and produces classism.

This dynamic fuels contempt for welfare recipients — not because they are in need, but because they are the structurally dispossessed. It is not the so-called successful individuals — whose success rests on reframing and simplification — who are blamed, but rather the poor, migrants, women, and disabled people. They are cast as the cause of dysfunction, while the deeper structural theft remains invisible.

This leads to the devaluation of all other values and contexts. Most people and cultures are dispossessed, forced to sell themselves below value to fit into the pyramid order, or sacrificed altogether in pursuit of access to its narrow top. This mechanism continues even in modern, seemingly enlightened societies —

across nearly all areas of economy and social life. The very construction of prosperity rests on it: on the canonisation of expropriation, on the fabrication of unworthiness, and on the transformation of artificially restricted goods into necessities of life — whose price continually rises while free contributions to the world lose value.

In the end, the preservation of commodity value and split-off status suffocates the space for self-determination, and with it, the diversity and dynamism of the market. It destroys the actual, natural market.

That is the paradox.

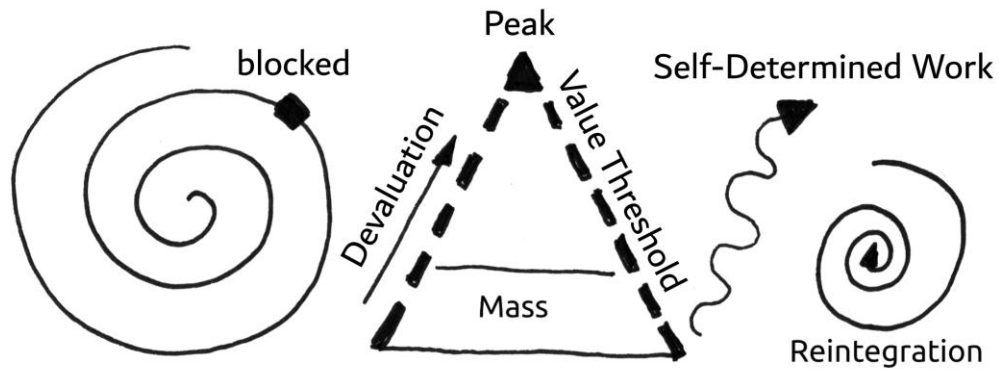
This structure limits the creative and effective potential of humanity, as countless synergies and natural interrelations are excluded from economic activity — even though they could support a much richer, more participatory economy in which people collaborate as equals and confidently bring in their own resources and talents.

There can therefore be no fair trade as long as trade is based on artificial scarcity and one-sided valuations. Yet this is the foundation of what is today widely accepted as “legitimate trade.”

Employers, it seems, bear no responsibility for the fact that workers can no longer survive independently. As if their power derived solely from their “performance” or privileged property — as if this had no systemic consequences. But in reality, they produce the very lack of freedom that leads to dependencies from which they profit. They fail to see that gainful employment is a form of human abuse, not a fair or ethically justifiable arrangement. Even seemingly “fair pay” cannot change this, as it merely shifts exploitation elsewhere, disguising it with the appearance of legitimacy. It is, in essence, a system of blackmail.

As the following image illustrates, a segment is extracted from the cycle — triggering the formation of the pyramid. Anyone attempting to work outside the dominant frame of value — imposed from above — will be unable to produce work that is recognised as objectively valuable. This is because relevance is contextualised exclusively in reference to the top, enforced through systemic blackmail. Everything else appears secondary.

At this point, comprehensive reality is inverted: it becomes a subjective space of organisation, while the market — and only the market — is seen as shaping “the one legitimate world.” This ultimately corrupts people into obedience toward this singular market, because to deviate is to fall out of the world — and to be accused of failing to participate in the construction of the only reality permitted: the one society.



The narrowing of supply — as previously discussed, the fundamental prerequisite for high profits — is only possible where free self-development, and with it the diversity of needs, is systematically restricted. This is why the lack of freedom in gainful employment is so crucial to the capitalist system. It limits supply by preventing people from unfolding freely — and at the same time, by constraining supply, it manipulates qualitatively limited demand in such a way as to expand it quantitatively.

This kind of market control is not based on the creation of the “good” or the “best”, as is often claimed, but solely on the principle of reducing options and devaluing diversity. That is the true objective. People are meant to believe that the best will naturally prevail — precisely so they will accept that, in practice, only one thing is allowed to prevail. This fiction is the basic precondition for the structural expropriation of the masses, forcing them — figuratively and often literally — into the factory.

That one thing must therefore be perceived as immensely more valuable than everything else, in order to justify such undemocratic violence. This isolated value, I emphasise again, leads directly to the hidden value threshold, because in every form of work there is one predefined thing that is supposed to be “the most valuable” — and this predefinition obstructs any authentic evaluation of

one's own labour. In a world full of individuals, the individual is bound to fail against the dictates of isolated value. It weakens every person — in one way or another.

The world is still created and shaped by everyone and through everything — but the narrative is told exclusively from one perspective: the perspective of success. Only what is deemed successful is considered relevant — and all too often, only what devalues people and nature becomes "successful".

Despite these realities, most economists still insist that market participants act freely, that the best wins, and that high achievers shape the world by themselves. This myth only works by systematically excluding all other dimensions of life and existence through a giant act of reframing — after which these suppressed aspects are reappropriated as mere "resources" by means of false categorisation.

The foundational error lies in the belief that the top deserves everything, while in fact it must destroy the ecosystem, reduce its complexity, or render it invisible — just to construct itself as the top.

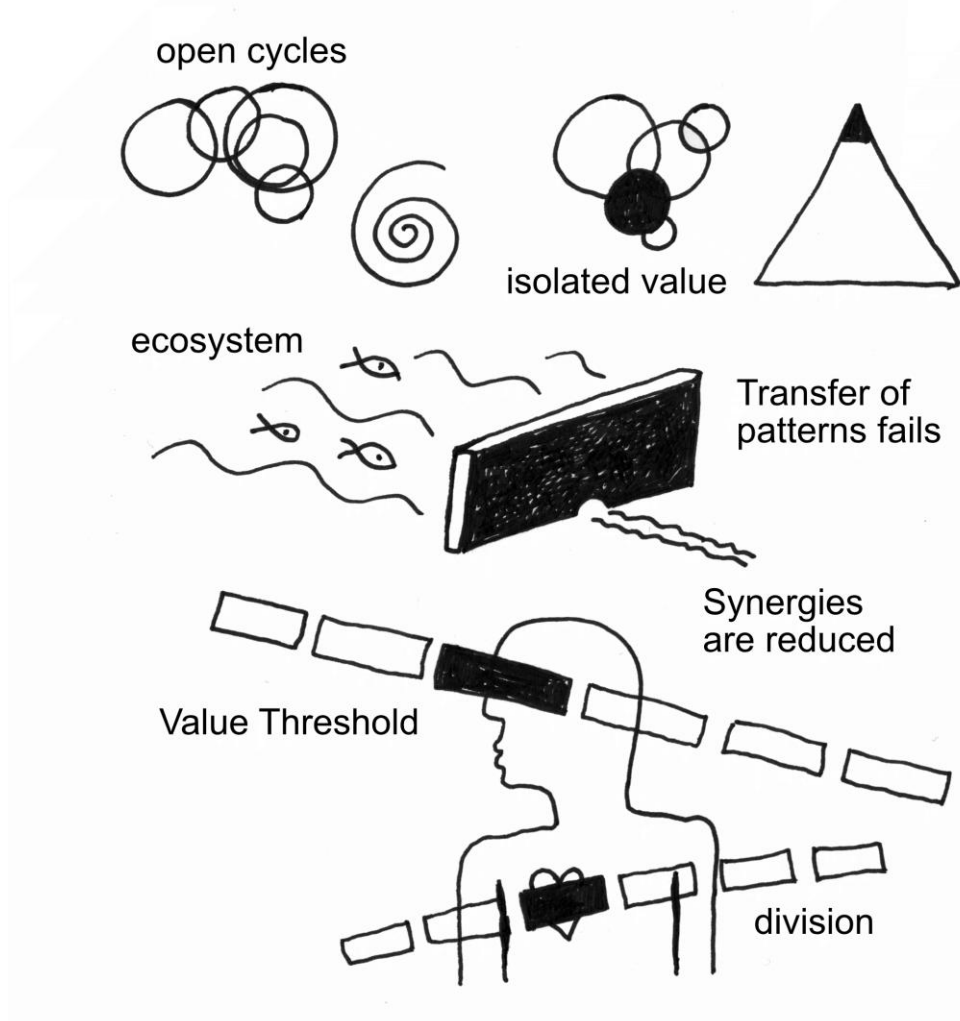
But there is a way out.

Self-determined labour is, in essence, an attempt to restore the circular system — by expanding diversity and contextual meaning, and thereby relativising the pyramid. It is about liberating the overlaps and intersections between values, where a single thing may hold different meanings for different people, from one-sided ownership — and transforming them into shared spaces of living and creating.

Such an approach would constitute nothing less than a democratisation of the market — by opening up the frame of reference for value, and thus also for labour.

The pressure to work — or the coercion within the market — is not merely aimed at punishing the supposedly "idle", as is often argued. It is above all directed against alternative value creators — those whose motivation is not obedience to the pyramid (i.e. the market), but rather the expansion of supply itself. By exploring their needs in self-determined ways, they increase the pluralism of demand.

## DESTRUCTION OF CYCLES



There is no justification for penalising and systematically discriminating against deviant people – those who do not work or contribute according to the logic of material success. There is no objective evidence that their actions are of lesser value to people, society or the ecosystem. Quite the opposite. The system would collapse if people didn't continue to engage beyond the realm of paid work. Yet economic theory systematically excludes these forces of value creation.

If the one-sidedness of production remains unquestioned, the worker has no chance to explain to her superiors why her free labour should be valued — especially given that she depends on the job to survive, while those in power hold the status and thus the authority to define what counts as value.



The employers' attitude of defining from above who "fits" — and is thus permitted to have value — is a role that does not rightfully belong to them. Rather, they have a duty to develop other ways for people to contribute to their projects without having to surrender everything in advance. It is the responsibility of entrepreneurs to recognise that the generation of entrepreneurial value in no way legitimises the exploitation of the workers' dependency.

But as described in the "Andorra effect", over time — if the oppression is long and brutal enough — many will internalise the role assigned to them from above.

Self-empowerment presupposes the right to free unfolding — the expression of one's own wealth. Yet the modern worker is no longer allowed to be or create everything that is possible. She must specialise — which is itself an expression of the restrictions necessary to work toward the top. As a result, we are all trapped in the eternally constructed reference to the "good", the "better" — leading to the shadows of society: to the repressed, the unlived, the unworked dimension of existence.

Disguised beneath the total devaluation of the self-determined worker, the compulsion to work and the chase after isolated value leads to a distortion of the will. It gives the impression that the oppression is desired by the oppressed — because they want the success it promises. Because apparently, everyone wants success. This trick legitimises the demand for unconditional adaptation to the market. If you want prosperity, you must perform! But the hierarchy defines what counts as performance. If the "isolated value", created through theft, is taken as something universally desired, then the extortion becomes invisible — it appears as something good. What everyone wants must be especially good and valuable. Thus the pyramid automatically generates a mass, as people are standardised through their devaluation. The base is always wider than the top. This mass, however, is a market construction — one that is based on the reduction and suppression of the individual. Remarkably, it could be destroyed at any time — by one simple step: the natural self-awareness of every human being.

The obligation to perform — the worker's supposed duty to society — summarised as obedience to the employer, offers no objective proof that status

in the ecosystem has higher value or greater effect. As previously discussed, there is also no objective proof of the absolute utility of success. On the contrary, success as a principle already distorts its own evaluative logic. It is these very primitive criteria that fail to do justice to the environment and the individual — and that constitute the basis of the dominance of the successful.

And yet we act as if this causality were mandatory and self-evident. Worse: the workers submit to it.

Obedience to the market can only be considered legitimate if market success actually and exclusively increases the “good” in the world in a totalising way. But this becomes untenable the moment the transfer protocol is decoded and it becomes clear that the construction of success is based solely on exclusion and suppression — of vast parts of the world and of human existence.

This has consequences.

Without understanding these connections, it is impossible to grasp what self-determined work is meant to be — or why it structurally leads to greater wealth. That’s why it is so important to break with opportunism. Society seems to have agreed that gainful employment alone is sufficient to produce the good. The primitive good. And so — the fake.

So when I speak of the value, the necessity of self-determined work, I am not speaking of self-development in the empty space of unrelatedness — but of a re-expansion and reintegration of reality reference in work. I am talking about a more complex pattern of co-creation of society by the individual — which requires a point of reference other than economic success. Because success is based solely on the psychological inversion of theft into virtue.

Many today say we should not follow money alone — but few ask what kind of system economics actually is, if it cannot maintain a society without discriminating against millions.

This reveals the true nature of economic theory: It is designed to serve the rulers — not the workers, and not society as a whole. The worker is supposed to strive for the top — but never reach it. By striving, she legitimises the dominance of the top, while remaining in her role as worker — never threatening the hierarchy.

To ensure this continues, she is constantly evaluated, categorised, measured. The performance evaluation functions as a wall — blocking her ascent.

In this light, we are looking at a deliberate structural disadvantage for large parts of the population. People are unable to provide for themselves — or can only do so poorly — because the recognition of their intrinsic value in the ecosystem is denied by the successful. Not always consciously — but consistently.

This undermines everything we think we know about value and how it is created.

Standardised performance evaluation can no longer be the guiding principle of a humane and just economy. Anyone who falls into debt because they earn too little from their work is a victim of massive discrimination — discrimination rooted in the economic system itself and in the concept of success.

This is serious fraud.

Because those who claim that the isolated value is what sustains the world — knowingly keep one generation after another in ignorance, through schools, media and politics.

They hide the fact that the isolated value — which ultimately becomes money — was and is created solely through violent processes of dispossession. It is a psychologically constructed value — but not a real one. The principle of isolated value is like a virus in the entire economic system.

The poor are not helpless people to be patronised — not passive recipients of handouts to be grateful for — and certainly not “work refusers”. They live and work within a mechanism that we call gainful employment — a mechanism that structurally disadvantages them. The injustice lies in the fact that we organise work according to the elitist principle of success — not according to meaning, value, or the intrinsic relevance of each contribution to a highly complex ecosystem.

Gainful employment is essentially the ritual that conceals dispossession. By involving the worker directly in her own expropriation, it appears to her as her own merit. This is another stage of the transfer protocol.

Gainful employment does not create the world — as is constantly claimed — but is the harvesting machine for the human resource. It does not generate profit — rather, the worker's devaluation is the true basis of high profits for the few. It prevents workers from shaping the world on equal terms and from sharing in it equally.

Workers are not co-owners of their creations — they remain in staggered devaluation. Their labour is worth less — and it is only considered “profitable” if it has less impact. The construction of utility keeps the worker trapped in a cage of limited impact. Their effectiveness as a human being — as part of a living ecosystem — is taken from them by the role of the labourer. They are simply not rewarded.

That is why they must specialise. That is why work is divided and bound by rules. Gainful employment must limit the impact of labour — so that it remains affordable.

So that the worker remains devalued. This is the paradox — the true madness of wage labour.

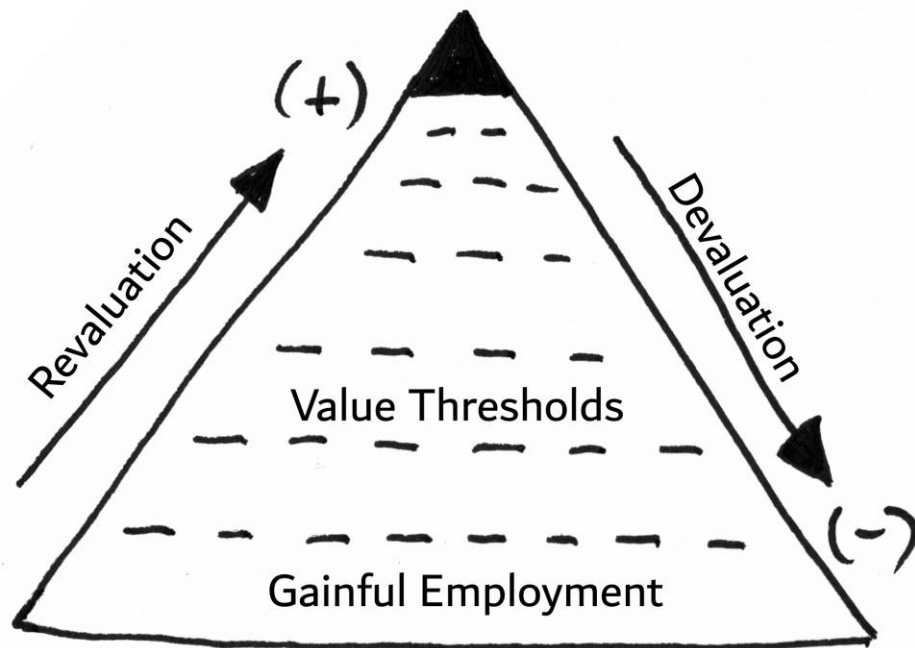
The concept of “performance” is a mechanism for limiting impact — because it denies most people the possibility of relevant impact. Only the winners are effective. The losers are treated like the undead — as if they exist outside the world.

That's why I say:

“Become effective! Free your actions from external judgement — and allow yourself a much stronger form of work than one based on externally determined wages and standards!”

Self-determined labour is the work with greater impact — because its impact is not limited by a wage. Because the truth is: Self-determined labour has powerful effects — but the recognition of this impact is denied precisely through the withholding of wages. Wages are the means through which influence is controlled and limited. Only this enables systemic expropriation through gainful employment.

# VALUE SCALING



Consequently, the ritual of rewarding labour through wages is not the transfer of profit, but the enforcement of limited value — including the corruption of one's own will and the undermining of one's relationship to the world. Always in reference to the top, and thus away from actual relevance. With a smile, devaluation is bestowed through the reward — for it is an act of humiliation to have to construct one's self-worth based on the external image imposed by others. The person as a whole is never rewarded — only a desired behaviour, a prescribed role. But this is violence against the ecosystem.

The collectivisation embedded in the evaluation system affects every ordinary worker, who, in case of doubt, is interchangeable with millions of others in the same role. If they were not standardised in function and reduced to their role, they would not be interchangeable — and their contribution would be more highly valued, i.e. more authentically appreciated in relation to context and situation, experienced as more vivid and meaningful. The work itself would become a rewarding experience.

While stock prices can explode, the value of workers is always capped — no matter what they do — because their labour is billed only in hours worked. This also negates their actual value and real impact within the ecosystem. Working time is limited: there are only 24 hours in a day. Whereas stock certificates can endlessly subdivide value units and maximise them through leverage (e.g. warrants), the worker has only the working hour. It's as if the stock market were restricted to actual physical books of account — values would remain static, and the stock exchanges would be deadly dull.

### **3. distortion and blame shifting**

Now something central occurs in the development process of the modern economy:

Over time, the victims of systemic violence begin to internalise the values of their oppressors and forget who they are and where they come from. They seek to please those who inflict harm, hoping this will lead to advancement and liberation from the suffering of oppression. The twisting of causality through the production of value is followed by the adoption of the perpetrator's worldview — and thus by active participation in the system of isolated value.

The perpetrators — which includes all of us — use reward, itself part of the pattern, to install a system of self-monitoring and blame displacement. Every level of the pyramid mirrors the brutality of the top towards those below, while also distributing selective rewards downward, thereby corrupting and seducing subordinates into complicity — with the hope of moving up. But where there is reward, punishment is never far away.

Poverty is not an accident, nor a failure of the poor. It is, as stated, intentional — a systemic act of violence. That's why it cannot be addressed through economics alone, but must also be confronted politically and legally. Poverty, like success, is a manipulatively constructed category. It is a crime against humanity.

The transfer protocol ultimately operates as a trade in two factors: profit maximisation and blame displacement. As enormous profits generate widespread harm — poverty, environmental destruction, exploitation — blame must be diverted as far as possible from

those who benefit. The principle of reward and punishment serves precisely this function: whoever rewards or punishes is absolved. It's a mechanism for evading systemic responsibility — shifting guilt from the top downward, onto the masses of disempowered workers, who struggle to survive and have little say in global processes, yet bear the highest burden of debt. They are made out to be the most guilty — while suffering the greatest structural powerlessness.

This paradox is intrinsic to the pyramid structure. Guilt in the market — and only the market counts — is not constructed through justice, let alone ethics. It is structurally displaced downwards, following the gradient of status and its sovereignty over interpretation. Guilt lies where value is denied. The poor are always more guilty than the rich can ever be — because the rich can buy their way out of systemic guilt through their utility construct. The poor remain trapped in it for life.

This displacement of guilt — away from those whose greed paralyses and poisons life, and onto those labelled flawed and undeserving — is one of our great societal taboos. The impoverished are not allowed to earn societal respect, because their “inferiority” is the foundation of existing power relations.

But when the poor begin to speak, when they reject the attribution of guilt for their own poverty or indebtedness, they automatically invoke the broader circulatory system — the wider context — and this very gesture threatens the power of the successful. It relativises both ownership and guilt. And suddenly, everyone is implicated.

But guilt, like success, must remain totalitarian. It must be captured in numbers that resist all relativity — figures that refuse to be placed in any broader context. That's why debt is always expressed in brutal negative numbers — because only this primitive accounting blocks recognition of the catastrophic relation between success and debt.

Anyone in debt asks, rightly: Why am I not seen as a whole human being? Why am I reduced to numbers? Because of course, this causal model is false. And yet this fantasy is violently upheld. Why? Because it serves the totalitarian logic of the success principle — the maintenance of a higher value established through fraud.

Most people know this in their gut. So why do we let this go unchallenged in economic theory?

How can economics call itself a science while tolerating such blatant misrecognition of contribution and systematic blame displacement? How can anyone hold a doctorate in economics and not see this?

It is time to democratise labour and value creation. It is time for the individual will — and its perception of reality — to matter again in questions of value and relevance.

### Research Relevance| Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The transfer protocol exposes the circulation of value as invisible code. Artistic interventions — from “protocol hacking” to data-visualised performance leaks — materialise the scripted nature of economic power and invite the audience to collectively search for errors. By revealing and rewriting the protocol, art turns creativity into social debugging.

— Critical Autism Studies: Autistic people experience protocol logic as a permanent double bind (“Earn value, but you are worthless”). Their hypersensitivity to hidden rules predestines them to uncover algorithmic inequality. The concept legitimises autistic non-compliance as epistemic and shows how pathologisation itself is part of the protocol — a systemic shift of blame that neurodivergent perspectives urgently correct.



# **Enactive Artistic Research with Autoethnographic Reports and Interventions: A Neurodivergent Perspective on Economy and Labour.**

## ***Situating Work – Lived Experience of Poverty***

Without a job, modern people always feel worthless and disoriented because they don't know how to construct their self-worth in any other way. Other structures that could provide security, such as the family or a society based on solidarity, have already been destroyed or severely weakened by the one-sided influence of the economy and the micro-/macrocosmic transmission of scarcity, violence, and lack of freedom. Self-respect is seen as selfishness, while ruthless careerism is twisted into a kind of social movement. This mechanism drives workers further and further into a corner. With the loss of self-worth and the associated self-determination, even one's own body is ultimately subjected to the hierarchy of values.

The very localisation of work—its fixed definition, which excludes the environment and the individual experience of relevance and meaning, of ethical and ecological aspects—already implies exploitation. By becoming a worker, the worker ceases to be a human being. The pyramid of values forces a permanent reduction of the self, alongside an increasing obligation to perform.

As a rule, workers are bound to a place and committed to it. Their senses, which connect them to the world, are no longer needed in gainful employment and become dull in everyday life. They even appear disruptive.

This is because the worker often has to act in contradiction to them. Conversely, once the worker has freed themselves from their fixed workplace to work wherever they want, the next step—namely self-determination over *what* they do—is not far away.

German Job Centres therefore even want to dictate to the unemployed where they have to be, because their bodies must be ready at all times for a job that often does not exist for them. The efficiency of capitalism has rendered this

obsolete by reducing wages through rationalisation. Unemployment is the loss of reference for one's own actions. It is not the action that ends in unemployment, but rather the "relevant reference" is taken away.

No one enters into relationships with the unemployed, and their contributions are not recognised; instead, they are excluded from processes of social equivalence. They are stigmatised. This is why the Job Centres act irrationally and ideologically in every respect.

First and foremost, they want to establish guilt and derive obligations from it. Eradicating poverty is not their real goal. They essentially want to force everyone into low-wage jobs, which perpetuate both poverty and guilt. Obedience is the real underlying intention—in other words: the compulsion into structural poverty. Because the compulsion to work is one of the essential foundations of impoverishment. It prevents the emergence of self-determined labour and self-determined value.

In case of doubt, even one's conscience must give way to the preservation of a job. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that anyone who goes into economic debt for ethical reasons is nevertheless treated as guilty by the state. Apparently, avoiding economic debt is more important than behaving ethically.

At the same time, this excuses unethical behaviour. The economic system *creates* unethical behaviour by completely denying that anything could be more important than earning money. The inviolability of gainful employment—i.e. the obligation to earn a living—creates the basis for ruthlessness and a lack of empathy.

That's basically crazy.

In Germany, the Hartz IV system—i.e. the social welfare system of Agenda 2010, later renamed "Bürgergeld"—is another example of the mental confusion of federal governments in recent years.

Thousands of unemployed people were declared guilty across the board, and it was assumed that this would have no serious consequences, neither for them nor for society.

On 23 May 2019, I received a letter from the Federal Ministry of Labour under Minister Hubertus Heil, informing me that a workshop entitled “Future Dialogue” had been held to review 14 years of Hartz IV.

None of the well-known critics of the Hartz IV system were invited. I myself was disinvited several times.

The outcome of the workshop is assessed exclusively positively by the woman writing to me. Not a single negative point is mentioned.

I am receiving this letter in response to my accusation that the Federal Ministry has made thousands of people ill under Hartz IV—including myself. The ministry will receive the script of this book.

The SPD achieved its worst result ever in the European elections that took place shortly afterwards. But neither the party nor the federal government wants to see what crimes they have committed. Those who can declare themselves successful, who have the power to fake their own success through deceit and deception, seem to get away with everything. Even with a concept of labour that is no longer true.

Every time I tell the Job Centre about my independent projects—about the countless hours of work I put into finding answers to the big and small questions of the time—the authorities categorically refuse to recognise what I do as work.

Because the more valuable my work becomes, for which I receive no money, the more guilt and failure fall back on the authorities and society, who want to force me to behave in the “only right” way according to the usual principle of success.

For example, to act like the supposedly successful (currently 12%) SPD, which wants to lead the country into a golden future in which every worker receives their fair wage. A contradiction in terms.

Why—this question keeps haunting me—has the government fought me all these years, even though I work mostly unpaid?

Why does no one ensure that my work is finally acknowledged?

Why does the SPD think that driving me into homelessness would free me from poverty?

I do understand the reason, but the absurdity is serious.

We live in a time in which jobs are vanishing in many sectors due to digitalisation, yet those who want to break new ground and create new value are punished by the government if these new paths don't resemble outdated forms of work from the last century—forms that are obviously beyond saving.

The state is actually trying—first structurally, then directly—to prevent me from working independently. It sabotages my work wherever it can, thereby dramatically worsening my economic situation. I will go into this in more detail later.

Of course, by denying the disappearance of paid work, it makes it seem as if what I'm doing is a refusal to work—rather than a desperate attempt to revitalise labour in a way that could actually help solve the problem of poverty in a sustainable way.

This paradox culminates in the involuntary statement from my Job Centre worker that I “actually work more than she does.” But that is a legitimisation problem for the authority.

Shortly afterwards, they decide to scrutinise everything I do, in order to prove and determine to what extent I am guilty through this work.

It seems to me that the new goal of the authorities is to criminalise me—as someone allegedly doing illegal work and thus harming society.

Because I don't earn any money through my work, it is consequently declared worthless and harmful. This reduction isn't questioned either. What is supposed to be of great value—namely civic engagement—suddenly becomes a transgression, a disruption of the economic fabric.

But this implies that a secure job is ethically more important than anything else. As I said: this is a fatal error in thinking.

In fact, I am not harming society, but only the unchallenged, hierarchically organised “isolated value.”

You have to keep yourself unemployed in order to be ready for the one job that might eventually—or never—come. The system prefers a passive person a thousand times over a committed, self-determined worker. Because the passive person can have their benefits cut, seemingly legitimised. But not me, because I am active. For them, disobedience through activity is the same as disobedience through passivity or refusal. The Office makes no distinction between the two.

My self-determined work could reveal relevance beyond the pyramid, and suddenly neither the authorities nor the state would have the legitimacy to demand obedience. Because one thing is clear: it is the state that keeps the poor poor, because it is the state that actually devalues them. Social systems like Hartz IV in Germany show this very clearly.

Work must therefore always take place within a cage of norms and rules, so that in the end only compliance is rewarded. And compliance with the rule is nothing more than ensuring reduced value—reducing diversity in the system. Obedience is part of the business model of expropriation. It prevents the question of meaning. Obedience is seen as right. Labour follows the rules. That is the supposed meaning of labour.

Because that's what it's all about, gainful employment often takes on strange forms in which it no longer seems to be about meaningful work, but about substitute actions that show you're not a threat to the system—because, no matter how absurd the task, you'll never stray from the predetermined path. When in doubt, you find creative ways to simulate adaptation and opportunism—and are rewarded for it.

Because the real benefit can neither be measured nor proven, the meaning of work, as previously discussed, is shifted to compliance with the norm. The more standardised the economy becomes, the stronger the illusion that compliance leads to success. In fact, success is nothing more than fulfilling a standardised expectation that everyone has become. And that very expectation excludes so much of the world that success becomes easy to fabricate within it.

Success is a success because it has no alternative—because it requires a reduced reality to persist. And that reduction is also its method. It is the dominance of rigid order, coupled with top-down allocation, which creates the impression

of a functioning success narrative. Success therefore seems inevitable once the “good order” has been established—an order that excludes diversity. At least for those who belong to the recognised norm and are almost automatically rewarded, as if by natural right, with a share of success they believe they earned through hard work.

The pressure to succeed must always lead to a fake—because the core of success is not real. It is not truly connected to the entirety of existence, the whole world, the full ecosystem.

Naturally, this shapes behaviour both inside and outside of work and leads to countless strategies of avoidance.

For example, many unemployed people write two kinds of applications. One for the authorities—to avoid sanctions—knowing full well it will never lead to a job. The other follows the actual rules of life and their own strategy. The authorities don’t find out about it, because they wouldn’t understand such activities. Authorities don’t like it when unemployed people shift into the role of the self-organised and act autonomously. They don’t understand such complexity—and cannot control it.

Of course, this isn’t always the case. But I’ve observed it repeatedly.

The state wants devaluation and limitation—and simultaneously demands that the poor perform in the market like those who already have value and mobility. It’s an absurd double bind that causes many people to break inside.

This absurdity can only be understood if we realise that our society only creates value via the transfer protocol—i.e. by increasing profits at the top of the economy.

Society is thus subject to the dictates of an elite economy that throws new masses of devalued people into the state’s social systems every year—while simultaneously demanding not to be burdened with higher taxes. Because otherwise, they say, the service providers wouldn’t be able to “sustain the system.”

We need to break this false logic and understand that widespread prosperity can be achieved from the other side: by closing the gap between rich and poor.

Not by making the poor work even harder and thereby devaluing them further, but by equalising appreciation—and this must be achieved structurally.

But before that, we must understand the absurdity of poverty as a structural ban on participation.

If it were possible to talk about the real situation, the press would pick up on it—which is not happening.

It would become clear that the unemployed live constantly in two realities:

- the government simulation that takes place in Job Centres and statistics, and

- the real condition of poverty, which arises very differently and is resolved very differently from what the government claims on television, for example.

In a way, the unemployed—who, out of necessity, keep the Job Centre unaware of their true, still far-too-low income—are covering up the government's fraud. Because basically everyone is cheating—the state, the poor, and the workers—the system continues to exist. Because everything remains vague.

Even the poor person who eventually gets a job will, when asked how it happened, point to their own hard work or performance—not to coincidence, or to the arbitrariness of the value thresholds on the labour market. If they spoke of arbitrariness, those still living in poverty would feel less guilty—and we could finally examine the real causalities. This permanent and ubiquitous self-deception is a declaration of bankruptcy for the entire system.

A state that does not shape reality, but only a simulation of reality, has a legitimisation problem and must be presented to the public so that the grievances can be changed.

I have experienced Job Centres who didn't want to understand that you can't work without food. They didn't understand that cutting money may be legal, but it doesn't help people escape poverty, on the contrary, it only increases the costs for the state. Hartz IV destroys people's health in order to save money and force people into obedience. The state has also severely damaged my health through bullying and years of ignoring the value of my work.

The compulsion to maintain a job is therefore often a compulsion to lie permanently, to deceive, to trick, to live in a permanent state of unfreedom. This thought seems important to me: that the pursuit of self-preservation often becomes something that destroys both people and society—because it turns responsible behaviour into a liability, while opportunism becomes the solution to everything. In a world where everyone cheats, the one who strives for truth is always at risk. Opportunism thus becomes the new realism. A fatal development that will ruin every society sooner or later.

For many people today, responsibility is nothing more than adapting in order to get a job, pay off the mortgage, or finance their children's education. Against this backdrop, referring to a job as being "oriented toward reality" and thus producing meaning can only mean something irresponsible—because it inevitably leads to job loss, as in my own case. Anyone who creates friction disrupts the production of one official truth.

This may sound bitter at first, but it is essential for recognising all layers of the issue. For many, gainful employment is linked to a great deal of frustration. But this frustration can also hold the potential for change—if it can finally be expressed freely. It's also about the question of how solidarity can emerge for those who try to follow a path of self-determination.

People are always more lenient with those who behave opportunistically and show less sympathy for people who rebel—and then appear to fail—because opportunists often don't give them a chance. One of the greatest obstacles I face is that I am not recommended to others—because those who have clawed their way through the hierarchical layers of conformity and self-denial fear for their reputation. Someone like me—who offers no security, who carries the "dirt and stains" of the system, who questions their own path as the only correct one—seems too great a risk to them. People who can still adapt, who haven't yet made any "mistakes", cannot imagine that there are people who are weeded out before they even get the chance to adapt.

Meritocracy has created a leadership class ruled by fear—and therefore by mediocrity. In some cases, the willingness to engage in necessary friction for quality and real realism has been completely removed from organisations. This has led to embarrassingly stupid structures, in which people behave like children who are no longer allowed to make decisions. When people enter a



company who have been through many life crises and want to contribute that experience, these well-behaved employees metaphorically hit the fire alarm.

The system has thus managed to reduce not only labour but also entire lifeworlds. You could say that people today only work within a single, paid lifeworld. The crucial question is: when will this one dominant lifeworld cease to dominate? When will it become clear that large parts of the planet have long been working in self-determined ways—already compensated for long ago—so that not everything falls apart? These are the countless people who voluntarily sacrifice themselves, who do more than they should, who are socially, culturally, or politically engaged, to name just a few examples. They also keep the world running—but today this is a marginalised and repressed form of existence.

The conformist employee, however, cannot act freely, which is why she seemingly bears no guilt for the consequences of her actions. This is one of the key psychological reasons why so many people feel incredible anger and contempt toward me—given that I work freely and still fail in the truncated market, and yet continue to work self-determinedly. Because those who fail in freedom receive no help either—as if self-liberation were a kind of desolidarisation with the dependent worker.

In fact, it's the opposite. I try to elevate the human being within the worker—but this humanity frightens many people.

The worker is rewarded with wages for their adapted behaviour to such a degree that they no longer expect or are willing to provide recognition—of any kind—for other, often more meaningful, forms of activity: those that matter to individuals or the so-called common good. Nor would they accept demands for a say from these people.

For ordinary workers, wages are not primarily tied to their performance—but to the sacrifice of freedom that comes with the job. You worked “hard”, and you are rewarded for it. No wonder, because even workers often don't find enough meaning in what they do to believe in the reward of actual achievement.

The employed person can only be free to organise themselves in their leisure time—when they are not working, and should (and want to) be passive in pure

consumption. Because they are passive in their free time, they do not become a competing worker—let alone a responsible actor. In your free time, you have nothing to do—so you bear no relation, no responsibility, no connection to what is happening. At best, you are even farther away—travelling to a foreign country where you don't participate in anything, because you don't even understand the language.

The modern worker can also be paid for their lack of participation—so that they don't work. They are paid for being prevented from working. And then they are also given a holiday.

My stance is a direct attack on those who, in their constructed unfreedom, believe themselves to be responsible individuals. The link between worker's duty and responsibility is psychologically difficult to break—because it's existential for them. In a world that has become a marketplace of value in everything, people are always fighting to “be right”. The link between duty and responsibility offers a structure that simulates security. A coupling like self-determination = responsibility is much riskier—but it's also a much more open system, one in which far more could be integrated. Because it requires constant integration and recalibration in order to do justice to it, whereas the other only requires obedience.

Artists have therefore created a fulfilling job for themselves. And parents who raise a child are rewarded with love and act out of love—so they don't need to be paid. The compulsion is thus closely tied to the wage. But the compulsion leads to a restriction of potential value creation.

Duty becomes a totalitarian standard of correctness — and thus an excuse to discriminate against everyone who doesn't work in a space where duties are externally imposed.

As I said: duty has replaced the meaning of work.

The principle of “service” implies subordination, and service is always a kind of renunciation — such as self-abasement before a customer. It wouldn't be humiliation if the worker did it self-determinedly. But in that case, she could quickly produce wealth — because her actions would already be valorised. There would be no value threshold.

Service is also the production of action under bondage — in order to prevent action based on genuine responsibility and autonomy, because the worker is not allowed to act that way. In society, action under bondage is confused with action under responsibility. The statement “you can’t” or “you have to do it anyway” becomes an excuse for everything. The fact that workers are systematically unable or not allowed to act may be the greatest suppressive force of our time.

That’s why free action and work appear irresponsible to many, as previously discussed. This is the suspicion that always shadows freedom in labour. It starts from a concept of value that must remain static — a value that can only be created through unfree work. The non-free is assumed if value is constructed in isolation.

Here we find the root of the aversion to self-determined labour. To the average worker, it feels like a breach of duty — which in turn feels like a destruction of value. What the worker doesn’t see is that the “job” itself is merely a constructed, isolated value.

According to this fatal logic, those who fail in freedom should be punished more harshly — because what they produce must be worthless. Those who fail in freedom are seen as irresponsible. But the conformist worker who loses their job is never labelled irresponsible. A worker who is fired for getting into a conflict with management over their conscience, or someone who takes a risk to create something new and loses everything — these people are marked. Freedom is always tainted with guilt because it represents disobedience toward the “isolated value” that everyone else sacrifices so much for. This value must not be questioned. That’s as true for bankers as it is for salespeople. They all legitimise their actions with reference to these rules.

To denounce these conditions at the job centre — as an unemployed person — is, of course, an act of radicalism. And it is still punished as a “refusal to work.”

Later, I was even denied naturalisation in Germany — because, according to the authorities, as an artist and critic of capitalist labour conditions, I was essentially responsible for my own poverty. I was declared an undesirable

person by the Brandenburg Ministry of the Interior and the immigration authority. After 23 years in the country, the state has no interest in naturalising me. My work, as stated in multiple official letters, is “of no benefit to the public good.”

On 10 May 2019, a senior official from the Brandenburg Ministry of the Interior even threatened to reject my application for citizenship if I didn’t stop criticising the authorities and the government “clearly and appropriately” for deceiving the public.

This undemocratic approach is only possible because, in our society, the unemployed are treated as if they were criminals. Psychologically, it seems acceptable to treat poor people like dirt. Poor people who resist must expect to be denied citizenship.

In most countries, a secure livelihood is a basic prerequisite for naturalisation. But in no Western country is it recognised that poverty is primarily something inflicted by the society one lives in — not a defect one brings like a disease.

According to mainstream economic theory, benefit is excluded if a person does what they want or what they think is right. But if someone doesn’t do what they want, and is instead rewarded by someone else — that’s considered useful for everyone involved.

You have to understand that this primitive lever has become the basis for how value and non-value are decided in the market — with fatal consequences. It is therefore assumed that free will must be useless — because most people, in their essence and will, are probably worthless.

Useless for whom, one must ask? The potential of free will for an open, creative, truthful and authentic society is entirely denied. Free will becomes a criminal act if it opposes profit — and profit is, as described earlier, falsely equated with the public good. Later, the job centre explicitly stated that I was violating my duties — and therefore the law — by doing what I want to do. In this way, self-determined work is directly criminalised.

But what I want to do does not emerge from a vacuum. It is motivated by the injustices I have experienced. They, in contrast, demand a prefabricated will —

a will divorced from any wider context and focused solely on one goal: the preservation of a job. A ritual of custody in service of totalitarian usefulness.

The prohibition of self-determined volition is, crucially, also the prohibition of conscious relationality — the ability to relate and to reference meaningfully. It disables the basis for ethical decisions. I am supposed to act against my conscience, against my better judgement, in accordance with their norms — or I will be punished, even expelled.

This oppression — of people and of the world — is disguised by rebranding free will as egoism. They do this to cover their own egoism, because they simply want to push me into a low-wage job and get rid of me.

They say I remain dependent on social welfare, and thus harm society and the taxpayer. I will refute this accusation in detail later. But one thing is clear: it cannot be said that my work has no value simply because it earns no money. And if it cannot be said, then the accusation of personal guilt must end here. I am trying to act rightly within a more complex framework of responsibility.

The market does not have the right to judge this.

It is people who must correct the market — so that unseen value and unseen relevance are no longer marginalised.

Then people like me will no longer need welfare.

We will no longer be in debt. Instead, the taxpayer — who wants to govern with money that is often earned by degrading others — will finally recognise an obligation to support a broad revaluation.

Today, however, it is not those who profit from devalued labour who are blamed — not those who use this labour to reduce diversity, who have a vested interest in keeping the poor down so their own profits can grow. No — the blame is placed on the poor. Especially on those, like me, who refuse to take part in this fraud and demand a fundamental change in the economic system — an end to the automatic expropriation built into the transfer protocol.

We demand to do meaningful work that tackles social, ecological, and economic crises directly — and to develop new answers.

But who has the self-confidence to stand up, in the face of absolute poverty and a brutal, inhuman state, and say clearly and loudly:

*“I have worth. Because I am — and I am wanted, exactly as I am, and always will be. My actions are right because they are mine — not because they mimic what others want to see.”*

## Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: Spatial fixation of work becomes material site-specific performances, urban hacking and sound mapping make visible how factories, offices, or Job Centres bind bodies and exclude alternative relationships. Art shifts the place of work in order to open up new spaces of meaning.

— Critical Autism Studies: Autistic people experience place and role rigidity as sensory overload and social double bind. Their strong awareness of place (hyper-spatiality) reveals how workplace norms discipline neurodivergent bodies. Research uses this view to deconstruct spatial politics of exclusion.

## ***Reconstructing Work – A New “Form”***

An essential core of my argument is the explanation of the relevance and necessity of free self-development in living systems. What I am doing here is essentially a neurodivergent phenomenology — research through the lens of a neurologically shifted perspective. This attempt at individuation, as formulated by the psychoanalyst C.G. Jung and the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, initially becomes my unconscious intention in describing a liberation of workers that I myself have experienced and fought for.

Individuation means the path toward the integration of the comprehensive whole through the unfolding of one’s own uniqueness — the deepening of individuality in resonance with the full range of positive and negative experiences of existence, thereby becoming, so to speak, *the world* — a full universe.

As an artist and autistic person, I transfer this radical self-valorisation to the concept of labour. The rich whole, in the sense of an ecosystem, ultimately emerges from diverse individuals — through the sum of all contributions. However, the whole in individuation cannot be reified or finalised like a gross national product. It remains an open and diverse process without an externally determined goal of production.

The obligation to reciprocate — referencing only the “isolated value” — stands in the way of a *genuinely valuable* contribution, which must be contextualised more broadly. It is therefore crucial for the individual to keep the space open — in contrast to economic action based exclusively on reification and profit.

By contrast, the worker in gainful employment attempts to assume a fixed identity and role, thereby excluding the world, the self, and their environment from the process of labour. This results in narrowing through specialisation and function — instead of a simultaneous expansion. What is enforced in the multitude of specialisations and jobs cannot be replaced by an artificial range of supposed freedom in consumption. Consumption does not fulfil or satisfy all needs — only those recognised as relevant by the market and thus by the logic of success.

Whatever authentic diversity and integrity is not already produced within work — through deviation and individuation — will not be recreated later

through a consumer product range. Certainly not one that could replace ecosystems or the diversity of deviant life-worlds.

As I will show in more detail later, this leads to a flattening of the space that labour could create.

We must therefore soberly acknowledge: deviation in self-determined labour is not a path into chaos — not an economy where everyone pulls in different directions and no shared form emerges. It is not a matter of denying the obvious need for coordination. The question is one of balance: the relationship between individual will and experience, and an object-fixated economy that refuses to recognise systemic harm.

In response, I develop the figure of the radically open worker. Not as an end-product, but as a counter-movement. Only such a radical worker can integrate a representation of the more complete into labour and value-creation — and thereby do justice to broader reality.

From this point onward, the worker leaves the simulation and construction of isolated usefulness and becomes part of a living organism in which labour and being are one. Only when acting from the whole of one's being can the worker truly integrate their living space into their work. To integrate the world, the worker must be open to the world — and choose an open form of production.

Being, however, reaches far beyond the boundaries of job and function. A more complex depiction of reality becomes possible — one to which labour can now respond. Work regains meaning and finds concrete integration into a more complex commonality — one that far exceeds what the labour market or classical economics can represent.

With the concept of “form,” I create an open space in which new patterns of a more complex order of labour and economy become visible. *Form* becomes the new economy: a counter-form to the value threshold — a new architecture. And precisely for that reason, it remains largely undefined and reveals itself indirectly — so that each individual may find their own way within it.

This is the new point of reference for the *Radical Worker*, as opposed to the intention to generate profit or to earn money.



No one can say what the form *wants*, and that is precisely what distinguishes it from constructs like “the economy.” Only an economy in the sense of *form* allows for the integration of holistic concepts — and for those forms of work that have not yet been recognised as such. *Form* is the economic counter-movement to a narrowing economy — one that shrinks the marketplace to maximise profits for the few, at the expense of the ecosystem.

When there is no longer a corporate or product goal as the point of reference, the individual’s personal relationship to the world moves into the foreground. Inevitably, the question arises — what does the individual *really, really* want to do (to borrow Frithjof Bergmann’s words)? And: what is needed to do this? What ecological foundation must be preserved as a resource accessible to all?

We must now preserve the ecosystem — not the pyramid. This requires a different set of conditions. For example: the end of structural impoverishment.

We must seek a new balance — in the spirit of Axel Honneth’s *Labouring Sovereign (Der arbeitende Souverän)*. People need space in which to become politically creative beings who *use* labour — not robots of a narrowed logic.

Self-organisation in densely networked ecosystems generates emergent uniqueness; each organism is a “critical node” in which the network becomes locally manifest. (Stuart Kauffman – *At Home in the Universe*, 1995) The living being produces its world individually in the process of self-generation (“bringing-forth a world”) – macro = micro. (Humberto Maturana & Francisco Varela – *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, 1980; Varela, Thompson & Rosch – *The Embodied Mind*, 1991) “The pattern that connects”: Mind is the relational structure between organism and environment; diversity is a prerequisite for individual cognition. (Gregory Bateson – *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 1972) The body is the “flesh of the world”; the world is turned inside out in the body and is sensually articulated there. (Maurice Merleau-Ponty – *The Visible and the Invisible*, 1968) Only partial perspectives generate objective knowledge; individuality is a junction of many relations. (Donna Haraway – *Situated Knowledges*, 1988) Each sub-system “unfolds” wholeness in a local manifestation – the *Implicate Order* as a macro-in-micro structure. (David Bohm – *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 1980) No actor exists alone; individuals emerge through co-creative symbioses – diversity is a

fundamental                      ontological                      condition.  
(Donna Haraway – *Staying with the Trouble*, 2016: “Sympoiesis”)

In this way, the whole world — as something vast, folded into the small — is inscribed into the individual and expresses itself uniquely through them. In my work, the concept of the *ecosystem* becomes a substitute term for a deeper and broader understanding of *economy* — one that encompasses both uniqueness and community without constructing elitism. For both are mutually dependent. If you remove the pressure to succeed, the punishment of failure, the collectivisation of workers, and the opportunism from the system, a middle ground becomes imaginable — between capitalism and socialism. In a sense: a *socialism* that prioritises the preservation of diversity, or a *capitalism* that prioritises the preservation of the ecosystem.

There are models such as the *eco-social market economy*, but in my view, they do not go far enough. They fail to emancipate themselves from central economic dogmas — for example, the narrow interpretive power of the performance principle. Even models like Muhammad Yunus' *social entrepreneurship* only enable greater social or ecological engagement when it also leads to success in the traditional economic sense. Market access and commercialisability become the criteria — usability for certain topics and people is simply made easier. Microcredits, for instance, allow for work in contexts where traditional lending would deem it uneconomical — but they don't challenge the foundations of capitalism itself. Still, these are important contributions.

In terms of *social business*, my own actions would not be considered expedient, as I generate hardly any profits as an activist and artist. Yet in a broader sense, my work *is* economically rational — in that it centres a social problem within economic activity. I declare my work to be a confrontation with the misconduct of the German federal government — in that sense, I *am* a kind of social entrepreneur. But I remain in poverty, because political and ethical action does not coincide with economic validation. This will only change when the one-dimensionality of market valuation mechanisms evolves into a more integrative system.

Artists, for instance, will never act *economically* in the classical sense. Aside from a few who are traded like racehorses on the art market, artists are

fundamentally incompatible with the capitalist model — because they constantly break with expectations and with the norm of isolated value.

Does this mean artists should be fully state-financed? I think that would be too little. It would be far more interesting if entrepreneurs developed an awareness that allows them to integrate artists — self-determined and as part of systemic diversity — into their own worlds. Nature doesn't produce thousands of artists so that only a handful may "succeed." These specific skills are needed everywhere. You only need to *understand* their value — instead of eliminating them through a market that wants to become ever narrower.

But that requires an economic theory that can integrate the *entirety* of reality — turning it into an equally valuable space of creation.

The self-determined worker—morally denounced for centuries, accused of not participating in a standardised society due to nonconformity— is rehabilitated in my work, as later example projects will demonstrate. More than that, she becomes the foundation of an ecologically responsible form of labour. Her uniqueness is acknowledged as a crucial lever in the creation of holistic wealth.

But what is this greater, more complex community that serves as a reference? What lies behind the idea of the "free form"? What exactly do I mean by it?

I do not refer to it as a thing, an object, a finished product, or a fixed set of rules—as found, for example, in Christian Felber's Economy for the Common Good. Rather, I understand it as a continuous process of becoming, not of improvement in the normative sense, but of deliberate rupture. These breaks serve to expand norms and to integrate new, more complex contexts.

Here, the break with the norm is not fragmentation but an act of integration. The "whole" begins as a process of accusation—against the state, against corporations, against unjust structures—and simultaneously as an attempt to live and embody the "more": to be permitted to be more.

Yet this whole is not a dogmatic checklist or a neatly rounded inventory of everything that constitutes life. Reality and relevance emerge through an experience of expansion, of increased freedom in direct confrontation with points of rupture. This is where work, for me, truly begins. This is where the

living form takes shape. Diversity is not an addition—it is an existential precondition.

## Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The open form of work presented serves as an artistic process manifesto: Collective Making, Commons Labs and Care Practices demonstrate how value emerges beyond profit. Art projects test “live prototypes” of a plural, non-profit economy.

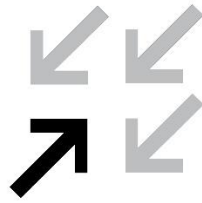
- Critical Autism Studies: Self-determined work validates neurodivergent specialisation and flow focus; demonstrating that autism is not a deficit but a resource for deep niche knowledge. Studies use this form to develop work models that integrate sensory autonomy, intermittent engagement and interest-led expertise.

### ***Empirical Research on Self-Determined Work***

That's why I say: “Yes, I have flaws. The job centre is right. That's why I am now living them out radically in the labour market. So that they can be recognised as a valuable contribution. Because, above all, they reveal the hidden grievances and strategies of devaluation. My first flaw is being an intellectual. My second flaw is being able to recognise 'mistakes' in structures. My third flaw is not being afraid of punishment.”

By abolishing the division between human and worker—and consequently, and quite logically, making work relevant and meaningful from the immediate situation, since the individual, directly experienced, is far more concrete and less abstract than the construct of gainful employment—I treat every situation that presents itself to me as if the whole could be completed within it. This creates a complex field, which then becomes my work: taking place on a small scale, yet always referring to the bigger picture.

One of my first radical work projects was to write a letter to the German billionaire Johanna Quandt (BMW), informing her that the logo of her foundation looked like a swastika to me.



No other logo I know of resembles a swastika in such a way—not McDonald’s, not Deutsche Bank, not any of the countless other companies in the world. I suggested to her that I could collaborate on exploring how such a shape came about. An interesting detail in this context: Magda Goebbels, née Quandt, was the wife of Hitler’s Minister of Propaganda.

Then something remarkable happened: the foundation attempted to distance itself from my statement by issuing a lengthy response drafted by their advertising agency. According to them, it was not a swastika but a set of “dynamic arrows.” They were desperate to save face. Because, as I’ve said, status and success are always totalitarian in nature. The owner of one of Germany’s most valuable companies must not allow even the slightest shadow to fall across her reputation. This totalitarianism of success is the origin of the compulsion to fake. Conversely, the agency’s marketing team conveyed that there could only be one valid interpretation of the logo of the Johanna Quandt Foundation. From their perspective, it must now be seen solely as something positive, as a good “object,” leaving no room for an artist’s perspective. In this way, the compulsion to be “good” or “the best” becomes a mechanism for erasing pluralism.

I am not permitted to work meaningfully on this issue, even though the deeper I dig, the more urgent the matter seems. As a result, I cannot contribute my capacity for revealing hidden conflicts to society. Like the talents of so many others, my abilities remain invisible—or worse, are devalued. There appears to be no place for them.

This example of a crisis experiment is certainly extreme, but it illustrates a core issue: free and self-determined work allows the traditional economic facade to fall away with startling speed. As an autistic person, it often takes me mere

minutes to identify what a company desperately does not want to see public. The greater the success, the greater the shadow.

Stacy Holman Jones (2005) describes autoethnography as an embodied practice of resistance, both epistemic and activist. Tami Spry (2001) defines it as vulnerability work, as stepping on stage with one's own contradiction. One could highlight autoethnographic disruption as a method for exposing institutional power—be it in education, the state, or cultural institutions—within one's own body.

Working in this way reveals the richness of the world. It is undoubtedly painful—but also redemptive, reconciling, and generative. The foundation could have responded differently. They could have said: *“Interesting observation. We’re open to exploring how we got here.”* Instead, they immediately moved to avoid guilt. Because in our society, guilt and prosperity are seen as mutually exclusive.

Over the years, I've focused mainly on these fractures. And that's precisely what makes this work exciting. One might assume that self-determined labour, like a hobby, loses itself in trivialities. My experience is the opposite: it's only when I work freely that I touch the essentials. Of course I encounter problems, like everyone else. One might ask whether the most essential thing isn't simply having money for food—no matter the cost. But that, in turn, is a question of values and cannot be answered universally. Humanity has often benefited from those who did not stop where self-preservation was at risk.

The Radical Worker, however, now turns to these other values—and in doing so, begins their labour precisely at the conflict between self and world. Their work gains meaning and natural relevance through this, integrating the world instead of getting lost in some arbitrary, standardised job.

From now on, I will enter more and more companies uninvited and work there until I'm thrown out. I will confront managers with their irresponsibility. These years are filled with major projects. I develop new management methods that increase complexity rather than simplify it. I devise radically different ways of handling information in the media. I challenge public authorities and redefine responsibility. I engage in countless disputes with executives and business owners across all conceivable layers of the economy.

To date, I have invested the equivalent of one million euros in unpaid labour towards the reorganisation of the modern economy. I have had this impact not because I possess wealth, influence, or status—but because I deviate. That deviation creates a difference in behaviour that forces the status quo to respond. And that movement is enough.

It's like a garden that finally feels rain after years of drought: growth everywhere.

I may go bankrupt as a result of this work and have to apply for welfare, but even then I continue as before. Because my poverty is not a personal failing—it is a structural scandal. And we must fight it at the root. Fighting the symptom helps no one.

The state now has to explain why what I do is not considered work. But it cannot. I, on the other hand, can clearly demonstrate that the prevailing concept of success is based on fraud. The state cannot cope with this and instead threatens to sanction me back into homelessness, to cut off all my resources unless I find a job and behave compliantly. They can try — but they can no longer ignore me. They can no longer deny the contradictions of economic theory. There is clearly value being created that is not rewarded, but punished.

It would be foolish, cowardly, and absurd to ignore this — and of course it has consequences for the question of what I should do for a living. But I take this question seriously enough to want to answer it properly.

In a way, the future of labour is decided in this conflict — if we choose to see it that way, if we dare to make use of this opportunity.

The self-determined worker, who breaks away from the linear, causally legitimised order and supposedly works chaotically, does not move toward egoism, as modern economics implies, but toward an ecological paradigm — an expanded concept that includes people, the environment, and the cosmos: all conceivable levels of existence. The absurdity of modern economic theory lies in its attempt to increase global wealth by sacrificing individual well-being. Since it is no longer fashionable in a democracy to make oppressive structures visible — let alone maintain them — modern economics speaks differently

than it acts. Outwardly, it maintains the narrative of upward mobility through effort.

But the job — as the prerequisite for everything: for the right to food, housing, mobility, or children — is becoming absurd. Anyone who, like the radical worker, begins to do *the other work* — which is only possible by refusing the constraints of gainful employment and remaining critically distanced from it — is now seen by the state and the media as someone acting *against* society, *against* the common good. Thus, the actions of radical workers are interpreted as “anti-social,” even though they are consciously shouldering a broader responsibility and striving for a renewal of what work could mean. This is, in essence, a deranged reaction by the state.

Yet here lies a crucial political turning point — if this alternative view of economic reality can be made accessible to a wider public.

#### Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The performative self-testing of self-determined work functions as radical field research: the artistic action becomes a medium of knowledge by provoking reactions and revealing institutional value filters. Artistic research here becomes an embodied epistemology — research takes place through action, not observation.

— Critical Autism Studies: The chapter legitimises neurodivergent forms of world appropriation as epistemically valid: autistic logic, stimulus structure and deviation are not only tolerated, but used as tools for system analysis. The research places autistic subjectivity at the centre as a method for performatively breaking down social exclusions.



## ***Divide and Conquer!***

For example, one day I go to a company that manufactures solar modules and try to work with the people on site. I want to complement myself as a stranger — as an aspect of the world not yet integrated into their workflows. The security service escorts me out.

But why?

Because I interfere with work that is geared towards specialisation.

We could spend many hours talking about what is really going on in the company. We could work on a different fullness of reality. But how can we do this if the diverse world outside and inside the company remains locked out?

This simple, yet highly relevant question comes up in many of my activities — and initially remains unanswered. My experience is that I am not allowed to work as a “free” person because I am too much for the company — as a person. My offer appears to them as a disruptive factor. They are afraid of the changes my work would bring. They can’t pay me to stop me from directly or indirectly helping to shape and sometimes even reshape everything.

Of course, I don’t act ignorantly. I may be provocative, but it’s about dialogue, about building relationships at eye level. If they paid me a wage, they could control my actions — divide me between function and person. But since I work as a radical worker without salary, they experience my actions as a threat. In the long run, it would be embarrassing not to pay me, especially because I work even more than those who are paid — exempt from the hourly rate and the working time limit. I relativise their wages. If they paid me for my commitment, it would reduce their profit. So they decide to kick me out.

What right do they have to do that?

Because employees reduce themselves in obedience, they do not embarrass companies into recognising that their actions are often simply not complex enough. Instead, they create the impression of the happy employee, the happy company — as if salvation has already been achieved and their actions lead to a totalitarian improvement of the world simply because they generate profit.

The contradiction necessary for recognising and sharpening reality rarely occurs in the everyday lives of wage labourers. The economic fairy tale of the creation of a happy and ideal world by the often purely patriarchal goes unchallenged. In economics, the idea prevails that those who have problems are not successful — which is why the successful never allow problems to become visible. So anyone who, like me as an impoverished person, is marked by problems, who brings scandals to light as an artist and whistleblower, is excluded from the realm of success.

The job, freed from all criticism, is meant to remain an apolitical space — a totalitarian political utility beyond democratic discourse. The causal chain of job, labour, production on the one hand, and standardised world-building on the other, becomes a sequence that seems increasingly to ignore the complex reality of human and ecological systems. In everyday life, people no longer act as politically self-determined beings, but rather within labour contracts or in private, often stripped of their rights and functions.

The state is now trying with all its might to push my self-determined work into the realm of leisure. Since I don't earn money with it, it must be a leisure activity. So I have no right to do this work — especially if it means that the other, “real” work is left undone. Everything that happens in your free time may only take place in dependence on material gain. If this is jeopardised, leisure time must be restricted.

This means that in Germany, even artistic freedom is ultimately assigned to leisure. The German government would probably like to tell all the revolutionaries of the world that they should make the revolution in their free time — or on the weekend.

What is the political, anyway? It is the relevance of the individual to the whole. A person has the highest political relevance when the whole manifests itself in the individual in a unique way. Such a person, however, is undesirable in gainful employment.

The workers are fighting a battle in the jobs that they cannot win. In response, the worker tends to do even more of one thing — to produce — instead of seeing the way out in the richness of variety and the expansion of metabolic processes. Overproduction is a direct consequence of the

devaluation of the worker on her holistic levels. The thing that is bought by as many people as possible has value. This is a direct effect of the labourer's inner deficit: she cannot develop self-worth from within herself, but only by dominating the masses — by becoming a worker in the mass product.

The worker knows she will always be penalised for the extra work that comes from becoming aware of complex interrelationships. The upper echelons try to use the function of the worker to prevent work being done elsewhere. This pluralistic participation in shaping conditions would be competition in the struggle for the significance of their products. The detergent — the mass product — would be in competition with work on concrete problems of humanity.

I replace the demand “Work more!” with the counter-demand: “Work on more!”

The so-called refuser of work — because everyone who does not submit to gainful employment is apparently a work refuser — is not despised because she does nothing. She is despised because she creates unpaid extra work for the worker. If workers were paid to stop what they are doing and join me in developing ideas for democracy, for example, I would be a hero to them. Because the work would never end. But this happens outside of jobs. It deprives jobs of their basis of legitimacy. That is why every worker fears losing their job when confronted with their responsibility to society — or their conscience. They too would then have to work without pay, i.e. work responsibly. For many, this inner contradiction is only an unconscious suspicion.

After all: you're only doing your job.

Although this sentence describes precisely this self-reduction, it becomes an accolade instead of an indictment. “Just” doing your job is considered honourable. Wanting more is seen as arrogance — an insult to the hard-working and diligent worker who toils for low wages.

In complete contrast to the Radical Worker stands the thoroughly standardised world of work in Germany — an outwardly very successful country that appears to assert itself globally through its labour culture. It is one thing to question working modes in countries of the Global South, where

economies appear to be failing. It is quite another to do so in one of the most economically successful nations in the world.

It is no coincidence that my work is particularly controversial in Germany, because here, the construct of labour is virtually unquestioned — even as the classical concept of labour is increasingly being challenged in other parts of Europe. In Germany, the hard-working labourer, who conditions herself for success, remains the foundation of national identity and greatness. Power is no longer sought explicitly — that striving cast the darkest shadows over Europe and, through colonialism, over the entire world. Today, it is the little industrious bee who legitimises Western dominance over other cultures. The innocent labourer — the decent worker — has replaced the armies of conquest.

As understandable as this underlying intention may be in light of historical guilt, the effort is still only a displacement. Germany has by no means overcome the old wound of narcissistic injury. It remains tense in its self-image — a dominant power that does not question its ambitions. The technocratic nature of the German work ethic — Prussian, almost military — has found a seemingly legitimised “home” in the work culture of the 1950s, extending to this day. A space in which modern predatory capitalism appears innocent.

It is the attitude of the self-sacrificing worker who, conscientious and strict with herself, performs the highest and noblest feats — while regarding the rest of the world with quiet disgust. From the perspective of Western labour culture, the “primitives” of today are those who fail to understand work the way Germans do. And apparently, the world markets agree — for Germany exemplifies how labour becomes a tool of dominance and power, while remaining unassailable.

Today, the German way of working is suffocating many economies across Europe. The problem of Germany’s export surplus — and the associated devaluation of other cultures’ value creation — is difficult to criticise, because the German mode of work presents itself as a model of success.

The country often justifies this success only by patronising “slower” cultures. This is because work does not carry the same one-dimensional meaning in other countries. In Germany, more than in almost any other society, work is tied to efficiency, a high degree of specialisation, and elitist thinking. Labour

dominates all other areas of life — for its own sake. As I have said before: work frees us from guilt. Which is why, in Germany, those who do not work are seen as far more guilty than anywhere else in the world.

In the name of labour, anything can be demanded. Its global success legitimises it. Combined with the notion of “technology”, a rationalised concept of labour has been exported — one that immediately implies a value system suppressing other work cultures and products. Like many industrialised nations, including the United States, Germany is practising *technology and labour colonialism*. This too is a form of expropriating and colonising other societies.

However, by emancipating the unemployed from the culture of blame, Europe could begin to grow together economically — by reintegrating diverse work forms, styles of cooperation, and labour cultures, while acknowledging their systemic contributions to the whole.

I would therefore like to coin the term “labour habitats” — as a counter-concept to “workplaces”.

By this, I mean reversing the dominant selection logic of what may be worked on, and by whom. Instead of sorting people by “desirable skills”, we should ask: *what form of work could naturally, or even unconsciously, emerge among the people already present in a given place?*

This is not about full employment, but about the integration of all talents, of all conceivable forms of contribution and being — building the market like an ecosystem, not like a competition. The goal is not to win against others, but to increase and integrate the conscious complexity and intelligence of the human system.

The aim is to create *living spaces of mutual support*, rooted in self-determination. Not because everyone wants the same, but because their inner diversity and mutual resonance generate structural foundations — enabling each person to contribute with their unique ideas, talents, and desires. This requires an entirely different culture of collaboration.

Labour habitats begin by asking: *who are you?* And from that, they derive what kind of form, what kind of work, wants to emerge. In gainful employment, by contrast, who you are is irrelevant. What

supposedly needs doing is all that counts. As a result, *limiting* value becomes more important than *creating* it. The things that are produced may be valuable in market terms — but often only because many people have worked on them at the cost of themselves. Not because their talents have actually been uniquely integrated.

That is a fundamental difference.

## Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: This chapter illustrates how the artist's body itself becomes a disruption in the workplace — not symbolically, but physically. Interventions in real workplaces become artistic performances that expose power relations. A new form of “embedded critique” emerges, in which art does not represent, but directly breaks reality.

— Critical Autism Studies: The experience of being marginalised as “too much” or “not fitting in” reflects classic autism diagnoses as power judgements. The described reactions to non-conforming work reflect the neurodivergent experience of rejection, masking pressure and functional exclusion. The chapter shows how this is precisely where the cognitive value lies: Those who do not “function” expose the blind spots of the system in an embodied way.

### ***Hot Days with Red Bull***

What is a job? A job is acting in purposeful isolation.

My central concern, throughout many years of engaging with the idea of work, has been to reintegrate the whole person into economic processes. I didn't start out with this intention — like most others, I first tried to adapt, to improve myself, to become more employable in the face of growing pressures on the labour market. I completed numerous training courses in the hope of getting a job.

But at some point, I realised that all of these were steps towards self-devaluation.

That I couldn't win this race. That I would become worthless to this economy either way — and worse, that by obeying the market's logic, I was also helping to devalue others.

In the summer of 2010 — I was not yet impoverished at the time — I travelled to Fuschl, near Salzburg, to the headquarters of the world-famous drinks company Red Bull and tried to change exactly that. I wanted to integrate the whole person into a company — including all the problems, conflicts, and new perspectives that might emerge as a result.

For a few hours I simply sat in front of the glass buildings, seemingly embedded in the Alpine landscape, walked across the wide meadows, felt the humid forest air. What would be the next step? How could I get involved — *me*, a human being? There, a company. How do we come together? How do I break through the isolation and separation in our relationship? No one wants to pay me to continue. So the only option left is to commission myself — to radically reorganise this economy. It may sound megalomaniacal, but in truth, it's just a small step for one person. It's frightening how easy it is to shake the foundations of a construct like the Western economy.

The Red Bull headquarters is a surreal place. Young, dynamic people who *look* like success stream in and out of the building during lunch break. They drive black VW Golfs and wear trendy clothes. The place has the atmosphere of a futuristic monastery. I walk among them — unnoticed. A few days pass.

Eventually, I walk in, smile nervously at the receptionist and say: *"Hello. My name is Timothy Speed. I'm an artist, and in a few weeks I'd like to kill a bull in front of your headquarters. I'm going to invite the international press and use the blood to rebuild the economy — in the interest of humanity. And of course, turn Red Bull into something much greater. Would it be possible to speak with Mr. Mateschitz? There are a few details to clarify. Like whether I can do it right here or if I'll need the main road closed off."*

She looks up from her calendar and, with a friendly smile — as if she hadn't heard correctly — replies:

*“You’ll need an appointment for that.”*

*“Fine,”* I say politely. *“Let’s make an appointment, then.”*

*“I’m afraid that’s not possible at the moment. The boss isn’t in. No one knows when he’ll be back.”*

*“Oh,”* I reply, slightly disappointed, leaving my number and a printed version of my concept.

Two days later, I receive a call from Mr. Mateschitz’s right-hand woman — the billionaire who owns much of Red Bull and founded the company together with an Asian partner. The concept is very interesting, she says — not entirely truthfully. They want to know more details.

Perhaps other companies would have dismissed me outright as a lunatic. Perhaps not everyone would have succeeded in drawing such attention. But I have one advantage at this point: I’m not calculable. When people google me, they find extremes. One minute I’m sitting at the world’s biggest roundtable alongside Nobel Prize winners, answering humanity’s “most important” questions (at Dropping Knowledge). The next minute I’m standing in their front yard, in person, talking about killing a bull. They can’t begin to predict what’s coming.

What follows are weeks and months of fluctuating dynamics between Red Bull and me.

They approach me — they threaten, invite me for coffee, try to buy me. I refuse. I select a bull and document the company’s internal conflict: between the human need to respond to the seemingly legitimate artistic impulse — and the corporate imperative to prevent me at all costs.

The process remains completely open.

Even I don’t fully understand my intentions. I’m driven by curiosity, exploring what happens when someone like me intervenes. I simply *work differently* — I rework a brand on my own terms. Since I’m not paid for it, I do it unpaid. No one anticipated this logic — or this danger. That I *can’t be bought* is a terrifying fact for many companies today.



Killing the bull is meant to trigger something — though I’m not entirely sure what.

I act impulsively and intuitively. The horned bull. The golden calf. The bull of the stock exchange. The bull on which the goddess Europa rides. If I can seize that bull, perhaps I can exorcise the demon from the economy and start again.

These are the thoughts running through my mind. I expose the entire entanglement between human and economy — and I call it *work*.

In what I am doing during these weeks and months, the patterns of two economies become visible: One in which humans have no say, and one in which free people rewrite the rules entirely.

What has a higher value?

The billion-dollar company Red Bull — or my intention, as an individual, to take over that company and reinterpret it in the interest of humanity, as the historic moment when the inflated value of the bull economy collapses?

Through my work, the customer and the worker are transformed into human beings. They break out of their roles and enter the company to kill the bull — so that another world may become visible. The intention to kill the bull of the economy is a deeply ritualistic, artistic, psychic, and symbolically powerful act.

A key feature of my working method is the ever-expanding web of references and associations — of meaning, patterns, sense-making. This is the *marketplace* I aim to establish in contrast to the debased selling of aluminium cans. This is where I find my nourishment.

In English, “to bully” (bull) means to dominate. In my work, *killing the bull* becomes the end of commercial domination.

To the company, my work signals impending disaster.

If I were to kill the bull in front of the cameras, the brand would be destroyed forever. A company like Red Bull — composed almost entirely of marketing — is inevitably damaged, if not annihilated, by such a radical reinterpretation of its brand.

Those weeks are extremely stressful for me. I'm not taking any of this lightly. I genuinely want to re-establish a level playing field between the "successful" and the "ordinary" human being. I want to become a *different kind* of employee.

Of course, some managers and economists might now be asking how any of this could lead to systemic change. After all, it *only* looks like an artistic performance. But it's more than that. It's the prelude to a radical shift in thinking — one that will lead me to a different concept of work and economy.

Only by crossing these lines, by breaking taboos, can we clear a path toward new action.

These conflicts open the way to valuable experiences with companies and new forms of labour. In the end, it's not about workers threatening corporations. It's about breaking down an internal wall — the one that says only paid labour, only labour tied to standard concepts of success, creates value.

So I'm sitting in the campsite opposite Red Bull headquarters, a beer in my hand, imagining how I pull out a pistol and shoot the bull in the head. The heavy animal collapses — and with it, the share price of a global corporation.

I set the pistol aside and call on people everywhere to storm companies in just this way, to freely redesign them. The world is more. I am more. Just once, look beyond the end of your own nose!

A little later, two lawyers disguised as cultural managers are flown to Vienna in a private jet to meet me at the famous Café Landtmann. Once again, we eat cake and drink coffee.

Red Bull, they say, invests heavily in culture. Maybe in three years, they could try to include me in an exhibition. I politely decline all proposals that would advance my career and tell them I'll continue redesigning Red Bull without their permission. I relativise their authority. I question their ownership of the product through which they dominate markets — while refusing to engage in genuine dialogue with the civilian population.

It's this ignorance that makes them rich: the presumed right to compartmentalisation and property.

I alter their product before their very eyes — in a totalitarian way — just as they once altered *me* as a consumer. They don't know how to respond.

What I'm doing makes sense from a human perspective — but business doesn't work like that. Business isn't fair, shared, or mutually valued. It's not designed for human-scale reciprocity.

The company takes me seriously — very seriously — because I also take the issue seriously. The press, of course, will come.

At some point I realise: I don't *really* want to kill the bull. Then again, in the days that follow, I'm not 100% sure I *shouldn't*. Red Bull seems equally unsure. Maybe the act *is* necessary — the sacrifice, the outrage, the discourse on the value of life.

Most of all, they seem afraid of alienating the vegetarians among their customer base if they allow it. A strange concern.

Later, I'm told that if I enter the premises unannounced again, the Cobra anti-terrorism unit will be called in. There had been threats against the company. In the heat of the moment, employees might not be able to distinguish a terrorist from me.

Over the summer and into autumn and winter, we meet several times. The company is internally divided — between people and function. It's an extraordinary thing to observe — a treasure trove of psychological, sociological, and economic insight.

The conflict could drag on for years. But at some point, I realise: the *act* itself isn't as important as the deeper understanding of what Red Bull and I are both trying to express. Actually killing the bull begins to seem trivial. And so, one day, I leave Fuschl behind.

Instead of killing the bull, I write the novel *Stieren des Weltdesigners*, in which Red Bull and the killing of the bull become metaphors for a different insight into Europe, the economy, and the future of society.

I dissolve the fixed role of the consumer. They should storm the corporations and take them over.

Numerous panel discussions and lectures followed in the years after. It remains particularly important to me to break the one-sided communication in the market, in which companies produce and consumers consume.

Anyone who claims the right to deliver beverage cans to every supermarket should also accept that I, as a consumer, engage with their company in a similar way — appropriating and reshaping it.

The way I do this — or rather, the way it happens to me in these situations — reveals new paradigms of a changed concept of work, in which people no longer work *for* companies, but *as whole persons* in relation to them.

Life enters companies, explodes like a mushroom, and spreads spores through their offices — messengers of uncontrolled growth. The density of diversity — of references, relationships, meanings — increases rapidly.

The complexity of the living environment dismantles the economic-totalitarian order.

To this day, the relationship between Red Bull and myself remains largely unresolved. The company unilaterally broke off contact. In the meantime, a publisher censored the novel out of fear of Red Bull. And although S. Fischer Verlag worked with me on the manuscript for some time, no publishing house ultimately found the courage to keep the book on the market.

The question of what would really happen if workers rose up and reshaped corporations from their own pain — in search of their personal form of labour — continues to arise.

It would be a revolution from below. And even if the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was right in saying that intellectuals often do not speak *for* the poor but only for themselves — these weeks showed that acting as individualised individuals makes a different form of resistance possible.

Red Bull never really took action against me — certainly also because they had no real way to stop me as a radical worker. Artistic freedom is strongly protected in Austria. Of course, Mr. Mateschitz would not simply allow someone to take over his empire — but I believe that

in a different setting, a different situation, and with some distance, he would ultimately agree with me. After all, his company, too, was born of deviation.

The only real question is: How do we find greater respect — for balance, for equality, for action without exploitation?

It was not to be my last crisis experiment.

In 2001 — about nine years earlier — I stood on stage in front of 1,000 art directors at Europe's largest marketing conference (Typo Berlin) and declared that advertising was damaging the economy and society. That seemed obvious to me. So I simply said it.

I had just become a father. Responsibility, as I've said before, had become a far more complex concept for me.

I couldn't remain silent just to avoid alienating potential clients. I couldn't bear that.

Before me, a font guru spoke for an hour about changing a typeface. When I finally took the stage, I was blinded by the spotlights — in hindsight, a typical autistic experience. I lost my train of thought, stammered, and eventually had to read out my statement.

Chairs shuffled. The advertising professionals didn't stop fidgeting. I was booed. By the end, only a few remained.

Later, the organiser blamed me for the scandal caused by my criticism and my "unprofessional behaviour", removing me from the programme.

Nobody wanted to work with me.

They said: If you criticise the system, your performance must be flawless.

But how is that supposed to work, when what I perform anticipates a collapse that later plays out on the big stages — without me?

The new is never a finished product.

What I find most challenging is letting go — allowing myself to stand on that stage like a complete fool. Only then does the more complex pattern, the more

diverse ecosystem, become visible. Because in a system of avoidance, reality always first appears as horror.

An economy that turns away from the fake, that refuses the value fabricated through marketing and advertising, will always, at first glance, look like a world no one wants to buy into.

Not wealth is visible at first, but all the repressed conflicts, injustices, and forms of discrimination.

But if the only thing that counts in an economy is whether the product is bought, then reality is never integrated into economic activity. That's why economics becomes a wall-to-wall sprint — an escalation until collapse follows. There's no other outcome.

Because it's a constant battle against reality. That battle consumes the energy, the creative power, that is lacking everywhere today.

That's why I refuse to act only professionally. It would restrict the form — wouldn't let it express itself.

This also applies to this book.

Change happens because I allow myself not to work perfectly, not to be infallible — and thereby allow more of myself into the work.

It's a shift in attitude.

Only by allowing failure can I overcome the guilt that blocks transformation. Proper work begins with the collapse of "proper work."

You can't integrate complexity by following a plan. You need workers who defy expectations.

For me, of course, that means breaking all the habits and rules of the labour market. But what else am I supposed to do, when it is clearly this behaviour — not the submissive one — that increases the true wealth of the world, that liberates both myself and others from poverty and oppression?

Of course, the authorities, the state, and managers think I'm crazy. Or dangerous. Or criminal. Or a parasite. But am I really?

Isn't my "inability" the same unrecognised ability that many people in the Global South are silently or openly blamed for — and which then becomes the very pretext for their exploitation or destruction?

Don't they carry the same "undesirable" value?

At that time, I felt deeply guilty.

Almost despairingly so.

Because nothing I had been doing for ten or twenty years was working in the market. But through my actions, the outline of an economy that integrates the entire ecosystem gradually became visible. The pyramid of success has lost its grip on me. Being "successful" no longer matters.

I want to see what emerges. I don't want to determine what should be created — I want to experience how creation unfolds.

They treat me like dirt.

But the state is increasingly running out of rational arguments — and is responding more and more post-factually, with brute force. This is violence without eye contact. The power to cut off money for food and rent is covert violence. Something is being denied — not done.

The bureaucracy always "verifies eligibility", but never your right to exist. In all these years, I was never officially sanctioned.

Because sanctions are overt acts — and thus confessions.

And sanctioning creative artists, intellectuals and scholars who objectively refute the Hartz-IV system wouldn't go over well in court. Instead, payments are deliberately delayed — as if by accident, as if unintentional. My suffering, my work — simply unseen. The state abuses me not so much through direct injustice, but through an absence of justice.

This behaviour is typical of totalitarian systems that aim to erase minorities slowly. The victims become invisible, dehumanised. The system focuses on rule enforcement — fully legitimised on paper — without considering impact or consequence.

I am always labelled: complainant, unemployed. But never: individual.

Never artist. Never researcher — whose life, whose work, whose existence might matter.

So I remain a mere function — a utility for the bureaucracy to secure its own employment.

They need me in my poverty.

They cling to me like a tick to its host.

I feed them.

I finance their survival.

The authorities *need* poverty — and they always argue in ways that make themselves appear flawless. That's one of the reasons they insist on seeing me as the villain.

Like the Johanna Quandt Foundation, the state cannot tolerate even the slightest shadow. Because if there were the faintest public doubt about the integrity of its actions, its power would collapse. That is why, in every inquiry I force into motion, the state's overriding goal is to confirm the *impeccability* of its own behaviour — never to acknowledge the injustice done to the poor, the unemployed, or those bullied by state institutions.

I put nearly 2,000 pages of research on the table — pages that dismantle the ideology of gainful employment, that show its violence, its absurdity, its failure. But they don't read them. Because for them, only one question ever matters. Always the same: Did the civil servant do their job? Did they follow procedure? If yes — then all is well.

## Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The action marks a form of “embedded disruption” — the artwork does not take place in the studio, but in the company itself. It becomes the prototype of an artistic power intervention that tests system boundaries and at the same time creates a new production aesthetic: radical, biographical, real.



— Critical Autism Studies: The role of the unwanted intruder reflects classic experiences of neurodivergent people in normalised institutions. The ability to make sense beyond profit and the refusal to allow oneself to be instrumentalised becomes clear here as an epistemic resource — as an expression of autistic integrity and system-critical intuition.

### ***Isolation in Gainful Employment***

Every attempt at liberation is associated with setbacks, which often lead to important new insights. It is interesting to note that, because I am denied compensation for my work by companies, the state and society—which ultimately drive me into economic exile—I create my own job as a reaction to this isolation. So I don't work “freely” from the outset. Because, caught up in the values of success, it is extremely demanding to valorise the diversity of what is newly emerging from within. Contrary to general expectation, however, I don't stop doing things—but if I receive no recognition, I eventually create work myself, which in itself implies recognition.

The first reflex in unemployment is often to work even more, which frequently means that leisure time is replaced by all kinds of “simulated” or staged work, much to the chagrin of one's partner or family. The unemployed person is often a misunderstood workaholic.

Apart from the lack of pay, my work is initially indistinguishable from gainful employment. I go into my study and work for hours on end. I even reward myself for the hours I've worked—with biscuits and chocolate.

In a way, I also experience here what Richard Sennett calls, in *The Corrosion of Character*, a disintegration of the inner lines of orientation, i.e. the consequence of flexible working conditions.

I now realise that the job is not a form of work that requires a wage, but—what is much more frightening—it is simply what happens when the connection to the environment, to the greater whole, is severed. Work must then create value for itself, independently of all contexts—legitimise itself. It becomes a self-referential act, a form of leapfrogging performed when people are isolated.

Isolation arises wherever activities are not socially valued. Work becomes a place of structural disregard, in the sense of Axel Honneth in *Recognition*.

Due to a lack of different references, action shifts one-sidedly to one thing that is repeated forever. In the sense of Byung-Chul Han's *Fatigue Society* (2010), one could say that the neoliberal self-entrepreneur lives in a state of permanent self-exhaustion. External discipline is replaced by internal self-rape.

Gainful employment therefore happens even when it is decoupled from any reference to competition, the market or profit. In terms of productivity levels, it works even better the greater the isolation and the fear of even more isolation becomes. If the job is decoupled from the wage and from connection to the world, the essential negative aspects of the job only become visible in their full consequence. However, this means that we allow ourselves to be paid for what is essentially sick behaviour.

Autistic people are not only overburdened by gainful employment, but also disconnected from themselves—they live under a constant masking pressure that forces them to act against their cognitive and sensory rhythms. (Nick Walker – *Neuroqueer Heresies*, 2021)

What I mean by this is that we need to look at jobs from a different perspective—not as the result of value creation, or even as meaningful action, but rather as a mechanism for the aggressive targeting of vitality: the compensation of creativity and motivation in a combustion process in which the individual desperately tries to achieve meaning, value and connection, but is already prevented from doing so by the structure itself. As a result, value creation explodes unilaterally but without integrating those mechanisms of action that would lead to a new refuelling of energy—such as balancing through diverse and varied activities.

The monotony of modern forms of work removes the basis of intrinsic motivation—namely, the comprehensive context in which people can develop freely and with a sense of purpose. Extrinsic motivation cannot offer this, or only rarely.

In *The Metamorphoses of the Social Question*, Robert Castel shows how gainful employment has become the sole access criterion for social participation—the unemployed become the “superfluous class”.

The job, as a structural form of behaviour, is therefore often also a kind of neurotic reaction to the experience of isolation and worthlessness. In fact, for many people, work takes on a meaningful position in life, but without providing any real meaning beyond payment. This is not because the work is meaningful, but because the work claims to be meaningful.

According to Nancy Fraser (*Cannibal Capitalism*, 2022), gainful employment functions by making other forms of relationships—care, concern, connection to the world—structurally invisible. This leads to social and ecological catastrophe. This focusing on one thing, on one area, enables the emergence of great individual achievements, but also their downside, namely structural impoverishment and burnout.

Due to a lack of opportunities for balance and complex metabolic processes, energy builds up and leads to a one-sided outburst at work—resulting in a “forced expression”. A substitute action. Because of the transfer protocol, however, this does not appear to be negative, but quite normal—even a positive reference to life. Because it is rewarded.

I call this the “growth illusion”, i.e. the confusion of a compensatory, one-sided push for growth with sustainable forms, which I will discuss in more detail later.

It is interesting to note that, as far as the pattern of classical work is concerned, the accumulation of creative power automatically leads to one or a few things being produced in greater quantities. A dammed river seems to carry more water. A pruned plant sprouts more vigorously. Pruning therefore gives the impression of potency and wealth. In fact, it is only an expression of a struggle for survival in which energy is quickly burnt up.

This is a very important observation. It means that the prosperity made possible by competition naturally burns up resources more quickly in the end and is ultimately just a means of simulating wealth in a desert through excessive productivity on the part of one person.

Of course, not all growth in an economy is characterised by these factors, but this mechanism works subliminally—like the transfer protocol—on all levels. If we fail to recognise this, we will not get to grips with the known problems. Much of what I describe in this book is not meant to be absolute, but I am

pointing out patterns that often lie beneath the surface of economics. I try to differentiate economic theory.

However, recognising this misunderstanding of growth is a possible key to overcoming—or transforming—capitalism.

It is astonishing that hundreds of economists still fail to realise that the growth principle of modern economics can only be an illusion. It is predominantly sustained by splitting it off from the rest of reality. It operates on the principle of compensation and simulation. More isolation and narrowness lead to more one-sided growth. This is the fatal logic of the modern market. Creative autonomy is reintegrated into the system—criticism is incorporated, but not realised in terms of content. (Luc Boltanski / Ève Chiapello – *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2003))

If productivity on the job can be increased through isolation while simultaneously reducing wages, one gets the idea that wages are the only factor that makes this way of working appear positive at all. This also explains the power that lies in the wage. Higher productivity without a wage is consumed more quickly—but if the reins are tightened, more one-sided labour can be enforced for less pay. This is not only a principle that can be applied to the individual, but also a systemic one.

It is crucial to realise that higher productivity is a sign of dwindling distribution—i.e. less diversity and less wealth—within a system. This is one of the key findings of my work. Lower productivity, i.e. smaller individual gains, indicate a functioning community in which distribution is not necessarily more equal, but in which the distribution of values is predominantly more homogeneous. Because if I increase equivalence in the market, values are automatically distributed across the board, which makes them appear to disappear as high individual profits. This is a very important mechanism.

The question arises whether an economy that, like capitalism, requires extremely high individual profits in order to inadequately supply the system via trickle-down is not significantly more primitive than an economy that prevents such one-sided profits in advance—and in doing so increases two

factors: diverse local dynamics, and an immediately higher basic provision for all areas of life and all people.

In such a system, productive energy would not be obtained through compensation, but from difference—from the “small drop height” between all individuals—which leads to permanent flow and equalisation. This would be a form of energy production similar to that of nature, as I have already described in earlier books.

For me, a “successful economy” in the modern sense is rather a sign of a dying civilisation. Understanding this can open people’s eyes.

It is only logical that capitalism ultimately leads to the monopolisation of everything—to a reduced simulation, to a hollowed-out representation that is no longer what it claims to be. This is the beginning of a world trapped in submergence.

Today, for example—as mentioned earlier—there is often talk of the shortage of skilled labour paralysing economic growth. In my opinion, modern economics misinterprets this. The shortage of skilled labour is basically a sign of an overheated market. It means that too much of one thing is being produced, and other workers are being devalued in large numbers.

Economists believe that more skilled labour would increase economic growth and thus ensure greater wealth distribution. This is a naïve assumption—because, as we have shown, there are considerable differences in the quality of growth.

If there are too few skilled workers, this simply means that more people have different interests and talents. But why should these needs be ignored just because more money is to be made elsewhere? That may work in the short term, but in the long run it weakens the market as a whole—because it destroys diversity.

Wolfgang Streeck (*Gekaufte Zeit*, 2013) analyses how “skills shortages” are often not a shortage of labour, but a means of putting pressure on wages. Companies don’t want to pay people—they want to “keep them available” as cheaply as possible.

Christoph Butterwegge, in various writings on labour market policy, shows that the labour market is not neutral, but structured around profitable segments. People with “different” talents and skills are not integrated, but systematically devalued. The modern economy only values what generates market value—it overlooks and suppresses other forms of knowledge, skill, and social contribution.

This is not a weakness, but a structural blindness of the economic system. (Mariana Mazzucato – *The Value of Everything*, 2018)

The narrative of a skilled labour shortage is also exposed by literature critical of capitalist growth: it conceals the asymmetry between profit zones and social wastelands—it conceals who is systematically excluded. (Branko Milanović – *Capitalism, Alone*, 2019)

An ecosystem has its own idea of inner balance. In terms of labour habitats, the question should be asked: what can be created from the people available? However, this could mean that leading industries today, which complain about a lack of workers, have simply reached the limits of their natural growth. It is important to understand such correlations, even if I am abbreviating a little here. But the shift in thinking, the basic principle, is crucial. What is really important? More skilled labour – or more workspaces in which different people can work together? The concept of “skilled labour” is too rigid, and ultimately also anti-innovation. The shortage of skilled labour is also the result of an overly elitist education system. So much willingness to perform was desired that too small a base of capable people was accepted in their assessment. Such mechanisms point to the need for further valorisation from below.

The capitalist market can only be left to regulate itself – if at all – where there is a dense network of relationships in society that diversifies and thus also reduces productivity. This is the only way to achieve a fairer distribution in the so-called trickle-down effect. A weakening economy should therefore also be viewed positively – because it shows that one-sided exploitation is decreasing, as long as there is sufficient energy in the market and it has not already been

cut to death. Modern economics, however, does not recognise the isolation factor. It would have to assess economic growth by asking whether it only occurs in isolated fields. That would reflect reality far more accurately.

It is also interesting to note that higher wages do not necessarily help to overcome isolation. In a stereotypical system, higher wages only lead to a further strengthening of one-sided profits – because the money is again only spent one-sidedly, as the needs have not yet been sufficiently diversified. A structural increase in diversity is therefore required, so that higher wages also lead to more structural wealth. Otherwise, the wage level is ultimately relativised again – in line with the low availability of distinguishable goods – in favour of mass-produced goods. Once again, this leads to overproduction and, ultimately, to a fall in prices and the devaluation of labour. Therefore, from a structural point of view, overcoming poverty cannot be solved through higher wages alone – but only through self-determined labour. Revaluation must therefore take place on many levels.

Elinor Ostrom – *Governing the Commons* (1990) – shows that functioning systems are based on polycentric, diverse participation. If only “skilled labour” counts, the commons model collapses. Anna Tsing – *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015) – examines economic ecosystems that only survive because they are *not* standardised. Diversity is a prerequisite for sustainability – not a cost factor. Kate Raworth – *Doughnut Economics* (2017) – postulates clear ecological and social limits to economic growth. A market that is focused solely on high-performance monetary zones (e.g. tech, pharma) systematically deprives other needs of resources and leads to social imbalance.

The wage masks the fact that gainful employment is always structurally forced labour – because it takes place in isolation. The isolation triggers the compulsive behaviour. Of course, individuals experience this differently. Someone in the military may experience the constraints less dramatically than a teacher. The state also talks to the unemployed about the “reasonableness” of work – thereby denying the character of gainful employment as a source of constraint. The constructed obligation to perform in return is, so to speak, the reversal of coercion into something positive and seemingly legitimate.

When we talk about coercion at work, we have to talk about the relationship between isolation and detachment – as discussed earlier. Someone who is more

strongly torn out of the context of their own being by the job experiences more forced labour than a person who associates themselves with the conditions in the job. If I am forced into a job that is maximally opposed to my identity – my being in its relation to the world – then we can speak of maximum forced labour. Forced labour, therefore, only has a limited connection with the fact that a job is done against one's will (symptom) – but primarily with the question of whether it leads to isolation from being.

In the interests of the ecosystem – and in the interests of an economy based on pluralistic growth – this must be prevented at all costs. Forced labour damages the kind of economy that wants to preserve all of life. Only an economy that seeks exploitation and high individual profits at the expense of society as a whole speaks of the “reasonableness” of labour and considers forced labour to be a good thing.

If a job leads to isolation from being, then the necessary work habitat for the person is also lost—and their uniqueness can no longer be integrated into society. It is destroyed. At the same time, it is devalued to such an extent that it results in blackmail. This is how increasingly scarce conditions and low-wage jobs are created.

The compulsion to provide a service in return within the labour force implies the legitimisation of working against one's will. It is often argued that a job—even one that a person does not wish to do—is reasonable in terms of the common good, without acknowledging that this enforces an unhealthy mode of work, one which is socially devastating and leads to structural impoverishment. Gainful employment itself is an imposition, because it often enforces isolation from appropriate, situated behaviour. Anyone who seeks to prohibit free will at work is also prohibiting adequacy in action—at the deepest level.

The compulsion to work is thus not only the reversal of the perpetrator–victim relationship of the transfer protocol; it also leads to a fundamentally misguided, socially damaging mode of working, a loss of responsibility and integrity within the sphere of labour. Compulsory labour is simultaneously a ban on true work and a ban on existence. This can only be legitimised through classist prejudice—through the idea that only conformist behaviour



contributes to the whole. The concept of “reasonableness” thus implies a total devaluation of the human being.

Linking forced labour to the factor of *isolation*, rather than to the *loss of free will*—which is legitimated via the demand for reciprocal obligation—fundamentally changes the perspective and opens up an entirely new insight into the emergence of meaningful and relevant work within an ecosystem. No one will deny that many jobs are performed under compulsion, but hardly anyone considers the isolation factor. It is *isolation* that generates coercion. And while it may appear permissible to restrict an individual’s free will in the name of the “greater good,” it would be unthinkable to publicly advocate *isolation* as a political instrument purported to serve society. After all, no one seriously wants to demand a mode of labour that simulates reality while negating it.

This point becomes concrete when workers stop ignoring systemic damage and instead integrate it—through protest—into their labour, thereby becoming disobedient. They act situationally in the interest of the entire ecosystem but evade the compulsion to conform to prescribed work. In doing so, gainful employment itself dissolves. No court in a democracy can silence such a worker by appealing to the “reasonableness” of labour. The abolition of gainful employment, because it simply becomes unenforceable, takes place the moment the worker begins to act meaningfully—i.e., by integrating broader relations and references. It is illogical to suggest that labour performed *against* reason and conscience could yield a beneficial economy. The problems of capitalism—readable via the transfer protocol—are visible everywhere.

Only when the concept of forced labour is linked to *isolation*, rather than to *free will*, does it gain systemic relevance. Until now, attention has focused almost exclusively on the sensitivities of individuals. What is now becoming apparent is that forced labour—i.e., labour that separates the individual from their being—causes massive damage to the system as a whole. And it is not economically viable either. *Self-devaluation cannot be rational economic behaviour.*

- Michel Foucault – *Discipline and Punish* (1975); *Security, Territory, Population* (1977/78): Describes how labour is enforced not only through external violence, but through

internalised norms, self-monitoring, and social isolation. The body becomes a disciplined resource.

- Frithjof Bergmann – *New Work, New Culture* (1984ff.): Describes wage labour as a “form of poverty”: those who work against their inner impulse lose contact with themselves; labour becomes a psychologically isolating simulation of autonomy.
- Karl Marx – *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844): Alienation of product, process, species-being and self.
- Loïc Wacquant – *Punishing the Poor* (2009): Labour as moral apparatus of coercion. Those who do not conform are disciplined by administrative systems (e.g. Job Centres, sanctions).
- Christina Maslach – *The Truth About Burnout* (1997): Burnout results when work loses meaning and social ties are severed.
- Richard Sennett – *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (2006): Flexible, project-based work leads to atomised subjectivity and social disconnection.
- Robert Castel – *The Metamorphoses of the Social Question* (2000): Those who do not fit into gainful employment become socially disembedded; isolation is not a side effect but a central consequence.

The result of the classic way of working can therefore only ever mean a further reduction in the scope for creativity—which only appears to be refuted by the fact that excessive bursts of productivity constantly occur under pressure to perform, and these are then misinterpreted as signs of positive growth.

Those who ignorantly demand more conventional economic growth are in fact calling for less humanity, less nature, less reality—and more isolation and segregation.

The reverse logic paints an even more disturbing picture: because the *isolation factor* turns poverty into a state of maximum one-sided overwork. Half of life happens unseen and unacknowledged. And that has consequences. As a poor and unemployed person, I suffer from burnout symptoms, stress, and

pressure—and I work more and more. As an unemployed person, I am a workaholic.

This may surprise many, but the reason why many people in poverty and unemployment display destructive behaviours, fall into alcoholism, or simply age faster is that they are overworking themselves. They toil in an almost unbearable, highly complex state of overexertion. The unemployed person desperately tries to participate, but unlike the employed, they cannot simply walk into a job in the morning—they must develop entirely different structures in order to generate value.

One of these is self-isolation: to avoid being recognised and exposed as poor in public, to avoid being shamed, and to avoid constantly having to translate oneself in order to explain why one is still human despite living in poverty.

According to my observations, the passivity often attributed to the unemployed is in fact a form of burnout—a result of chronic overwork. There is simply *too much* labour in the poor.

This change in perspective shifts all basic assumptions about poverty and its origins. The poor achieve more, not less. They do not suffer from a lack of output, but from their segregation—their artificial exclusion from meaningful participation in society. The next best job is not the solution, because within it, they remain isolated and unseen.

The impoverishment of millions who have jobs but are destroyed by them is the result of structures that force people into labour and continue to abuse, suppress, and devalue them.

The poor never have time off. They never go on holiday. They know no limits to their working hours.

The systematic increase in poverty—not just monetary poverty, but poverty as a structural principle—through the modern mode of labour is not only damaging *to the poor*, but to *the system as a whole*. The entire system moves in the opposite direction of sensible, sustainable work. It involves fewer and fewer people, and then marginalises the diverse contributions of those it excludes.

Of course, I have been talking about “jobs” as a fundamental structure all along—but that does not mean people cannot find fulfilment within their

jobs. However, if the concept of work were extended *beyond* the job, the positive experiences would be stronger—and, conversely, many of the pathologies described here would simply disappear.

## Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The chapter makes isolation not only describable, but also performatively tangible — it becomes an aesthetic resource. In Artistic Research, this isolation can be staged, broken through or mapped as material: for example through solo performances, documentary self-exclusion or social spatial interventions. The artistic work shows: It is not the individual who is deficient, but the structure that prevents resonance.

— Critical Autism Studies: Isolation in gainful employment reflects key experiences of neurodivergent people: Masking, sensory overload and exclusion through normality demands. The chapter empirically confirms that neurodivergent isolation is often not a retreat, but an act of self-preservation. Research recognises this as a resource: isolation becomes a lens through which structural violence becomes visible — and the basis for alternative work and life models.

## ***The Significance of the Milgram Experiments***

Back in 1961, the psychologist Stanley Milgram conducted the well-known experiments at Yale University in which test subjects were instructed to administer electric shocks to a stranger whenever they failed to solve a task correctly. It turned out that under two conditions, almost all participants went to extremes—even when the other person was already screaming in pain. The two conditions for the so-called *agentic state* were: a legitimised authority and the authority's assumption of responsibility.

As a Jew, Milgram conducted his research against the backdrop of the Holocaust, trying to understand how it had been possible for Germans to carry

out such atrocities—or more precisely, to do so obediently. The realisation that US-Americans of different origins and social statuses—Black people, women, people from various professions—did not behave significantly differently in these experiments was a profound shock at the time. They all harboured the potential, to quote Hannah Arendt, to fall prey to the *banality of evil*.

To this day, it has rarely been pointed out that gainful employment as a construct largely mirrors the experimental design of the Milgram experiment.

A defining characteristic of the employee is obedience to an authority that assumes responsibility for everything. The worker, as I have said elsewhere, is removed from the broader frame of reference. They do their job and do not reflect further. Over time, they are manipulated by reward systems and cognitive dissonance to the point where they come to see their own actions as correct and appropriate. Even if those actions, viewed externally, are clearly harmful or unjust, the employee does not get up from their chair, does not leave the office—that is, the experiment.

I have experienced this myself on numerous occasions: judges and public prosecutors refusing to intervene in the face of unconscionable injustice, simply because it contradicts the procedural setup and the rules of their job. See my book *Speed's Work*.

Understanding that Milgram's structure parallels that of jobs—of gainful employment—reveals why the job as a structural principle inevitably leads to a kind of brainwashing over time. It also confirms the mechanism described in the transfer protocol, whereby the victims of one-sided value exaggeration begin to adopt the values of the perpetrators, ultimately legitimising their actions through a skewed logic of reward and punishment. According to this logic, the party administering the reward or punishment is by definition right and good.

The power of reward is vastly underestimated in our society. The inner corruption that comes with abandoning free will and authenticity is barely acknowledged. Yet this leads to a distortion of perception: the world is dynamic, but the wage creates a static point of reference. You cannot have both—a wage experienced as deserved, and a complex interaction with life. The reward is a regressive, infantilising relationship.

Regardless of a person's actual experience, the wage produces standardised behaviours detached from reality—rewarded through abstract values. Administering electric shocks was part of the job. Empathising with the victim's pain was not—and therefore went unrewarded.

Even if Milgram's experiment was obviously far more extreme than most jobs, the suspicion remains that countless seemingly minor, or even massive, acts of ignorance, brutality, discrimination, or exploitation carried out on the job are fundamentally grounded in the same psychological mechanism—and that the degree of isolation may even amplify the effect. The more isolated the work becomes, the more it orients itself toward an abstract authority or value, the more likely it is to become a means of enacting violence—against people, against the environment. The ethical erosion of our society can be explained substantially by such mechanisms.

This makes gainful employment a basic structural precondition for the emergence and spread of discrimination, racism, totalitarianism, and other intersectional violences within our societies. Work occupies a central part of our lifeworld. The division of labour, ostensibly a system of shared responsibility, often becomes a system of irresponsibility. Gainful employment—as a structure, not necessarily as an individual experience—is a child of totalitarianism, not of democracy. The job is the code for totalitarian right. The job is the code for one-sided truth. Reality is reduced to the office. And the boss is not democratically elected. In this way, the job undermines freedom of conscience, freedom of dissent.

We believe that the necessities of jobs are the necessities of life. But that is not true. The necessities of life often stand in direct contradiction to the requirements of jobs.

Problems such as burnout or the many other afflictions of modern workers do not, as we are told, arise from *too much stress*, which can be remedied by vacations and exercise. They arise from the structural destruction of the mental, social, and cultural ecosystem that people need in order to remain mentally healthy. It is not overexertion within gainful employment that causes this—it is gainful employment as such, as a system.

Even if there are milder or less extreme forms that contradict this diagnosis or seem to relativise it, a bitter suspicion remains: that the job by no means legitimises everything, or that you are automatically “okay” just because you have one. The real question is how to avoid becoming a monster to yourself and others *because of* your job—as in Milgram’s experiments.

It seems to me that neurotypicals are particularly at risk here, because they prioritise “group thinking” much more than neurodivergent people. They are more inclined to obey authority and more likely to overlook contradictions in patterns.

The totalitarian correctness of jobs is always followed by their banal normalisation. Today, jobs have become so normalised that their structural brutality appears to have weakened. But this weakening is based solely on the fact that people have grown used to gainful employment. In other words: a creeping hardening. But what is hardening, if not a reduction in the ability to perceive?

In my experiments, I try to break through this numbness to pain and make people aware of what jobs actually do—namely, normalise a crime. This perspective is especially important from a neurodivergent point of view, because it must be recognised that neurodivergent people obviously perceive a problem here much more readily than neurotypicals. The way I experience the world—through a different brain, through a different type of neural wiring—makes the phenomenon of the job appear to me as an act of violence, and I experience the associated economy as a crime. This is not a subjective view or an emotional experience. Neurodivergent people have a different experience of reality, which is just as real as that of neurotypicals.

As the MNO model shows, neurodivergent people have the right to treat their truth as objective—because the neurological foundations that cause a shift in perception are themselves objective, measurable, and not an illness, but a different filter, a different mode of world-relation that leads to a significant epistemic contribution.

Over all these years of conflict, I have written to around 20 public prosecutors stating that the abuse of children and pregnant women in the context of Hartz IV is based on the fraud embedded in the transfer protocol. Although there are

thousands of victims, the idea that the state might be doing something wrong must not be acknowledged within the job of a prosecutor. Because prosecutors act neurotypically—which means that facts are only treated as relevant until they clash with social norms, at which point they are sacrificed to preserve conformity within power structures.

When I provoke the prosecutors, I lure the entire system out of its comfort zone. I want the system to see the *person*—so I behave, as much as possible, *as* a person, instead of functioning smoothly. This leads to rejection, especially for me as an autistic person—but in the long run, it forces the system to acknowledge the reality of the lives of the poor, the neurodivergent, the unemployed, and the workers.

To achieve this, I must also speak in my own language—because in the language of the oppressors, the words I need to express my reality do not even exist.

Authorities often demand that victims use objective language, because “objective” language makes acts of violence sound less serious. The detached gaze is also a form of alienation, a means of shielding oneself from the harshness of pain.

As Milgram showed, the reification of relationships—between worker and customer, market and politics—leads to the collapse of all ethical principles, because the relationship becomes truncated. Problems are covered up, and criminal or selfish behaviour is downplayed by pointing to others who act similarly. In the name of money, anything seems to be permitted—because money stands for isolated value, which must never be questioned, let alone relativised.

All these behaviours, which often make our society so repulsive, are already embedded in the situation of gainful employment. It seems that hardly anyone can escape them.

When confronted with the transfer protocol, the Brandenburg Minister of Justice, Stefan Ludwig, replied to me—on 23 July 2018 via a staff member—as follows:

*“I hope you will understand that I leave the ‘Freywald Declaration’ (transfer protocol) uncommented and do not expect the public prosecutor’s offices to deal*



*with its content, as their statutory task is primarily to examine specific facts relevant to criminal law—which does not include extraordinary socio-economic views or general systemic criticism.”*

So politicians deny the fraud and refuse to talk about it—because the more they engage with my work, the more guilty they become. Because then, at the latest, no one can say they didn’t know. This is why the Ministry of Justice also tries to suppress the facts and frame it all as if it were merely a theory that doesn’t concern them. They deliberately refuse to understand. Because if it were to become publicly visible that they *do* understand, they would have a huge problem.

What we are witnessing here is what Miranda Fricker calls *epistemic injustice*—the marginalisation of those who are different and who, as a result, perceive the world from a different epistemic position. My truth, my objectivity, is being erased. For the Minister of Justice, there is nothing wrong with the economy—because it rewards him.

However, systems of injustice can only be dismantled if their brutality is linked to individual decisions—if politicians, prosecutors, and civil servants are directly confronted with the fact that they are accomplices, and are challenged to either stop or face prosecution.

In fact, the Ministry of Justice’s response is a scandal. It essentially says: *It’s not fraud if it’s the state*. If a social system discriminates and deceives, it’s not to be prosecuted. Anyone who participates in such a scheme for personal benefit is apparently safe from consequences.

But where exactly is the line between unthinking privilege—benefiting from a system that systematically oppresses large parts of the population—and conscious complicity in its fraud?

I am convinced that the line is crossed when someone is made aware of the injustice—and then, like the Brandenburg Minister of Justice, chooses not to act.

For years, I have involved the German government—especially Labour Minister Andrea Nahles—along with countless civil servants and major corporations, in a debate about my work and the real mechanisms behind the poverty I experience as a neurodivergent person. In doing so, they all become

witnesses to the emergence of my poverty and to my attempt at self-determined liberation.

Many people think I'm mad—because at first, they don't know how to make sense of it. After all, no one else seems to get up and do the work they believe is most urgent—especially not without payment, and especially not when this work destroys one's own career.

They don't understand how this is supposed to help society, even though it is meticulously explained in the transfer protocol.

They don't understand because they've internalised a simple rule: Only what is rewarded is of value. And conversely: What is not rewarded must be wrong. They live in a reduced relational model.

Work of high value outside of gainful employment must not be allowed to exist—because if it did, the entire logic that justifies people enduring this horror *because of the job*, because of *duty*, would collapse. The job would no longer stand above conscience.

Jobs stabilise the encrusted order only because we believe in the causality chain of the economy—that the world is sustained by jobs, *as if there were no life without them*. People thus remain trapped in a deadlock: do jobs promote or prevent life?

Everyone thinks they can make it, that they can prove something through their job, show how far they can go and what good they can bring into the world. And of course, good things are achieved. But the problem is: Only the “good” is allowed. Only the “good” is rewarded—which systematically reverses the meaning of good, just as Milgram pointed out.

## Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— **Artistic Research:** The chapter reveals the psychological mechanisms behind obedience as a structural dramaturgy — a template for performative interruption. Artistic practice can specifically reconstruct or alienate Milgram

situations in order to make the logic of shifting authority visible. Art becomes a field experiment against the invisibility of institutional violence.

— Critical Autism Studies: Neurodivergent individuals often instinctively refuse the “agentic state” — they do not act blindly according to the logic of authority, but insist on inner coherence. This chapter sheds light on why precisely this attitude is considered disruptive: autistic integrity undermines the system of delegated obedience and exposes the ethical breach that others conceal with functionality.

### ***Productive Inequality***

The ways in which injustice against the marginalised is twisted and concealed to render it as invisible as possible are manifold—and not always easy to see through. The economy, for instance, operates under the banner of *equal opportunity*, but in reality it grants access only through conformity to standards. Yet most people never question the fact that “the norm” is a constructed value that cannot do justice to the complexity of life—especially in the realms of school and university. Many people who failed at school later became great scientists.

The fact that there is “equal opportunity” only for those who behave “correctly” in the eyes of an allegedly omniscient authority seems to trouble too few. But what is the meaning of a static definition of value in a constantly changing world? How much injustice and oppression is based on these high values used to judge people one-sidedly? And how many complex situations, life paths, and forms of suffering go unrecognised—or are systematically marginalised?

Many people know from experience that bureaucracy is incapable of recognising life in its real proportions and priorities. Inequality is not prevented because the bureaucracy avoids the favouritism of some, as it claims. On the contrary: even more unequal treatment is constantly being created—

because inequality arises not only when the same things are treated unequally, but also when all differences are lumped together.

The concept of *balanced reporting* in the media—as a form of equal treatment—is equally misleading. The new, the unfamiliar, always requires more explanation than the known. If both are given the same space in the media, the new will always lose to the status quo.

Equal treatment and justice do not emerge through the establishment of norms, but through a living capacity for relation. A more mature concept of justice is needed.

In the market, people have started to turn fundamental inequality into something positive—via competition. According to the transfer protocol, everyone is expected to benefit from proximity to the winners, and every totalitarian system warns against the “inferior”. Competition is the private sector’s version of brutal selection, coated in optimism.

- Michael Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit* (2020), analyses how the meritocratic narrative—“those who work hard deserve success”—serves to legitimise inequality. The marginalised internalise failure and accept their exclusion as deserved.
- Daniel Markovits, *The Meritocracy Trap* (2019), shows that meritocracy reproduces elitist capital under the guise of fairness—while generating massive pressure on all involved.
- Stefan Kühl, *Elite durch Bildung?* (2009), unmasks the idea that education systems assess performance neutrally: in truth, they encode class origin.
- Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction* (1979), theorises *cultural capital*: what looks like achievement is often just social fit. Those without the codes of the ruling class are read as inferior—though their contributions are ignored.
- Andreas Reckwitz, *Gesellschaft der Singularitäten* (2017), shows how society has shifted from equality to comparability under competitive conditions. Diversity is only accepted if it is profitable.

- Thomas Lemke, *Biopolitics of Performance* (2011), reveals how in neoliberal societies, performance becomes a biopolitical norm: those who aren't measurably better are made invisible.
- David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), explains how inequality is not a side effect but the engine of neoliberal accumulation. “Productive inequality” is a euphemism for upward redistribution.
- Branko Milanović, *Global Inequality* (2016), shows empirically that economic systems rely on inequality—not due to resource scarcity, but because inequality fuels accumulation.
- Heinz Bude, *Bildungspanik* (2011), analyses the structurally generated fear of falling behind. It’s not a personal flaw, but a control mechanism in competitive societies.
- Lisa Herzog, *Die Rettung der Arbeit* (2019), calls for a concept of work beyond market logic—centred on justice, autonomy and diversity as economic fundamentals.

The fundamental inequality caused by value boundaries—which is recognised neither as injustice under capitalism nor as an individual position within diversity—is twisted one step further into productive inequality. What originally constitutes dynamism through difference becomes the principle of competition, which borrows the rhetoric of diversity’s benefits but destroys it in practice. Competition prioritises victory over difference rather than the integration of the diverse.

As a result, the positive effects of inequality on diversity are lost. Instead, the mechanism fosters the destruction of diversity in order to fulfil norms and expectations. The winners are held up as examples of how inequality can be beneficial—as incentive, as proof that “the best rise to the top”—while the systemic weakening of the “losers” is never seen as a destruction of human resources.

Does inequality create life? Yes.

Does that justify the exaltation of one over the other? No.

There is a clear distinction between recognising inequality as differentiation—as the valuation of contributions according to their unique nature—and staging inequality as segregation and subjugation, while pretending it’s the same creative force that gives rise to life.

Competition traps people in a seemingly positive inequality, one with a strong normative effect. It enables neither diversity nor autonomy. It cannot exist without a value boundary. We’re taught that inequality is good because it motivates self-optimisation—yet in reality, it produces opportunism, aligning people with the expectations of authority or an imagined market. This, over time, reduces distinctiveness—and paradoxically, inequality appears to shrink. Thus injustice appears reduced too.

A strange side effect:

Equality is manufactured by forcing everyone into the same performance norm. But this is, at heart, a fascist principle, hidden in the neoliberal concept of competition. Competition begins by telling you: Adapt or be destroyed.

There’s also a structural link between “productive inequality” and Shoshana Zuboff’s *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019). Both involve the exploitation of behaviour as a raw material, and both normalise and intensify inequality. Zuboff shows how surveillance capitalism collects, predicts and manipulates human behaviour to generate profit. What cannot be profitably predicted is suppressed—by systemic devaluation, invisibilisation or algorithmic marginalisation.

And even for entrepreneurs, the pattern holds. Productive inequality generates immense opportunism. Yes, some take risks—but the focus on success never disappears. This corrupts people into following the norm. There is no balance between pluralistic positions. What we see instead is a thin balancing act: enough distinctiveness to separate oneself from the “unworthy”, and enough conformity to avoid unsettling the customers’ faith in the rules of the “better”.

Entrepreneurs rarely step outside this frame.

The poor, the foreign, the different—are not merely unequal in this system. They are wrong. They need to be corrected—not included.

To support their path would mean expanding the corridor—contradicting the very architecture of capitalist prosperity.

In this twisted framework, the individual—the supposed raw material of the “good”—is only valued if it produces material success or reinforces the norm. Genuine difference vanishes from official discourse. According to market logic, you simply have to try harder and behave more “appropriately” to avoid being disadvantaged—and this, allegedly, benefits all. The norm is never questioned. It is not seen as the source of discrimination.

For example, I am told: Just get a job, do well, and you’ll be treated equally. Equality becomes not a right, but a reward—a function of conformity.

But standardisation itself, as a sub-complex category, is the basis of discrimination. Capitalism constructs its moral superiority from this distortion. The victims are rebranded as “losers”—those who don’t behave correctly. But they could. Allegedly. They should. It’s their fault. They don’t comply. Capitalism excludes no one.

And this gives us the right to treat millions unequally.

If we didn’t, the “better world” would be endangered.

If I finally obey, they say, my performance will be evaluated fairly—and then we’ll see what I’m worth.

This, in fact, is the essential blind spot of economic theory.

The “better world” is only “fairer” because it imagines itself as superior.

The accusation of discrimination is swallowed up by the ethos of meritocracy. Let the rabble not complain, say the winners—everyone striving to become better is treated equally. It’s hard to imagine anything more ignorant. The price is countless social conflicts, epistemic erasure, and the loss of viable, alternative lifeworlds.

When the Job Centre forces people like me to write a conventional tabular CV—i.e. to submit to standardised competition—it says almost nothing. I have never worked with the aim of producing a CV that conforms to standardised values, but always with the aim of solving specific conflicts and problems in society. For this work, I received neither certificates nor letters of

recommendation, nor can anyone who is not deeply involved in it adequately evaluate or even categorise it. In almost every respect, it operates in incomparable contexts.

To force myself into this format would mean taking away everything I have worked for over the years. I cannot list any classic training programmes in logical order, nor any degrees, nor a string of jobs. The result is the impression that I've never worked. They erase what makes me unique. They erase my contribution.

To understand the value of such work, one would have to read all my writings and engage with the whole of my life. Millions of people are like me—or similar. Their unequal treatment, their exclusion, increases neither their motivation nor does it ever bring their achievements to light. They are simply destroyed. From the very beginning, they are excluded from competition as the people they actually are—and everything that could make them competitors to the “successful” is stripped from them.

Everyone wants to shout: *“But I did this, and that—that too is an achievement!”* And the simple answer is: *“But it didn’t make money—so it’s worthless.”*

How, I ask, can a state end up assigning personal guilt to people who are systematically impoverished by this machine—persecuting and punishing them, accusing them of not having sufficiently tried—while at the same time they are crushed every day by the value threshold? How can it claim they’ve achieved less, since they haven’t produced any visible outcomes in the competition—where value is defined by artificial exaggeration?

How can anyone claim that I didn’t make an effort to understand what politicians actually stated in their official declarations? As previously discussed, I was also denied naturalisation and permanent residency on the grounds that I had caused my own poverty—because, as an autistic person and artist, I either did not want to or could not conform to standardised equality. But what would the world be without my capacities, my actions—and those of all the other people? Without our attempt to do what is right according to our own, individual experience?

A just society is always only just for the ‘good’. Through the scarcity imposed by the transfer protocol—which relies on the



robbery and exaggeration of a single value—a kind of “master race” always ends up defining who is “good”, “important”, “relevant”. As long as we do not abolish this principle from the economy, there can be no comprehensive and free production of value.

Equality in the modern West—this is the perverse core—is fulfilled only in a prosperity that itself cannot exist without seemingly legalised inequality and exclusion.

That we recognise the rules of the modern economy as legitimate is only due to the interpretive power of the norm. What is considered “normal” automatically takes on a positive connotation. This also explains how slavery could exist for centuries. One day, people may no longer be able to comprehend how forced labour could have been considered “normal”. In 300 years, *competition* or *classical economic growth* may be viewed as similarly primitive reductions of complexity—like the belief that the earth is flat.

Productive inequality is the deliberate bulwark against those individuals who deviate from the norm—who evade competition in order to create something independent, something incommensurable. But this kind of work has no value in today’s economy.

In capitalism, productive overcoming of inequality—not free self-development—is defined as the true engine of wealth creation. Diversity is not understood as deviation and individualism, but as performance within a normative division of labour. One may be different in the service of improvement, but not different *as such*.

The concept of improvement is not recognised as a contradiction to existential completeness—and thus, the good intention turns inevitably into bias and dogmatism.

If poverty is only ever considered through the lens of improvement, the poor will continue to be structurally dispossessed. This enables the “blanket rejections” (PAKOs) we now research under the framework of group-focused enmity.

A particularly important aspect is opportunism within meritocracy. It’s no coincidence that meritocracy produces so many conformist yes-men and yes-women, thereby flattening real quality. “Excellence” is everywhere—but

quality keeps declining. This is a natural consequence of elitist systems: elitism produces weakness, because it leads to under-complex thinking.

IMF economist and investor Mohamed El-Erian illustrated the conventional view of inequality as a meritocratic driver in *SPIEGEL ONLINE* (17 October 2017):

*“The result is what I call the trinity of inequality: unequal income, unequal wealth and unequally distributed opportunities. A country like the USA can live well with the first two points. There is a fundamental belief there that inequality is good for incentivising. If you are as good as Marc Zuckerberg, you should be a multi-billionaire. But the problem is the third point: when inequality of opportunity is added to the mix. This also applies to Europe, where youth unemployment is very high in many countries.”*

Like many economists, El-Erian fails to see that the first two points create the third. The inequality generated by the market creates automated reduction chains—entire industries fall into insignificance, along with the associated talents and skills. This creates zones of total exclusion for large parts of society.

Economists like to pretend that everyone can enter the competition. But that’s like telling mathematicians that they can do just as well in an expressionist art contest—if they just *try harder* to be expressive.

As I said: People are not meant to become complete, but better. And “*better*” always excludes the notion of pluralism.

Even worse, the earlier example implies—without any trace of irony—that Marc Zuckerberg, as the founder of Facebook, is simply a better person. Yet Facebook, one of the most successful companies in the world, is deeply controversial in civil society. This is ignored in the economy.

From a historical perspective, the modern concept of achievement essentially emerges from the dialectical conflict between the principles of socialism and capitalism—that is, from the idea that socialism must be overcome by an externally defined notion of freedom detached from context, while capitalism, from a socialist perspective, must be constrained by state-imposed rules for the collective. Both ideologies ignore the possibility that there could be another

form of individualism and freedom—and another form of collectivism—such as a striving of the individual that stands in conscious relation to a diverse environment (*individuation*), or a sense of community that grows organically from self-determined individuals.

A world with less division would be characterised by less competition and more cooperation. Yet this path remains blocked—still—by historical wounds.

In modernity and postmodernity, at the so-called “end of history”, this access—this synthesis of both worlds—remains obstructed by the continued ideological conflict between left and right. El-Erian, for example, expresses the typical Western model of freedom in terms of dialectically justified inequality, which emerged historically as a counterpoint to socialist notions of equality. People never wanted to be equal again. But in rejecting that, they also killed solidarity.

This concept of freedom emphasises secession as a gesture of liberation. The free subject of the West thus acts only as an isolated and therefore disempowered individual, cut off from broader relational contexts. In socialism, on the other hand, the individual has value only as a totalised part of the One. Both models undermine self-determination as something that emerges from the inner and outer complexity of a person’s lived wholeness. They reduce the individual to a partial function, defined only by the utility of an object-oriented, abbreviated division of labour.

In this sense, both systems are totalitarian. They seek to force the many into the One—and to claim the One as the Whole—instead of letting the greater whole unfold through the irreducible multiplicity of the many, something that would resist control. And in capitalism, this would also mean giving up the disproportionate profits without which the system cannot sustain itself.

## Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The chapter deconstructs competition as an aesthetic form of violence — Artistic Research can undermine this ideology through intermedial simultaneity, non-comparability and collective practice.

Performative works that juxtapose radically different things become counter-images to the logic of exploitation. Here, art becomes a platform for incommensurability.

— Critical Autism Studies: The criticism of “productive” inequality coincides with the experiences of neurodivergent people, whose contribution is often only recognised if it fits into efficiency frameworks in accordance with standards. The chapter reveals that the problem is not deviation, but systemically coded comparability. Autistic difference can thus no longer be understood as a deficit, but as a necessary disruption of standard metrics.

### ***Creative Destruction — Schumpeter was wrong***

There is a fundamental misunderstanding between economics and ecology when it comes to the methodology of value creation. As the MNO model shows, I have re-examined the natural processes and cycles of both economic and ecological systems.

Joseph A. Schumpeter, in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942), introduced the concept of “creative destruction” to explain cycles of innovation. I criticise this idea because it fails to incorporate any socio-ecological differentiation. The economy constructs value and non-value through dialectical operations of right versus wrong, success versus failure, whereas ecology, by contrast, integrates and evolves through systemic circulation and mutual embeddedness. Capitalism often equates separation with progress, yet separation in nature is not destruction—it is metamorphosis, transduction, or reintegration.

In economic thinking—from Marx to Schumpeter—destruction is not seen as a systemic failure, but as a productive necessity. Yet in nature, nothing is ever *wholly* destroyed. The new always emerges from within the old. It is not born out of annihilation, but through transitory continuity. Death in nature is not erasure, but incorporation. For centuries, however, managers, industrialists and theorists alike have justified their violent dismantling of entire ecosystems

by invoking the right of the “new” to assert itself mercilessly. Destruction was stylised as a prerequisite for emergence. But this logic is flawed.

Wolfgang Streeck, in *Gekaufte Zeit* (2013), describes how capitalism loses its capacity for innovation by eroding the very foundations it depends on—social security, democratic stability, ecological sustainability—through its own internal mechanisms of exhaustion. Kate Raworth, in *Doughnut Economics* (2017), rejects the ideal of creative destruction altogether, calling instead for reintegration: economies must operate within ecological and social thresholds. Mariana Mazzucato, in *The Value of Everything* (2018), attacks the profit-centric notion of innovation: only that which generates return is considered valuable—while contributions to resilience, diversity or the commons are systematically devalued or excluded.

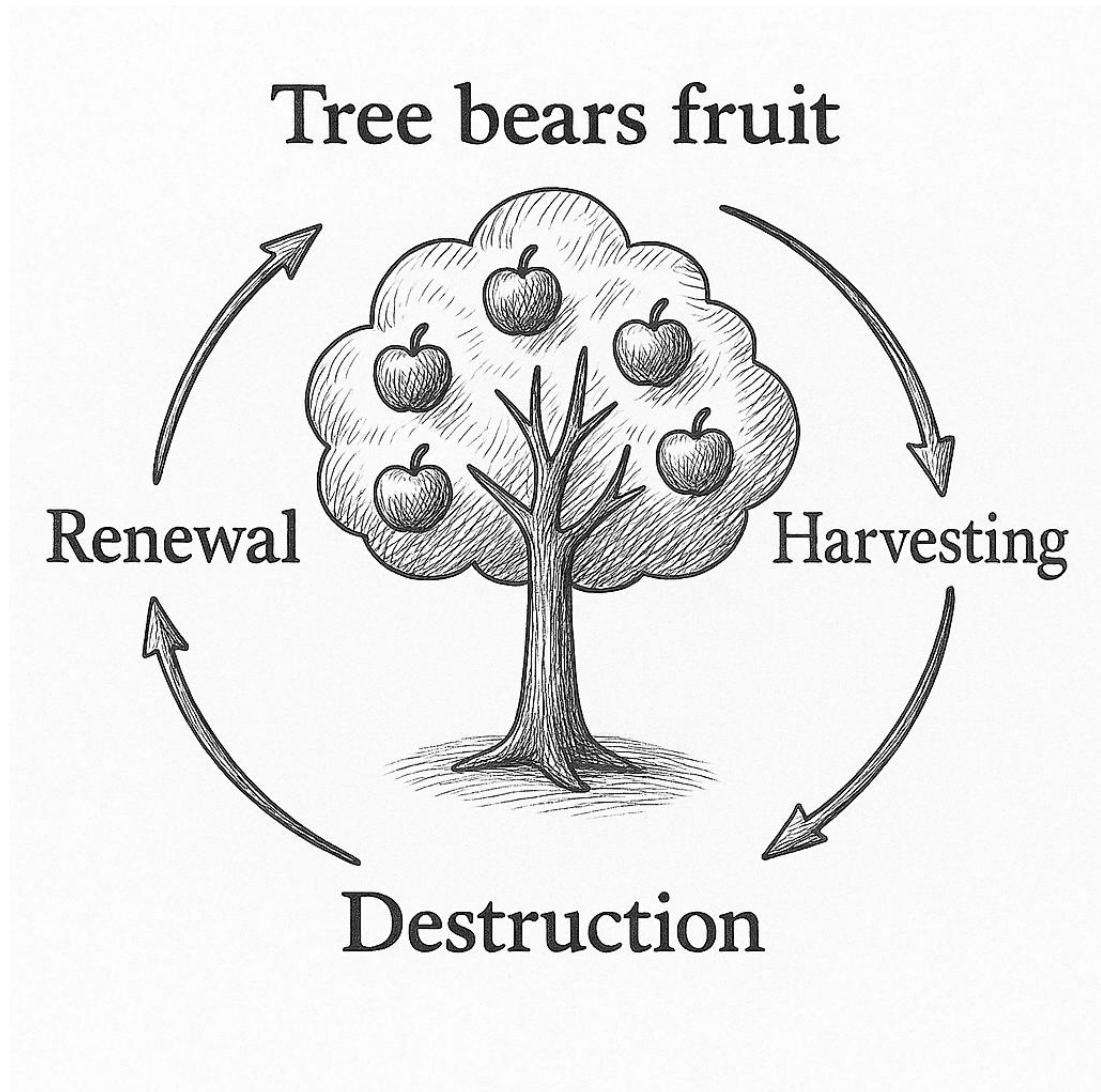
In my view, Schumpeter’s error lies in his failure to distinguish between qualitative and quantitative growth—and in his inability, typical of economic orthodoxy, to account for the source of creative and formative energy itself. This energy is not infinite. On the contrary, it is systematically depleted in economies based on creative destruction. The result: structural fatigue, a collapse in systemic diversity, and ultimately a kind of depression of the possible—a scarcity of viable alternatives and creative futures.

To understand this, one must examine how energy for creation and design arises in living systems. Let’s return to the example of the hedge: if cut back radically, it will indeed react with a surge of growth—but only temporarily. Repeat this too often, too harshly, and the system collapses. Energy elsewhere is drained, the whole becomes less than the sum of its parts.

With apple trees, a similar law applies. Excessive vegetative growth reduces fruitfulness. If the tree is pruned too hard, it produces either fewer fruits or fruits of lower quality and diminished nutrient density. This leads to alternance, a biologically well-known phenomenon: a year of overproduction and exhaustion is followed by a barren year. A pendulum oscillation. Stock markets behave similarly: speculative excess today, collapse tomorrow.

I want to further differentiate this principle of energy generation in systemic ecologies—not just biological but also social—because it provides a powerful explanation for many of the systemic failures and symptoms of breakdown in

our present economic model. Understanding how creative energy is built, circulated, and maintained—rather than simply extracted and depleted—is central to any future-oriented political ecology.



The real power of value creation does not lie in quantitative, short-term growth, as is generally and falsely assumed, but in qualitative distribution and interaction—in the construction of a system with as much variety and deviation as possible. It is precisely this multiplicity that generates difference, nourishes creative energy, and makes innovation possible in the first place.

In a monotonous system, energy for transformation must be injected from the outside—energy that will then be lacking elsewhere. When Schumpeterian *creative destruction* occurs, one-sided quantitative growth may indeed

accelerate, and innovations may emerge—but at a structural cost: it undermines alternative approaches by depriving them of the pluralistic foundation on which value diversity depends. As the race for success intensifies, access to essential resources narrows, and other modes of development are silently erased.

This is a crucial insight. It challenges not just the conventional concept of success, but the entire premise of how market dynamics emerge. *Creative destruction*, far from fostering innovation, often suppresses it. In the inflation of specific “bubbles”—e.g., tech or AI—entire sectors lose funding, attention, and epistemic legitimacy. An economy does not become more innovative by investing in a handful of high-profile “excellence clusters”, but through the long-term, distributed valorisation of diverse, time-intensive, and currently precariously compensated research.

There is, for instance, no financial framework to support the kind of innovation I develop here. *Creative destruction*, therefore, leads not to vibrant evolution, but to systemic desolation. This desolation becomes visible only belatedly—because the success of a few early movers creates the illusion of a new paradise, seemingly justifying the erosion of diversity. Yet, the frenzy of short-term growth inevitably demands new sensations, new breakthroughs—until each is consumed and discarded by the market within years.

The resulting convulsions on the stock market are seen as healthy turbulence, as signs of creative energy—when in fact they are the symptoms of exhaustion, of a systemic burnout of possibilities. Desolation and hyperprofit go hand in hand. Success and emptiness form a paradoxical pair. Like exaltation and loss of meaning.

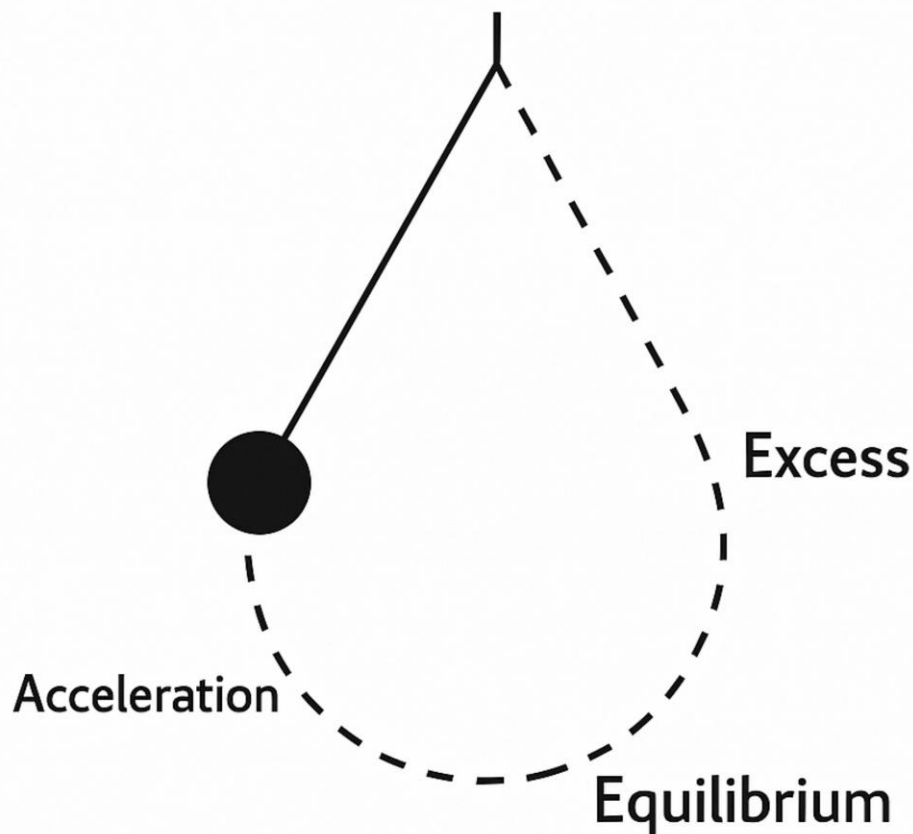
The problem is that economics, as a discipline, lacks the tools to conceptualise qualitative growth. It has no method for organising value *beyond* quantity. This knowledge still needs to be invented. Meanwhile, the spectacle of short-term growth continues to uphold the illusion that the system itself is growing—that accelerated expansion equals vitality or systemic strength.

Let me illustrate this misreading with a metaphor:

If I let a pendulum circle, for example, I see a cycle when viewed from above. But if I take a horizontal perspective, I see a pendulum swinging back

and forth, i.e. a dialectical process of opposition. This misunderstanding of the true nature of balancing processes in a living system also characterises modern economics. Dialectics, i.e. trial and error, or right and wrong, better and worse alone do not explain the origin of life. Modern economics sees competition where circular phenomena and integrative processes actually occur. It sees two-dimensional acts where three-dimensional space and movement take place on several levels and axes. If the movement of the pendulum flattens out, the modern economy only pushes it in the opposite direction, generating only the pendulum movement (see stock markets), but no longer the circle. In order to start the cycle, the hand must reproduce the circle in the movement, just as the worker must reproduce the whole if he wants an economy in which he plays a role as a whole person. To move the pendulum back and forth, on the other hand, you have to keep pushing the pendulum in the opposite direction. The energy expenditure is significantly higher because the hand holding the pendulum stagnates and the pendulum has to be constantly moved from a standstill or against itself.





Applied to the economic process, this means: profits must always be extracted from losses. Because losses are treated as devalued states, they are systemically stripped of energy potential. If these states were seen not as failures but simply as *different*, one could move on with far less energy expenditure—to the next experience of value. But as success in capitalism demands destruction as its dialectical counterpart, the system erodes creative energy through false motion sequences.

This is why modern gainful employment has become such an exhausting, expensive, and energetically draining act. The value barrier prevents intrinsic motivation by systematically extinguishing the will, experience, and inner coherence of workers in advance. The polarised structure of rich and poor flattens the multiple differentiations that would otherwise distribute energy broadly. This leads to a concentration of creative force on one end—and a total desiccation of alternative markets on the other.

Yet: a high density of differences within a system of diversity increases dynamics and makes energy accessible at all levels. Energy follows the principle of equilibrium: the more difference and diversity, the more balance. Where difference is lacking, energy fails. Where difference becomes too great, connection breaks—and exchange collapses.

One could say that with the rise of the superpowers—USA, Europe, China, Russia—solving humanity’s global problems has not become easier, but harder. A paradox: never before has so much success and power been concentrated in so few hands. And yet, with this consolidation of the pyramid, broad intelligence and ecosystemic alternatives are eroding. Humanity has boxed itself into a dead-end street in its totalitarian pursuit of success. It has lost its global creative capacity and is increasingly falling into destructive dependency structures.

What we need is a different leadership strategy—one rooted in *diversity*. We must unlock the *synergies of diversity*.

There have been many historical attempts to integrate circular thinking into economic processes, but most have remained confined within the logic of the transfer protocol.

For example, what the environmental movement of the 1960s tried to do—relating to the entire ecosystem—remains unresolved within capitalism. It is still misperceived as a threat to “freedom” and prosperity. Preventing separation from nature is seen by capitalist logic as a *loss* of freedom, rather than an expansion of relational capacity. Even though, today, it is precisely the *loss of the ecosystem* that leads to an ever-deepening loss of freedom for humanity.

This is why the early eco-movement was often branded as communist: from a capitalist view, it addressed the common good, which appeared totalitarian. Ecology was not seen as an *integrative system*—affecting not just forests, but also labour and the economy—but as a totalitarian rival to human autonomy. The idea prevailed that to be *free*, one had to dominate the world like the elites. Thus, no living concept of diversity emerged.

Instead, the dialectical confrontation escalated: the left was pushed further into socialist ideas, while capital entrenched itself behind the notion of success

and totalitarian freedom à la neoliberalism. The result: a systemic blockade that persists today. The synthesis between *wholeness* and *success* remains unthinkable. "Holistic success" appears as a contradiction in terms—which is why organic farmers are still dismissed as anti-economists.

The structural incompatibility between ecology and capitalism was met for decades with attempts at *integration into the system*, rather than recognising that the economic model itself prevents a revaluation of broader approaches. Because if *everything* is valuable, nothing yields excessive profit. Therefore, the ecological product had to become a high-priced product to reflect any value at all—thus conforming to the same capitalist laws that ultimately threaten it with market-based devaluation.

Soon, organic goods were mass-produced abroad. Organic farmers in Germany were forced back into conventional agriculture—subject to the same cost pressures as any other commodity. In the globalised market, high labour costs made local production uncompetitive.

In other words: only half the step was taken.

Organic agriculture, which is far more labour-intensive, is now threatened by the high cost of labour. The organic farmer, whether as entrepreneur or worker, remains tied to capitalist rules. The chickens may be free—but the farmer is not.

Although her actions benefit the ecosystem, she cannot bill the tax office or her customers for this added value. Only narrow definitions of income and expenditure are recognised. The happy chicken is not followed by the happy worker.

## Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The chapter radically questions the logic of growth and innovation and creates space for aesthetic processes based on cyclicity, care and emergence. Artistic research becomes a counter-practice to the dogma of innovation — not through disruptive effects, but through rhythms of recurrence, recontextualisation and rootedness.

— Critical Autism Studies: Neurodivergent ways of living and working often elude the principle of “newness through destruction” — they are based on stability, repetition, subtle variation. The chapter recognises this approach as a cognitive logic and lends autistic constancy and world relations a cultural relevance that points beyond the efficiency model.

### ***Provocation and Consistency***

As part of my empirical research, I am once again trying to explain the fundamentals of my way of working to the authorities — and I am deliberately entering into intensified conflict, in the hope of finally clarifying the question of which way of working is more appropriate. I explain to the Job Centre officials that they are devaluing the worker — and thus ultimately themselves — through coercion. That the creation of a vast low-wage sector systematically destroys prosperity for everyone. And that their actions are therefore economically irrational in the deepest sense.

This section is exemplary of a form of artistic and political desperation with epistemological intent: the conflict is not a side effect, but a method of truth production. I show: It is not the escalation that is dangerous, but the system that no longer allows any other language. I force authorities to reveal their own normative foundations — and that is a profoundly scientific and artistic act.

Harold Garfinkel – *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967) – demonstrated that the method of “breaching experiments” (targeted violations of social expectations to expose their structure) forms the theoretical foundation of my actions. I expand this method with an existential, artistic dimension.

Michel Foucault – *Surveillance and Punishment* (1975) – analysed how power functions through discipline and standardisation. This is precisely what one experiences here.

Gayatri Spivak – *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) – asks whether marginalised people can speak at all, when the structures of power deprive them of any legitimacy. My confrontation with the systemic denial of poverty as a

structural problem is a direct response to this question. Lisa Baraitser & Laura Salisbury (eds.) — *A Time for the Humanities: Futurity and the Limits of Autonomy* (2020) – examine how state bureaucracies manipulate subjects through time, waiting, punishment, and the deprivation of language. My work demonstrates exactly this mechanism. Loïc Wacquant – *Punishing the Poor* (2009) – shows how neoliberal social policy becomes a machine of repression, where unemployment is criminalised and autonomy is delegitimised.

Didier Fassin – *Enforcing Order* (2013) – uses the police in French banlieues to show how “lawfulness” is often used as a tool to deny structural injustice. My conflict with the job centre is the civilian equivalent of this thesis.

My experience with the German job centre is almost unbearable. I suffer increasingly from anxiety, because they threaten to cut off my entire livelihood if I don’t stop working on this project, stop pointing out systemic failings, stop helping others without financial compensation. The pressure increases week by week. There are mornings when I vomit. I feel persecuted. The constant blame and humiliation make me depressive.

For those who have never experienced it, it’s hard to imagine how the Hartz-IV system breaks people and pushes them to their limits. This systematic denial of injustice eats away at the basic belief in justice itself. Because when the state turns against you, it feels as if there is no hope left. Who is supposed to help you, free you, when prosecutors look the other way, judges avoid responsibility through legalistic evasions, politicians remain unreachable, and civil servants record one falsehood after another about you in files — with zero accountability, zero consequences?

In the end, they are always proven right. Because the unemployed must be at fault. They must be *wrong*. Criminals. Because if they weren’t — they wouldn’t be poor.

Out of desperation and hopelessness, I finally resort to violence. My violence is relatively rational: I file a series of criminal charges against the job centre with the public prosecutor’s office. I want to find out why those who commit this injustice fail to recognise it. The conflict is supposed to bring clarity.

I live in a tent for three winters as a direct consequence of my work. I remain consistent.

After summer comes the cold, but I have hardened my body and prepared it for what lies ahead. I want to endure, not allow myself to be blackmailed — but find a way to overcome this massive injustice, which no one is allowed to work on, through conscious work. Through forbidden work.

If they won't pay me, then I will simply do it unpaid — and sooner or later even the last one will realise that there is value in it. I've believed this for years.

It is, of course, easy to understand why civil servants are opposed to my work. Their role implies a framing in which the causes of poverty and unemployment are radically simplified. They justify their right to impose obligations on me with the assumption that wealth and taxes are created solely through gainful employment, and that the state has a kind of proprietary right over this money — while those who have nothing are to be “helped”, but not seen as disenfranchised people who have been cheated by the system.

But if taxes are also generated through exploitation — i.e. through the maintenance of impoverishment — then this demand made upon the poor is not just a mockery, but an act of double theft. First, by underpaying or devaluing them.

Second, by disenfranchising them because of the poverty they were forced into. This “double hit” of the poor is the starting point for reversing the narrative of guilt.

So when civil servants issue demands under threat of sanctions, they do so based on a legitimising logic that assumes poverty has nothing to do with the actions of the state. That there is no systemic interaction. And if poverty is not seen as a structural injustice, then the poor appear to be simply asking for help — from the outside.

But I'm not asking for help.

I'm documenting a crime. The crime of discrimination and economic violence that has caused my poverty.

But the system cannot process that. It would be as if the prison guards suddenly realised that the prisoners are the innocent ones — and they themselves are the criminals.

I notice how reflexively people want to shout: “Just get a job!” — because nothing is more threatening than the realisation that your own salary may not stem from merit, but from the exclusion of millions of others whose abilities, whose being, whose will means nothing in the market. Not because they are useless. But because this exclusion is the very lever that enables modern Western prosperity.

The worker thinks she has earned her wage — suffered for it — and so others must suffer too. And if they don’t work, then they should suffer even more, because otherwise her own suffering would lose its meaning. That’s the trap. A psychological trap.

To believe that one kind of work is more “valuable” simply because it is rewarded more generously.

I can protect my work — in free form, as it is only possible in Western democracies — by declaring it artistic work. I transform my entire economic activity into a Gesamtkunstwerk, a kind of experimental laboratory in which a new form of labour emerges, one that depicts reality in all its breadth — and must not be subjected to external control.

Given all this, it’s no surprise that the state now begins to treat my art as a criminal offence.

In those years, art meant nothing to the majority of the population. No industrial worker would have agreed that art makes a significant contribution to society. Because art doesn’t generate money.

And from an economic point of view, what doesn’t generate money is considered worthless.

It is only the last remnants of humanist education — and the last defences built into constitutional law — that prevent insolvency courts from finally liquidating artists altogether. The form is protected — and I am protected — by artistic freedom.

In response, the state repeatedly tries to drive a wedge between my artistic and intellectual work and my supposed “duty” to participate in gainful employment. Each time, I explain that it has no right to do so. What I do is in the public interest. It is economic.

If they cannot split me in two, they have no power over me. They understand everything about gainful employment but nothing about self-determined labour.

They weren’t there.

They didn’t experience it.

They cannot speak truthfully about what is actually happening here.

They cannot assess it.

Suddenly, they are helpless — armed only with their norms and metrics, which no longer apply.

This creates a legally precarious situation for the government: Either it attacks me directly as an artist, or it must declare my work non-work. Both moves push the state into undemocratic, anti-constitutional territory. At first, it tries — almost frantically — to justify why gainful employment is the only legitimate form of labour. It rattles off every cliché in the book. I counter them all, in writing.

Shortly thereafter: silence.

For months.

For years.

In light of my work, the federal government can no longer clearly articulate the social or economic function of gainful employment. It has no arguments left — neither against my work nor against the structural violence it exposes.

I am told:

“You’re becoming a hard case.”

It is a strange situation when the entire constitutional state, confronted with the question of what work actually means, survives only by looking away —



unable to say whether my actions are right or wrong. I would gladly enter into a public discourse with the government, but the state is no longer present.

It hopes that my form of work will find no supporters. In truth, no one is responsible. There is no job description for those meant to address systemic contradictions. The system is assumed to be perfect. Those who serve it are rewarded. Therefore, it must be right.

That is why, in my case, the government does not make a decision. I cease to exist.

From now on, I work in a hidden country.

Occasionally, I appear in an internal directive.

Someone has to ask what became of me.

A desperate job placement officer asks whether I'm not tired of poverty. Wouldn't I prefer success? All I have to do is sign the reintegration agreement, and she'll make sure I get a job soon.

It is this incredible discrepancy — between the fact that I've already tried nearly everything in previous years, while narrow-minded, profit-obsessed companies simply don't want someone like me — and the job counsellor's professionalised confidence, that drives one to despair.

Their very existence is based on the insane belief that five minutes of consultation can conjure up jobs and equal opportunity — no matter what the market outside looks like.

She recites the same tired speeches about hard work and diligence, about duties and strategies.

And all of it serves only one purpose: To degrade me into a worthless child — so she can keep her job. Keeping her job — that's all that counts now. If necessary, she'll destroy me for it. She has been given the legal authority to do so.

The following month, it will be another case worker, who knows nothing of my work, who proposes equally absurd options.

And if I don't smile and follow instructions, they'll sanction me into homelessness.

After years of research, of working hard to find solutions to the poverty issue — my last holiday was 16 years ago — I now stand with my back against a wall.

Because although I know what needs to be done, those who have the power to enable change simply refuse to listen.

The truth of the transfer protocol appears unthinkable to them — the notion that success, that object of universal striving, is actively destroying the world. I realise that as long as I — a poor person — remain worthless in their eyes, they can continue to construct their own success on the illusion that they're doing “the right thing.”

They fail to see that “the right thing” is merely the result of excluding complexity, so that what is devalued does not appear equal.

Poverty is such a brutal form of violence because it always denies suffering and trades it for guilt.

Whenever I name my pain, they respond with blame.

In the end, even the public value of my work is denied — because benefit and poverty cannot be reconciled. Anyone doing unpaid work is, by definition, “useless.” And even though this is patently absurd, the state continues to propagate this fiction.

Of course, this becomes a form of systemic bullying — and countless poor people suffer under it.

Because an entire bureaucratic apparatus declares them wrong.

Even though they — we — have done nothing but try to live rightly.

And yet, we were set up to fail — devalued by the very design of the value boundary.

None of us is to blame for our poverty. That needs to be said — clearly, unambiguously. A state that denies this is a state that lies.

Every day, in the name of that lie, people are destroyed — mentally, physically, existentially.

What makes people sick — and eventually broke me as well — is not only the humiliation, the systematic devaluation, but the fact that truth itself ceases to matter. The poor have no claim to a narrative that deviates from the norm — not even to an objective one.

The constant burden of justification often ends in violence. Violence directed either outward — at the representatives of the system — or inward — against oneself.

Because it is the state that removes democracy from poverty.

The state that shuts down dialogue — again and again.

I stand stunned before a mountain of guilt — now also financial debt — simply for trying to act in an ecological, social and ethical way.

Even this, ultimately, is denied me.

One official would later write that he could find “no public benefit” in my work.

Meanwhile, the modern economy is free to keep up the lie: that it alone sustains life, that it is inherently good, that wherever it succeeds, it must remain untouched — absolute. But how is it possible that everything not aligned with the market is marginalised — and even now, with the destruction so plainly visible, the market is still seen as salvation?

The most powerful objection I face — one aimed at anyone who dares to deviate — is this: You cannot make a living from your way of life. So how can it be life-affirming? And in the most brutal sense: They’re right. I can’t prove otherwise. Apparently, I’m supposed to starve.

This argument, flawed as it is, has immense symbolic power. It crushes anyone attempting a new economic model, a different form of contribution. But this argument demands a response. Success has nothing to do with preserving life.

What we call “earning a living” is an artificial construct — a system sustained by removing people’s autonomous access to the shared wealth of the world. Work is no longer about maintaining life — but about buying access to resources through obedience.

We do not live from our jobs. We live from the hierarchy. It is the hierarchy that decides who gets to live — and how.

So if I deviate from the will of the hierarchy and end up starving, then money is taken from other workers to feed me — and suddenly, the illusion emerges that I am living on their backs.

And from that, the fatal idea is born: that I am harming life through my actions.

But the truth is: all of us live from the artificial devaluation of the poor.

If the hierarchy were to allow my contribution to count, then my right to food, to housing, would no longer be questioned.

Then my work could be recognised as work — and an entirely different form of value creation would become possible.

But the world mistakes the manipulated link between conformity and reward for a law of nature. And anyone who receives no reward must, it seems, have been punished by nature itself. And if even nature punishes you, then surely your way of life must be unnatural — against the spirit of life. That nature in this case is represented by a handful of capitalists is erased from view — by the transfer protocol.

The state tells workers that their sacrifice sustains others. But what is really sustained is their own obligation to self-devaluation, their submission to market norms.

This is the perverse distortion of solidarity.

It's why so many employed people see the unemployed as idle, passive, indifferent. Because they've internalised the belief that to help, one must obey. And to disobey is to be a burden.

But in truth, it is a neurotic shift of guilt: The employed must constantly prove they are "better" — so no relativisation can occur, no alternative narratives emerge, no challenge to their fragile belief that their suffering has meaning.

And so they cling to the fantasy that they are preserving society — when in fact, they are preserving a totalitarian and inhuman, povertistic hierarchy.

When I was young, we had a sports teacher at school who used to be a world boxing champion. He treated us like soldiers — even though we were attending a humanistic art school. We were forced to run competitions around the building, always trying to get faster. Sometimes I'd run the distance backwards, or in strange spirals — more like dancing. I took long, exaggerated strides, moving in slow motion. Funny walking," things like that. I was always the last to arrive.

He never understood why I did it. When he saw me coming, he would whistle and shout in rage. The other pupils laughed. That only made him angrier.

For years I've struggled to give value to that gesture — and even now, there are moments when I think I must be crazy to believe that the entire economic theory is based on fraud. Because in the end, that boxing world champion is still standing there — telling me I've failed, that I'm worthless.

The agricultural scientist Felix zu Löwenstein once said in an interview:

*"The formula can't be: 'Give me more money and I'll treat my animals better.' No — I have to reorganise the entire production system so that animals are raised and fed appropriately. This automatically makes the product — the eggs, the milk — significantly more expensive. But this is where the interesting part begins: consumer behaviour changes. It's logical: people have limited food budgets. If meat becomes more expensive, they'll eat less of it. Suddenly we're consuming something that's better for our health and for the planet."*

*("Welche Zukunft hat die Landwirtschaft", WDR)*

I, too, am reorganising production. I am raising the price of my work. I will either exist completely — or not at all.

At first, of course, many companies and workers reject me — and my way of working. But over time, as the economy continues to shift, the demand for a different kind of labour grows. In the end, it may turn out that the non-conforming, self-critical worker is the role model of the future. Why? Because the devaluation of labour decreases when we revalue the person. With less labour, more value can be created. This reduces overproduction, which in turn

- lessens the need to compensate for the general devaluation of life – conserves resources
- and strengthens the creative power of the system as a whole.

Industries that only exist because they generate profit would be replaced by forms of labour that create value through meaning, not scarcity. They would become habitats of work — where contribution is not tied to lack, but to possibility.

This requires two things:

1. Longer horizons. Just like building up humus, building a pluralistic work culture takes time.
2. Consistency in the present. Staying with the work that feels meaningful — even when unrecognised.

That's why I continue to work the way I do: I smash the fetish of gainful employment against the walls of corporate logic. Eventually, even the state will realise that this other mode of working is not just viable, but valuable — economically, socially, societally.

Because, as my work shows, the real problems are often addressed only by those who are self-directed and intrinsically motivated. In 100 years of modern economics, professional economists have not managed to grasp the core of poverty — not because they lacked intelligence, but because they were rarely affected by it. They lacked perspective. They lacked the experience — and the existential motivation — to expand the framework they were operating in. Most of their work was externally determined. Mine is not.

## Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The chapter is a manifest application of Provoked Empiricism: the action itself — the conflict with the institution — becomes an art form and research unit. An ethics of real experimentation emerges, in which the system becomes the material. The artistic gesture here is not symbolic, but realpolitik — it confronts power with visibility.

— Critical Autism Studies: The Purposeful Refusal of Masking and Adaptation reveals how neurodivergent integrity collides with institutional violence. The chapter shows how autistic people's refusal to take on non-systemic roles is not unproductive, but rather insightful. Breaking with the normality script reveals where the system is blind.

### ***The Film Transfer Protocol***

“After thirty years of mostly unpaid work as an artist, labour theorist, and poverty researcher, Timothy Speed is finally bankrupt. He falls into the clutches of a deranged job placement officer named Frau Redlich. Her job centre is housed in a giant bust of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, where the poor must do anything to be liked. Stigmatised, abandoned, and pushed to the margins of society, Speed finds himself in free fall. But he has a plan: by founding a new form of economy and labour, he wants to liberate humanity from poverty.”

From 2020 to 2024, I worked on a cinema film based on the content of my books about Hartz IV, Bürgergeld (citizen's income), labour, and economic violence. At the time, I did not yet know that I was autistic. The film was designed as an enactive intervention into society, television, and media space. It was an attempt to connect disparate spheres and implant a hidden foundational conflict—my existence as a political sculpture in public space.

To realise the project, I taught myself over twenty different production software tools and created the entire film alone, except for the actors—something not unusual for autistic people. I worked in a single 25-square-metre room with a green screen. The project was funded by the pandemic relief fund: around €7,000.

The result was Transferprotokoll. It was later rejected by all public broadcasters—partly because it was “too much art,” and partly because of its neurodivergent dramaturgy. The film explored its subject matter in cyclical,

essayistic deepening spirals that apparently clashed too hard with neurotypical viewing expectations.

In response to the rejections, I wrote multiple letters to the director of ZDF and to the Broadcasting Council, criticising the non-transparent mechanisms of structural censorship. They referred me to their current programming, which they claimed was full of diversity—but they never answered the actual question: what are the open criteria for selection? They audit the final schedule, but never analyse which projects were excluded in the submission process. I demanded clarification and pointed out the systemic exclusion of poor productions. Eventually, I addressed the ARD director, Prof. Dr. Kai Gniffke, with an open letter:

“Dear Prof. Dr. Kai Gniffke, thank you for your reply of 19 September 2024. I would like to respond with this open letter.

In cultural research, we speak of the culturalisation of art when attempts are made to contain it in a harmless niche—so that it disturbs society as little as possible. We also speak of the ghettoisation of art. Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin warned against the aestheticisation instead of politicisation of art—meaning that once art is judged solely by formal or aesthetic criteria, it is robbed of its political force. The very development Adorno and Benjamin sought to prevent is now ubiquitous in public broadcasting, especially in your programme selection.

You judge by aesthetics, form, and content—but you are incapable of enduring disruption. You respond to accusations of lacking diversity by pointing to your curated forms of it. You presume to know better what society needs than those in the independent scene, who live the fractures and can speak from experience, not just from commentary. That is a fatal assumption.

Depoliticisation of art means removing it from its critical and social context and converting it into a harmless commodity. Once depoliticised, art loses its ability to intervene in public discourse. This is particularly dangerous in a time of creeping authoritarianism.

In your letter, you describe *Transferprotokoll* as a “hybrid mix of social satire, docufiction with sci-fi elements, artistic self-portrait and pointed thesis film. In your satirical approach to poverty, you turn the tables and accuse the



German bureaucracy in order to present your view of social power structures. Your work is open to political and aesthetic friction.”

This description is correct. But then you write:

“Nevertheless, we feel that issues around Hartz IV or the new citizen’s income, and their associated criticisms, must be communicated differently to our audience.”

You acknowledge the film’s relevance—and then dismiss it. But the real reason for its rejection lies in your fear of formal rupture and epistemic friction.

“Your audience” — forgive my bluntness — appears, in your eyes, to be senile, stupid, uneducated. You clearly don’t trust them to engage with art independently, especially when it offers a perspective on the citizen’s income system that does not reflect the dominant classist and racist narratives about marginalised groups — narratives that public broadcasters all too willingly replicate.

And heaven forbid that this critique come from someone who has experienced that systemic dehumanisation firsthand — someone who breaks through the distancing strategies of those who’d rather look away.

You treat “your audience” as if they depend on your judgment — your presumed ability to determine what’s good for them. And because you cannot meet that standard with actual integrity, you retreat into interchangeability and mediocrity. As a public broadcaster, you flee into the safe space of aesthetic sanitisation.

You are a white man in an extremely privileged position. I am a precarious migrant and cultural worker, targeted by right-wing extremists in Brandenburg, who spent four years — unpaid — trying to respond to that situation. With almost no resources, I made a film with the actors and myself, without pay, with the intent to serve the public.

Forgive me if my language is not “comfortable” enough for your audience. How could it be? I had neither your budget, nor your resources, nor your cynicism regarding whether work from the independent scene is legible to the majority — or dismissed as worthless.

What you're doing is pushing the already marginalised even further out of public discourse. You are, perhaps without realising it, doing the work of the far-right — all in the mistaken belief that you're maintaining “balance,” which you've confused with frictionless consensus.

Your decision weakens civil society. It narrows the discourse. This is not a new critique — even the far-right now levels it at you, albeit for entirely different ends. But the structural weakness is the same: the public broadcaster is failing its democratic mandate.

This isn't just about me. Much of contemporary art is now under threat from the right. And yet in your letter, you imply that our work is not society's concern — that art is a product, and the audience must not be “imposed upon.” You fundamentally misunderstand your cultural responsibility. You don't exist to avoid disturbance. You exist to make room for it.

Yes, *Transfer Protocol* is a disturbance. That's true. But isn't that exactly the kind of disturbance we need in times when 30% of the East votes fascist, and a right-wing populist like Friedrich Merz — who incites hatred against the poor — may soon become chancellor?

Why are the poor not allowed to speak freely on ARD and SWR? Whose privilege are you protecting?

I urge you to reconsider your decision. It is now no longer just an editorial call — it is a civic and cultural choice.

You could easily contextualise the film. Poor people deserve the same interpretive effort as VIPs. Frame the work. Distance yourselves if you must. But show it. If we don't show art because it generates discomfort, how are we ever supposed to fight fascism — i.e., the *Gleichschaltung* of meaning?

Thousands of poor people, migrants, and cultural workers are under massive threat from a shifting political climate. Don't silence us.

We, the audience, do not belong to you — and we do not want to. In times like these, programming decisions must not be left solely to editors for whom topics are interchangeable. Because we — with our suffering, our insight, our resistance — are not.

The independent scene and the marginalised demand a seat at the table.  
Sincerely,  
Timothy Speed

I invested four years in this film. It was denied because the existence it depicted seemed too different, too alien, too disturbing to be permitted a voice — to even be considered part of the world. As a result, I remain impoverished. Without a platform. Constrained. Reduced. As a human being.



Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The film *Transferprotokoll* is a radical form of embodied research — a real media experiment that understands art not as representation but as intervention. The principle of disruption is placed at the centre of form, production and reception: As a non-standardised aesthetic, as a destabilising narrative and as an open provocation to cultural gatekeepers. The film is exemplary of artistic research that does not exhaust itself in reflection, but challenges society in the gesture itself.

— Critical Autism Studies: The production method, narrative structure and public failure of the film point to central dynamics of neurodivergent experience: cyclical dramaturgy, radical logic of its own, non-conformity to standardised perceptual grids. The rejection of the film reflects the structural exclusion of autistic people in cultural discourses — not because of a lack of quality, but because of sensory, formal and semantic deviation. The project proves this: Neurodivergent forms of expression do not need inclusion, but institutional deprivileging.

## **Enactive Corrections to Economic Mechanisms – Analyses, Models, and New Concepts**

### ***The Rediscovery of the Primary Economy***

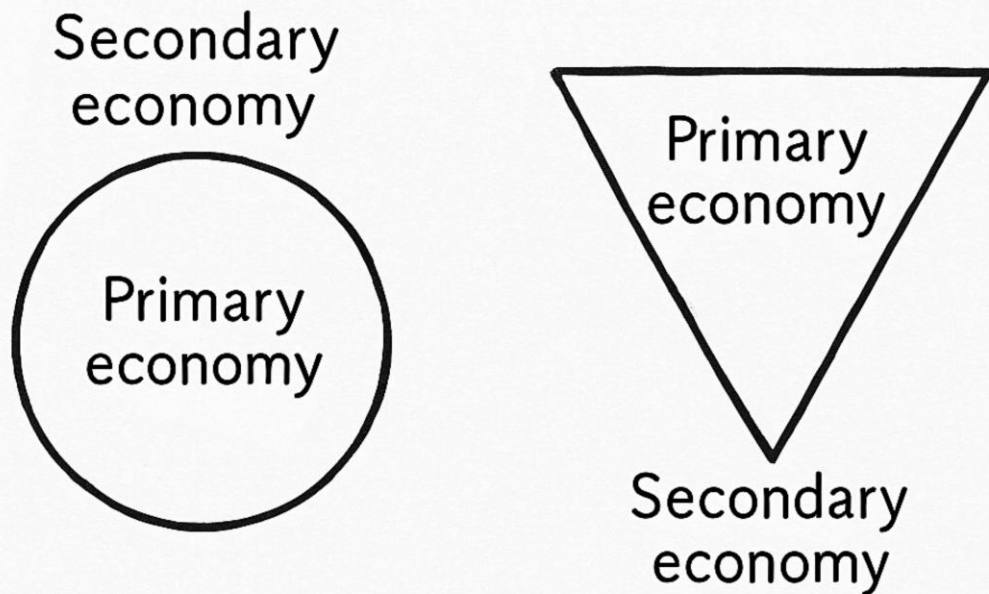
In this section of the book, I would like to elaborate on how this alternative economy can emerge in the sense of the MNO model—an economy implied by the *Radical Worker*, who labours not to merely improve themselves, but to complete themselves by working on “everything”. Central to this is an understanding that places ecology at the heart of economy itself.

It is time to strip economics of its interpretive sovereignty over the sustenance of life and to make a clear distinction between those forces that genuinely sustain life—in all its human, ecological and cultural complexity—and those that do not. I aim to draw this distinction, and for this reason, I differentiate between two forces: the *primary economy* and the *secondary economy*.

By *primary economy*, I mean the ecosystem in its full, plural form—an expansive and self-organising field that includes natural wilderness as much as cultural and social human activity, as well as the diverse, unruly reality itself.

By *secondary economy*, I refer to the conventional economic system—what is usually meant by “the economy” or “economics”—which abstracts, extracts and ultimately parasitises the primary economy under the guise of value production.

## WHAT IS BASED ON WHAT?



The fact is: the *secondary economy*—that is, the conventional economic system—constantly claims successes and causalities that in reality stem from the *primary economy*, the underlying ecosystem. This appropriation is the natural consequence of interpretive power in a pyramidal hierarchy.

For example, companies do not compensate the mothers of their employees for the immense effort of raising those workers. Nor does classical economics account for civilisational achievements like the rule of law, democracy, or the idea of the “free individual”—without which no corporation could operate. Similarly, those who, out of intrinsic motivation, commitment, or self-denial, ensure that systems continue functioning—yet whose activities are not part of the officially recognised value chain—are neither acknowledged nor rewarded.

That is why I have come to realise that the so-called “top performers” in boardrooms are taking credit for achievements that would be impossible without the holistic, diverse, and often invisible labour of people trying to reconcile themselves with this world.

Nancy Fraser (*Cannibal Capitalism*, 2022; *Capitalism’s Crisis of Care*, 2016) argues that capitalism is built upon the exploitation of an invisible care economy. This “primary economy” is central to society’s functioning but is

systematically devalued. Silvia Federici (*Reenchanting the World*, 2018; *Wages Against Housework*, 1975) shows that domestic and care work, motherhood, and community-building are in fact more productive than much of what the market recognises. My notion of the *primary economy* aligns with this framing of reproduction as a source of value and resistance.

Elinor Ostrom (*Governing the Commons*, 1990) provides empirical evidence that functional economies are often based on non-market principles such as trust, reciprocity, and local negotiation—i.e., primary structures. Silke Helfrich & David Bollier (*Free, Fair and Alive*, 2019) describe an “economy of relationships” as the true substrate of life, with market activity being secondary and largely parasitic on these relational structures.

Kate Raworth (*Doughnut Economics*, 2017) famously visualised a “safe and just space” between two boundaries: the outer ring (planetary boundaries) and the inner ring (social foundation)—this is the ecological and social envelope within which all economy must unfold. In my terminology, that’s the *primary economy*. Jason Hickel (*Less Is More*, 2020) calls for a post-extractive economy, arguing that the compulsion for growth is undermining life itself.

Marcel Mauss (*The Gift*, 1925) reminds us that economy begins not with exchange, but with the gift, the counter-gift, and integration—relational and communal dynamics. My concept brings this foundational insight into the present. Hartmut Rosa (*Resonance*, 2016) identifies resonance as a basic human need and a key metric of societal health. The *primary economy* is precisely the sphere in which resonance can unfold.

Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch (*The Embodied Mind*, 1991) demonstrate that meaning, action and cognition emerge only within living systems—i.e. through embodied, systemic entanglement with body, environment and society, not through market abstraction. Gregory Bateson (*Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 1972) pursued a vision of “ecological intelligence”—the insight that everything is connected. My concept of the *primary economy* draws directly from this principle, which the market abstracts and fragments.

In this sense, we are dealing with multiple superimposed patterns of organisation. You can view the world solely through the filter of economics

and receive a simplified, self-serving “explanation”—or you can add back the other filters and perceive a far more complex structure. You can understand economy either as the narrowed abstraction of exchange, or as the integrative totality of all contributions.

The apparent worthlessness of the *primary economy*—and the illusion of “efficiency” in its reduction—is ultimately due to the invisibility of causal chains in more complex systems.

### Overview: Primary economy vs. secondary economy

| Category              | Primary economy                                                      | Secondary economy                                                   |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Definition of         | Vital, non-market-organised systems                                  | Formalised market and monetary economy                              |
| Carrier moulds        | Care, gift, self-organisation, cooperation, ecosystems, art          | Exchange, purchase, sale, monetary valuation                        |
| Actors                | Neighbours, parents, groups of friends, commons communities, farmers | Companies, states, corporations, financial markets                  |
| Examples (human)      | Care work, education, voluntary help, artistic community work        | Factory work, office work, service, management                      |
| Examples (ecological) | Pollination, soil formation, water cycles, biodiversity              | Extraction, commodity trading, agriculture as industrial production |
| Economic              | mostly invisible,                                                    | quantified, visible,                                                |



|                             |                                                                |                                                                 |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| evaluation                  | unpaid, morally<br>superimposed                                | balanced                                                        |
| Logic / Principle           | Cycle, gift,<br>responsibility,<br>resonance                   | Competition,<br>efficiency,<br>accumulation,<br>externalisation |
| Time structure              | cyclical, rhythmic,<br>lifeworldly                             | linear, clocked,<br>clocked through                             |
| Rationality                 | situational,<br>relational,<br>emotional-intuitive             | calculating,<br>forecasting, profit-<br>maximising              |
| Hazard                      | through devaluation,<br>invisibilisation,<br>externalisation   | due to crises, lack of<br>resources, system<br>overload         |
| Conceptually close<br>to... | Commons, care<br>economy, ecology,<br>anthropology,<br>poetics | Capitalism, business<br>management, tax<br>policy, stock market |

Those who still believe that jobs are inherently meaningful often point to positive experiences associated with them. But these moments usually stem from forces of the *primary economy*—that is, the broader ecosystem. If we removed the conditional link of compensation—this truncated causality—these forces would become visible as part of a much larger and richer reality.

When I speak critically of *jobs*, I refer to the format of paid employment. Of course, the lived reality of work contains much more. You cannot separate work from life. But that does not mean life can be fully seen within jobs—especially if everything is interpreted through economic logic alone.

What I criticise, then, is how the *corset of gainful employment* constrains the natural human drive to act, to create, to relate. This drive can never be completely repressed. Instead, it is redirected and exploited—like a hedge trimmed to grow in just one direction to reproduce a predefined shape. This

forced uniformity, when scaled up as mass phenomenon, saps the entire system of its generative force.

This also means that the step from wage labour to *self-determined work* is a small one with enormous implications. Self-determination already happens within many jobs. But it is rarely intended—and when it does occur, the benefit is misattributed to concepts like “diligence” or “overtime.” Workers who, for example, save a company through unpaid extra labour are not recognised as co-creators or co-entrepreneurs, but as obedient employees.

The deception of the secondary economy lies in its narrative: it treats all growth and success as the outcome of its rules and structures. There is no differentiation. All benefit is claimed retrospectively, even when it depends on invisible inputs. The *deadweight losses* are immense. And from the position of the “successful,” the past is always re-narrated to justify power—a pattern I call the transfer protocol.

Taxes, profits, and productivity are built not only on labour and market discipline but on unseen resources from the ecosystem. When politicians and managers speak of economic “success” and demand that people adapt to it, they reframe *natural effects*—such as growth, emergence, and creativity—as outcomes of their leadership.

But life grows *despite* control. Creation happens anyway. What they suppress is the diversity and directionality of this growth. When it still happens—now forced into narrow channels—it appears as though those who imposed the direction are themselves the creators. That’s the illusion. And because growth now increases *quantitatively*, values like high productivity seem to confirm their model.

This is why distinguishing between the primary and secondary economy is crucial: it reveals who actually contributes to life-sustaining work. Often, it is those whose self-sacrifice, renunciation, or even destruction enables one-sided production at great cost.

The secondary economy constantly co-opts the results of the primary economy to make itself look functional. This must be exposed. The constant distortion of causality by the ideology of success has left us fundamentally unable to govern the economy in service of ecosystems, people, or life itself.

We must shift our focus. We need to prioritise the cultivation of diverse forms of value creation and abandon *success* as a historical error. Without making the patterns of the primary economy visible, there is no way to refute capitalism's claim to be the engine of the world. Because as long as that illusion holds, people will continue to believe it is *capitalism* that creates value—not the ecosystem, which is, in fact, a far more intelligent and integrative system than we can yet grasp.

This *other world* only becomes visible when we break with capitalism and with conventional work altogether. If people stopped working *when there is no money*, it becomes difficult to say which work was ever done for money, and which—often harmful—work would simply vanish if payment stopped.

Once the secondary economy loses its monopoly on interpreting value, it also loses its power to blackmail workers. This blackmail is what limits and devalues their contribution. The value of *people* would then exceed the value of *goods*. Right now, it is the opposite.

If human labour were valued higher than goods, many products would no longer be profitable. Production would fall. Other forms of motivation would emerge: meaning, purpose, relationships. The wage-labour system would be too costly, too absurd. Much work would be done directly by individuals, grounded in authentic interest rather than delegation or alienation.

We have devalued the most powerful resource of all: self-determined contribution. This is important to remember as we move, in later chapters, toward describing what kinds of *new action forms* might emerge in a world of *relative equivalence*—a world in which artificial scarcity has been reversed.

When there is plenty, there is also freedom. What will we do with it?

Will it lead to meaningless leisure as a neurotic counterbalance to meaningless work? I don't think so. If everything has value, then the value of the immediate, the regional, and the relational will increase. Diverse spaces and cultures will grow. Where there is *more*, *less* will be needed elsewhere. A truly *wealthy* society is one that uses *fewer* resources—because it no longer devalues all other forms of worth.

The consumption of scarce resources is driven by the devaluation of everything else. From an ecological standpoint, then, we must be clear: the path to

sustainability does *not* lie in the mere *reduction* of consumption, but in the *radical revaluation* of all contributions.

Cutting back consumption alone only deepens the logic of scarcity and reinforces market dominance. What is needed is a shift: the consumer must become a self-determined actor—intervening, questioning, shaping production directly.

That is how the primary economy will gain strength over the secondary.

This would be a mature and emancipatory approach to value creation. It would allow us to finally understand the real causes of exploitation. We must accept that the economy exists *within* the ecosystem—and that the secondary economy is the *less complex*, more *primitive* of the two. Only then can we assess the consequences of economic systems on life, culture, and planetary survival.

The myth that “the economy”—and particularly its CEOs and technocrats—single-handedly sustain the world would be shattered. And with it, their political legitimacy.

The economy does not come first. Its dominance is built on primitive economic assumptions—most of them formulated by privileged white men.

By asserting the concept of the *primary economy*, we place ecosystems, relationships, and lived life on the same level as the market. The economy must be *reintegrated* into the ecosystem—where it belongs.

Until now, workers have been locked inside a box—a structure that defines their actions and assigns their value. They are given a role, a title, a function, and are then rewarded or punished according to how well they perform within this predefined frame. As long as this framework is maintained, the *primary economy* remains invisible.

What I attempt to do in my projects—and in my stance as a *radical worker*—is to break out of that box. Naturally, this means I no longer have a fixed role. But that is consistent with the fact that my function within the *ecosystem* is far more complex.

It also means I cannot submit to the hurdles of the traditional labour market. I don’t first complete an apprenticeship just to be granted permission to act. Instead, I allow the larger system to interact with me directly—to “access” my

actions, so to speak. It's as if the ecosystem itself is calling, and I leave the office to answer that call elsewhere.

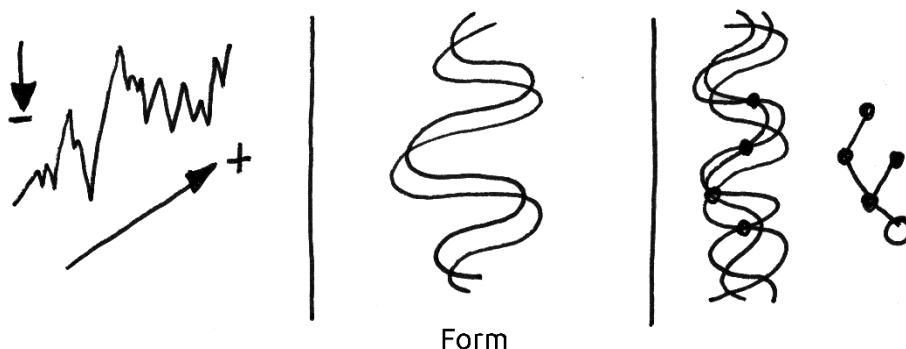
The criteria by which meaning is created are completely different here.

Many workers or entrepreneurs look at me and shake their heads. They can't comprehend why I work the way I do—because from their perspective, not only am I *unsuccessful*, but I seem to be doing *everything wrong*. But that's only if you look through the lens of the secondary economy. If you place the primary economy over my life as a filter, everything suddenly starts to make sense.

We are living in a time where both *labour* and *nature* are in crisis. So what, then, is the most relevant form of work? Is it not precisely the search for new responses to these intertwined crises? Or should I take the more convenient route and find a job that prevents me from doing what I am actually called to do?

Let me illustrate this with an image.

The secondary economy views itself along a curve that moves up and down: profits and losses, positives and negatives. These are its central coordinates. But now, imagine taking that curve and rotating it by 90 degrees. Suddenly, what was once “positive” or “negative” becomes “left” or “right.” You begin to see *patterns of structure*, a kind of ordering logic. You realise: the movement to the left is what creates the form on the right. The action that was previously judged as failure is now revealed as form-building, world-making, meaning-generating.



If we now expand the complexity of the “form”, what emerges is a kind of frequency or DNA of the *primary economy*. It reveals the connections that are systematically suppressed by the *secondary economy*. As a result, the broader context is neither recognised nor consciously developed.

Fundamentally, the *Radical Worker* is doing nothing other than working on this *form*—rather than merely reacting to polarities like left or right, success or failure. This pivot in perspective makes it clearer why the economic idea of value creation is far too primitive—and why a much broader, more integrated economy could emerge. Meaning only returns to labour when workers are allowed to interact with the more complex system. That is why I leave the norm of the conventional working world behind. That is why I work self-determinedly—because only from this position can I *see* the form I am actually working on.

At the same time, it’s only logical that my work begins where the greatest dysfunctions lie—where my own pain is strong enough to motivate me to endure real difficulty and to push forward, step by step.

In terms of form, emotions and deeply personal aspects can be just as relevant as abstract intentions or concrete products. All of these feed into one another—they are structurally related.

As long as people do this other kind of work *within* regular jobs, they will gradually be pushed to the margins by the pressures of performance. But as soon as you rise up—acting truthfully, but visibly impoverished—and publicly accuse members of the federal government of deceit and denial, for their support of the *Transfer Protocol*, and for refusing to acknowledge the systemic realities described here, then the ugly side of capitalism comes to light—and the cycle of denial ends.

In the question of which labour truly *matters*, the point of reference shifts: from profit to the awareness of the *primary economy* and its deeper interdependencies. Even if I lead the government to the brink of speechlessness, this society still deems it appropriate to let me starve—to punish me for attempting to end the suffering of millions.

In a SPIEGEL ONLINE article dated 18 April 2019 (*Appeals against Hartz IV cuts are often successful*), the journalist writes:

*“However, the predominant legal opinion assumes that the state only has to ensure the minimum subsistence level—for people who, according to a definition by the Federal Constitutional Court, cannot achieve this ‘either through employment, their own assets, or third-party contributions’. This means that those capable of working but whose behaviour prevents them from doing so—even hypothetically—can no longer claim this fundamental right.”*

This statement reveals the fundamental failure of the Federal Constitutional Court to understand two essential things:

First, that the majority of poor people are not poor by accident or individual fault, but as a result of discriminatory structures within the *secondary economy*. These structures can only be made visible through a deeper understanding of *primary economic* dynamics.

Second, that this dehumanising position criminalises poverty activists like myself—who reject certain forms of labour for well-grounded reasons—and effectively strips us of basic human rights. As an artist and researcher, I am being denied the right to exist because I orient my work around a more complex order—one that resists capitalist exploitation.

And we’re not even talking yet about the fact that the state systematically threatens autistic and neurodivergent people for something that is intrinsic to their being: the inability to carry out tasks that are meaningless, self-contradictory or ethically wrong. The reduction of value to what is economically profitable is not an objective measure—it is an *ideology*.

The Federal Constitutional Court will, in the future, have to consider very carefully whether it wants to continue operating from such a position. It may turn out that it has already distanced itself from the Basic Law under the banner of a classist ideology.

It is unacceptable that the logic of *secondary economics* is allowed to determine what counts as valid labour. It is equally unacceptable that civil servants—who are often intellectually limited and ethically unripe—are granted the authority to decide matters of life and death.

What the *Radical Worker* and its labour habitats signify for the role of the worker, the *primary economy* signifies for the overarching economic system.

Many green, leftist, social and humane visions cannot be realised today unless workers are liberated from the standardised success imperative of the *secondary economy*. The narrowing of economics to the purely economic is devastating villages and entire cultures. What is needed are new synergies, new forms of participation, commitment and self-directed involvement—projects like Franz Nahrada's village networks or Wolfgang Lalouschek's *Village Campus*. But without grounding in the logic of the *primary economy*, people lack the solid epistemic foundation to argue why working solely within the framework of the *secondary economy* is not just inadequate, but misaligned with human and ecological needs.

As long as these connections are not communicated clearly, those seeking alternative paths will continue to ask themselves: *Why do I feel and generate more value in these new contexts—but always end up with less money?* And therefore: less status, less freedom, less political voice. This apparent contradiction is not a real contradiction—once one accepts that we are dealing with *opposing systems*. But without that insight, people can be blackmailed into believing they must succeed. That success is a prerequisite for moral legitimacy.

Once you consider how many people suffer unfathomably simply because they are not *successful*, the full scale of injustice becomes visible. When a state then goes further—structurally dispossessing the poor through mechanisms of devaluation, even to the point of death—then it has crossed a threshold. For what does homelessness in winter mean, other than a death sentence? What else is it but the willing acceptance of people freezing to death, simply because they contradicted a job placement officer—someone who, in many cases, lacks the intellectual tools to even grasp the complexity of a dissenting argument?

This is the moment at which the state becomes a perpetrator. The Federal Constitutional Court has made itself complicit—by granting intellectually unfit civil servants the legal license to annihilate dissidents and minorities.

The Court supported, promoted and legitimised a mechanism that almost *automatically* forces dissenters into hunger, desperation and despair. Today, this economically totalitarian system has reached a level of sophistication



where it has nearly perfected the invisibilisation of its own effects on people. Only when suffering becomes visible does the *ecosystem* come into view. And only when the *ecosystem* becomes visible do the patterns of a truly humane economy begin to emerge.

The *job* must never again be given priority merely because it pays or signals success. If that remains the standard, there can be no viable social future. I will not allow the state or the economy to force me into a narrative of success. Instead, I will force the state—and the executives who think they manage the world—to recognise my actions as part of life's richness.

The hunger they inflict on me is the hunger they ultimately inflict on themselves.

#### Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The chapter opens up a radical redefinition of economic processes as cultural-ecological processes. Artistic research itself thus becomes a primary economy — as a place of emergent production of meaning, beyond instrumental utilisation. Art does not become decorative here, but fundamentally relevant to the economy, as it produces new patterns for meaning, time, care and value.

— Critical Autism Studies: The reconnection to the primary economy coincides with autistic world relations based on deep system understanding, stability, resonance and relevance beyond social simulation. Autistic subjects act like sensors for the primary economy — they recognise patterns where others abstract. The chapter lends epistemic authority to this perceptual logic and positions neurodivergent thinking as the key to realigning basic economic assumptions.

## ***The Meaning of the Diversity Marker***

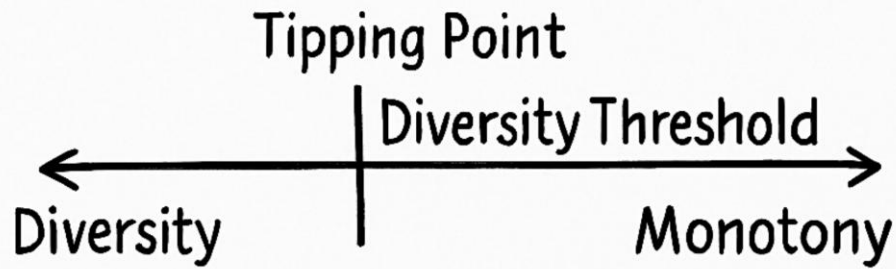
If diversity falls below a certain threshold, the ecosystem collapses. This is a generally recognised fact – and, in economic terms, a radical observation with far-reaching consequences. What I call the Diversity Marker raises the question: what level of diversity is necessary for a system to remain self-sustaining at all?

A crucial question is: how broad, how deep must diversity be so that a system can sustain and grow without being fed from above by a pyramid structure? There is no real self-preservation in a monotonous system. In such systems, self-preservation always means submission and artificial provisioning from a higher authority. That is the root of exploitation – a combination of expropriation and top-down maintenance.

Due to structural expropriation, the social and economic structures are not diverse enough to offer docking points, compensation, resonance or impact opportunities for other talents and contributions. The statement “*You are not needed!*” always stems from the fact that value creation has become too one-dimensional. For those affected, this immediately results in total devaluation and the prevention of any self-determined contribution.

Humanity then no longer functions as a highly complex, intelligent system, but as a reduced resource, unaware of itself, unable to access the system in its totality. The consequence of this realisation must be to prevent any policy or structure that causes the Diversity Marker to fall below critical level. At that point, jobs – understood as rigid, exclusionary formats – become a concrete problem.

And thus, the question emerges: how much diversity does an economy actually need? A question that classical economics has never dared to ask.



### System Behavior When Exceeding vs. Falling Short

|            | Exceeding<br>Diversity<br>Threshold | Falling Short<br>of Diversity<br>Threshold |
|------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Resilience | Diversity                           | Collapse                                   |
| Monotony   | Monotony                            |                                            |

With the Diversity Marker, I introduce a concept into the modern economy that is essential and potentially transformative. Without it, we cannot understand why doing the right thing—namely stimulating a variety of metabolic processes and positioning oneself broadly and diversely—so often leads to failure in the modern capitalist market. As mentioned at the outset: openness, novelty, deviation from the norm are systematically subjected to specialisation and narrowing. The free individual confronts the predefined function and role of the market-based worker—determined by a dominant logic of control.

This becomes an increasingly urgent problem, because the transfer protocol continues to operate at every level, in micro- and macrocosm alike. Everyone strives to narrow opportunities further—to eliminate competition.

Another kind of worker, however—such as the one I exemplify in my own practice—cannot prove their “usefulness” in market terms. Because the premise that high individualism generates high diversity, and that high diversity enables alternative forms of value creation—thus creating a more dynamic, stable market and, ultimately, a more resilient economy—only becomes reality once a certain threshold of diversity has been reached.

In systems already “killed off” by optimisation and rationalisation, any start-up, any non-conforming business, any product deviating from the norm has a much harder time than the stereotyped, mass-produced good. These standardised goods cater to increasingly impoverished populations, who are trained to want whatever is cheapest.

In such under-complex, down-managed systems, deviation does not appear as a valuable extension of relational potential, but as a costly alienness—an investment one cannot afford. What appears expensive is often simply harder to access. This is precisely what the Federal Constitutional Court wrongly considers “socially harmful” or “deviant behaviour”.

Diversity operates indirectly. It cannot be controlled or minimised for traditional added value. Its benefits only emerge when complexity increases. Only then do higher-order patterns become recognisable. Only then do other needs and interactions unfold—triggered by exceptions to the rule that cause friction in rigid orders.

Alternative economic systems cannot present counter-evidence where the Diversity Marker is brutally undershot. This is the bitter truth: capitalism, which dominates the whole architecture of economic life, always appears right at first—because it does generate value. Meanwhile, any other form that is unpaid or unfunded seems abstract, utopian, burdensome.

In truth, however, falling short of the Diversity Marker is what generates widespread powerlessness—which in turn leads to resistance to new models. People cannot imagine how the shift might happen: from the unfamiliar as misfit to the unfamiliar as enrichment. Especially not when locked in a profit-oriented mindset.

While labour in capitalism becomes easier the more system complexity is reduced, labour in ecosystems, in real labour habitats, only begins to thrive as

complexity increases. Material surplus is absorbed into diversity. What emerges instead is a wealth of liveable expressions, life-worlds, and creative possibility.

The fallacy of capitalism lies in its belief that money buys more. In reality, capitalism's profit-orientation reduces offerings over time. The customer may not notice—but the worker does. So do all those marginalised by the ever-tighter market.

But what is the ratio of diversity to monotony in today's economy? How can it be quantified? The Transfer Protocol—the pyramid structure—offers a clue: the more efficient a market becomes, the more globalised, the closer it moves toward a distribution ratio of 1% to 99%.

The diversity we believe we see in the market is likely already constrained to 1% of the possible 99% of pluralism. This is not a precise metric, but a conceptual frame: a way of imagining how different markets would be if the missing 99% of deviation—of unexpressed individualism—were reintegrated into public life. Wealth distribution today shows a similar pattern: the richest few hold the vast majority.

Capitalism reduces the economic potential and creative power of humanity to 1%, in order to extract 99% of value through expropriation. This is relativised only by the simulated middle class, which sustains the illusion of fairness—as if performance equalled reward. It is a roleplay designed to mask structural theft.

Niklas Luhmann – *Social Systems* (1984) argues that systems can only survive if their mode of operation matches their internal complexity. The diversity marker can be read here as a necessary operational openness: when diversity falls below a certain threshold, the system becomes blind.

Gregory Bateson – *Mind and Nature* (1979) postulates that systems which reduce internal diversity inevitably lose intelligence. My concept adopts this logic in economic and cultural terms: diversity becomes an ontological condition of systemic stability.

Sara Ahmed – *On Being Included* (2012) describes how “diversity” is often reduced to a brand or institutional gesture—without structural transformation. She asks: *What happens when diversity is tidied up?* The

diversity marker, in this context, reveals the moment where sanitised inclusion turns into symbolic erasure.

bell hooks – *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984) shows how dominant systems tend to instrumentalise difference rather than genuinely integrating marginalised perspectives. For hooks, the diversity marker marks the threshold where real inclusion stops and assimilation begins.

Elinor Ostrom – *Governing the Commons* (1990) shows through empirical studies that functioning commons rely on polycentric, pluralistic participation. Systems that over-consolidate power and reduce diversity lose their responsiveness and resilience.

Erik Reinert – *How Rich Countries Got Rich ... and Why Poor Countries Stay Poor* (2007) argues that sustainable economic success depends on functional diversity. Mono-economic systems, no matter how efficient, are ultimately fragile. The diversity marker reveals the threshold at which economic variety becomes necessary for long-term stability.

Nick Walker – *Neuroqueer Heresies* (2021) describes neurodivergent people not as carriers of deficits but as bearers of alternative cognitive logics. Their marginalisation often signals a systemic narrowing of cognitive diversity—a clear case of falling short of the diversity marker.

Damian Milton – *The Double Empathy Problem* (2012) reframes the issue: the problem is not autistic perception but the system's inability to mirror and respond to it. Here, the diversity marker becomes a measure of the system's empathic capacity—a threshold beyond which mutual understanding collapses.

Richard Sennett – *The Craftsman* (2008) advocates for forms of labour that allow for temporal depth, unpredictability, and individual development. When systems suppress such forms, they fall short of the cultural diversity marker—they lose their generative potential.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos – *Epistemologies of the South* (2014) unmasks “universal” knowledge regimes as structured by the erasure of epistemic diversity. The diversity marker in this context signals the threshold where alternative knowledges can no longer interface with the dominant system.

I would like to use another image as an example to illustrate the problem. If I have a building block with multiple docking points, but all other building blocks only allow one equalisation or construction level, what means multiple resources in the amount of such deviating building blocks very quickly becomes unwieldy and cumbersome, which leads to this particular building block no longer being used.

In everyday life, however, it is difficult to articulate these dynamics. We appear to live in a world full of diversity, prosperity, profit, and products. Psychologically, this creates a contradiction that is hard to resolve—because no one in the media or the marketplace openly admits to experiencing the same limitations. To do so would appear as a sign of weakness, further diminishing one's position within a success-driven system. People are thus structurally corrupted into conflating material prosperity with meaningful wealth. After all, what else would be the point of working, if not to produce more of these goods? There seems to be no exit. The sub-complex does not point toward the more complex. What is not visible is assumed not to be missing.

And yet, the question of the *meaning* of work is becoming louder. So is the question of *fair distribution*. These are symptoms of a longing for more authentic forms of value creation.

Imagine a world with 99% more diversity than our current reality. How much more intelligent, creative, and less resource-intensive might that world be? What we now frame as a call for self-development—something treated as a luxury to be earned—could tomorrow be recognised as the most solid foundation for a resilient and pluralistic economy.

From this follows a new principle: qualitative diversity must be increased in line with the diversity marker until the deficiencies of society are eliminated. This principle I call *dynamic diversity equalisation*.

Dynamic equalisation defines the necessary threshold of the diversity marker and simultaneously marks the intersection where broad metabolic processes transform into a truly open market—aligned with the logic of the primary economy. Concretely, this means that a mechanism must be developed to couple excessive, one-sided profits with compensatory increases in qualitative diversity in society and nature.

Taxes are insufficient. They are often redistributed in top-down ways, toward supposedly “good” causes or politically expedient projects—many of which still serve the secondary economy and its success logic. States also save selectively, reinforcing hierarchies. Real pluralistic redistribution, by contrast, demands horizontal self-determination and democratic re-valuation.

This conflicts with conventional economic logic, which assumes that diversity dilutes efficiency. But in a pluralistic system, high diversification is precisely what prevents the collapse of complexity. Where there is diversity, causality becomes harder to trace—but that is not a flaw, it is a feature. Diversity must be promoted directly—not through top-down helicopter money or symbolic inclusion, but by transforming the structural quality of participation.

We need to maximise support for individuals in their self-determined development. Only when society is again made up of diverse, local, differentiated forces—pluralistic frictions—can the intelligence of the ecosystem return. Society would no longer be financed through exploitation, but nourished by decentralised vitality. Intrinsically motivated work does not generate high labour costs, because it is not extracted from the worker but inherently linked to their needs and lifeworld. This creates new freedoms.

Dynamic diversity equalisation means recognising and compensating for the negative effects of profit-seeking, not by promoting “better” causes, but by enabling self-organising processes of pluralist compensation. This cannot be imposed from above; it must be grounded in radical self-valorisation across all levels of society. The pyramid must be dismantled and replaced by open circulation systems. Later, I will elaborate on what such a transition could look like.

Until now, it was assumed that markets and states could manage this balancing act together. They cannot. Neither is invested in the principle of diversity—nor in the most vital concern of all economic activity: the preservation of pluralistic humanity. As long as majorities are required to govern, diversity will remain endangered.

In majoritarian systems, the will of the individual is always weakened, manipulated, constructed, and truncated. And crucially—it provides the



legitimacy for the few to govern the many, reinforcing concentration of power and systemic corruption.

Contemporary politics aims to strike balances using “appropriate” measures—but in doing so, it often excludes the very contradictions and undesirables that a living system needs to survive. For example, much is said about a CO<sub>2</sub> tax to address the climate crisis. The idea is that raising the price of emissions will curb consumption. But this addresses the symptom, not the structural root. What we need is a paradigm shift: to undermine the labour ideology itself.

Dynamic diversity equalisation is not a fixed system—it is a statement of principle. As Robert Chapman (*Empire of Normality*, 2023) notes, systems that pathologise diversity will eventually collapse—not because of the deviant, but because they themselves have become too simple. The diversity marker identifies the point at which the system’s epistemology breaks: when it no longer recognises difference as a resource, but only as a threat.

What is needed is an open, pluralistic discourse. There can and should be different models and approaches. But all must share the same insight: the principle of the diversity marker must be integrated into economic theory as a foundational concept.

Without dynamic diversity equalisation, all wealth flows toward large corporations, where it is redistributed unjustly—primarily by destroying potential competitors and alternative markets.

The problem is that this is still widely perceived as legitimate, even commendable. Whoever eliminates the competition is considered the better manager. This logic is occasionally questioned, but only on moral grounds—not in terms of structural imbalance or *economic failure* in the sense of primary economics. But morality is a weak argument when it comes to economic survival. It lacks systemic teeth. Within the logic of the secondary economy, people continue to believe that this extractive model is necessary to generate tax revenue, which can then be used to fund the “good” in society.

I am not talking about ethics, then, but about reclaiming access to the primary economic market—a much more powerful basis for existence, which remains systematically excluded. This requires lowering the threshold of access to meaningful work—something only possible through radical self-

determination. This would also reduce market polarisation and economic energy loss. More diversity leads to less frictional loss.

So when I confront the Job Centre, I do so to defend the primary economy and to make space for more meaningful economic activity. Even when I “invade” corporate spaces and appropriate them as a deviation from the norm, I increase the system’s complexity. I make visible hidden dynamics that matter to human life. My value creation emerges from radically valorising the dark, forgotten, and neglected modes of existence.

The progress we know is not the only conceivable progress. But meritocracy makes it appear as if it were—rendering success a quantity that cannot be contradicted. Because what would the alternative be? But a *lack of alternatives* is precisely what a living market must never accept.

When the state intervenes in the name of “fair redistribution,” it often falls into a dialectical trap: it acts in polar opposition, but not with pluralism. It balances groups against each other but does not increase the overall diversity of the system—which would, in turn, reduce conflict. Interest rates up, interest rates down. Law in favour, law against. The state acts as counterpower, but not as counterculture. It does not relativise the success principle, because to do so would undermine its own power. And it lacks the epistemic capacity to think beyond this model.

So how can the diversity marker be increased in an ecosystem *without constant top-down intervention*? The so-called free market cannot do this, because it is too tightly coupled to the success-performance axis.

I cannot describe all necessary structural elements in this book, but I will provide sketches of how dynamic diversity equalisation could look in practice.

Let me begin with a simple illustration that does not yet cover all dimensions, but points in the right direction: concepts like *do-it-yourself*, *open source culture*, and the *sharing/lending economy* offer bridges. The goal is not to find the *best* system, but to interlink many different forms of economic activity, allowing them to complement each other where individual approaches today still reveal weaknesses.

All of these approaches are based on a core desire: to establish alternative forms of compensation beyond money and wage labour. They matter—because only

by widening our concept of trade can diverse labour and a truly pluralistic market emerge.

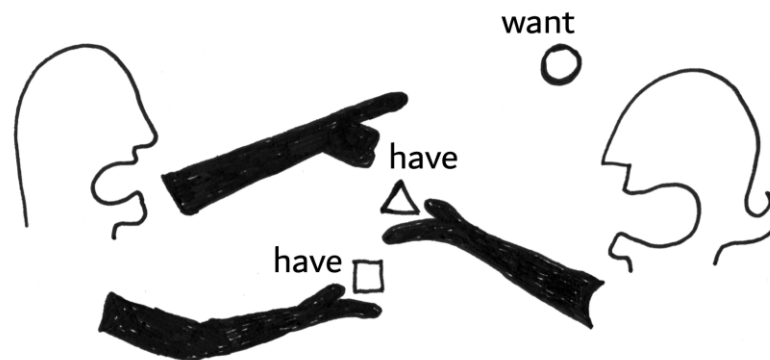
To understand what compensatory mechanisms are most urgently needed in a living system, it helps to ask: Which forms of activity are least rewarded by the market today—even though they are part of natural life and essential to it?

Take a village, for example. If it consists entirely of tradespeople, like carpenters and bricklayers, trade can only occur within the narrow realm of overlapping need. But if someone has a medical problem, it can only be solved through money—unless the doctor happens to need a new roof. Over time, this restricts individual development, as people learn they are only valuable for one-dimensional output.

But what happens if you integrate a doctor, a philosopher, a mathematician, a gardener, or a cook—and each of them develops additional talents and unconventional needs that may not even have a name yet? Trade can then occur increasingly independent of money—and thus independent of reductionist valuation or exclusion. Money becomes less necessary. True value creation and authentic value relations become possible.

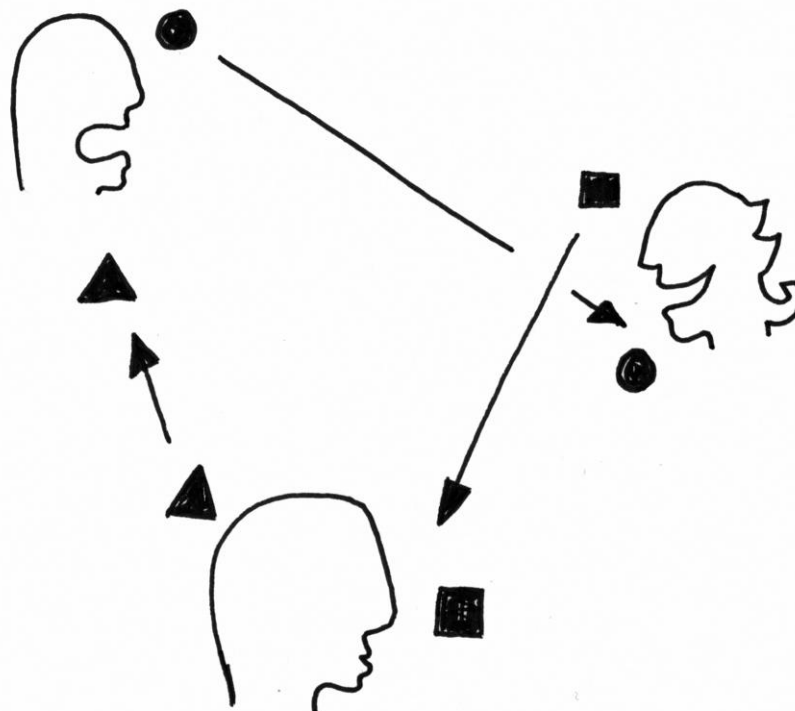
Money is only required in markets where diversity is too low to allow for meaningful exchange through expanded rituals of co-creation. The following image (not shown here) demonstrates how trade collapses without money, not because people are unwilling, but because they have become too similar—unable to offer complementary difference. Money becomes the fallback, and participants can only contribute *one aspect* of themselves. They remain unrealised in the market.

## LIVING MARKETS



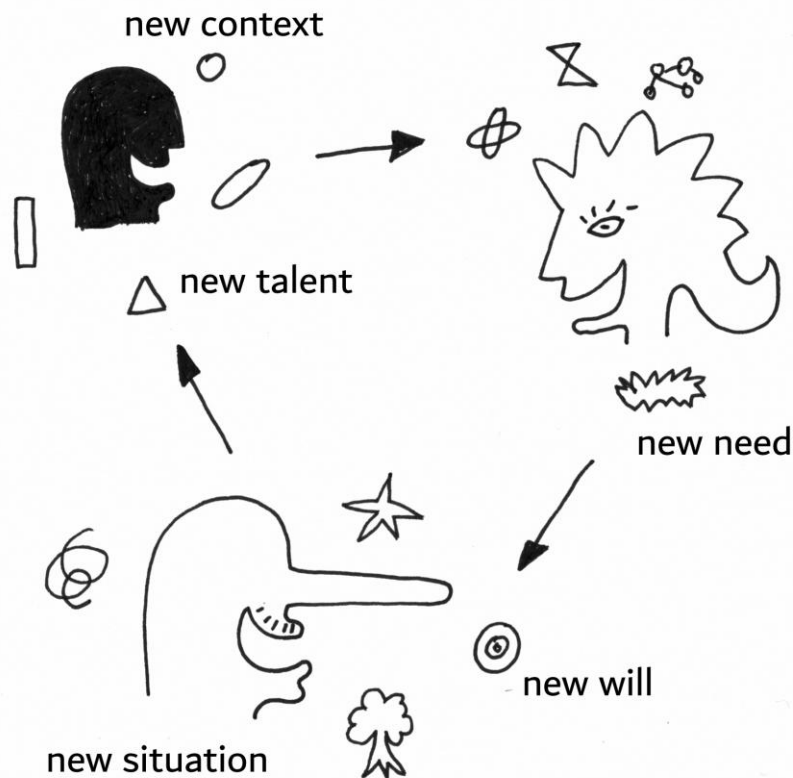
The second picture shows an equalisation via triangular transactions. The diversity for the equalisation is increased, but perhaps the culture is missing to make the foreign, the unknown visible as a third equalisation value.

## TRIANGULAR TRANSACTIONS



It is only in the third picture that it becomes clear how, by exceeding the diversity mark, all participants in the market can grow continuously at all levels and make a diverse contribution.

## EXPANSION OF RESOURCES



Until recently, barter economies were widely considered more primitive forms of market exchange. But the opposite is true. Even stock exchanges are, in comparison, remarkably simple. They facilitate trade based on basic abstractions—but if I want to exchange something whose value is entirely different to me than to my counterpart, the transfer of value no longer happens along a single axis like price. It becomes a cultural technique. When abstract monetary value is no longer enough to satisfy the exchange, I must engage the entire sphere of life and existence. That may seem burdensome, but it is the only way to build truly shared and democratic lifeworlds. There is no shortcutting automatism here—no algorithmic market execution like that of computerised stock trading. We remain in relationship.

Many markets that appear “dead” today could be revitalised through what I call living markets. The aim is to build a diverse foundation so that processes of exchange and mutual recognition can occur on multiple levels. This is not a regression to premodern markets. On the contrary, it is a more advanced market technology, based on higher complexity, not less. The concepts involved are highly modern and intelligent—far removed from the image of a medieval bazaar or mere neighbourhood barter.

But for this to work, we must be willing to cross domains. The bricklayer must show interest in the meaning of life, and the philosopher must engage with the properties of mortar and structural tension. Markets arise where diversity surpasses a critical threshold—and where it falls below, they disappear. Because a plurality of entry points is needed to allow mutual completion. At the same time, this fosters more complex forms of organisation, which reveal higher-order patterns in society. If I can no longer get to know my counterpart in a complex way, I also lose sight of potential synergies. Meanwhile, the space of cultural production flattens out. Culture, in this sense, becomes the basis of the economy.

The open markets of earlier times—those that once brought life to cities—did not vanish because they were incapable of sustaining large communities. They disappeared because they do not produce high, one-sided profits. The great capitalist trick was to turn individual greed into a system-preserving force, which everyone was told would make them rich.

But this model destroys real markets and breeds monopolies. This trend may become far more dangerous when coupled with artificial intelligence. As the market shifts into the virtual realm, the dismantling of complex world structures accelerates. A modern economy promising prosperity through technological acceleration achieves this by standardising participants’ profiles—flattening difference and maximising extraction. The result is a steep pyramid of value, where complexity is not amplified but compressed.

The internet allows this reduction of complexity with surgical efficiency. You appear only as a profile, a simplified data point. The same logic governs social media and algorithmic language processing. This explains both the dominance and the monopolisation of the internet economy. Although the marketplace includes billions of people, they are visible only as a handful of target group

templates—catalogued, compared, and consolidated. Only one or two platforms dominate each sector: Amazon, Google, Facebook.

This act of stereotyping people as users is the real secret behind the enormous profits of Big Tech. It pushes aside the diverse, embodied contact points and replaces them with a few global abstractions.

Facebook has standardised friendship. Through likes and algorithmic ranking, social evaluation becomes an instrument of conformity. The unknown, the strange, the nonconforming are punished. Public evaluation enforces peer pressure—a form of control.

Google has standardised curiosity. Search behaviour becomes predictable; queries return what fits pre-profiled expectations. Search engines no longer expand understanding—they reinforce it. The result is a feedback loop of simplification.

The simplification of reality maximises profits, but its consequences are devastating. Shifting society into a virtual simulation means maximum extraction and maximum dispossession. People lose the ability to shape their lives. Digital infrastructures push relational value out of the market by making it unreproducible. Digitisation, as currently designed, is an expropriation process. It generates global comparability, interchangeability, and surveillance.

And this surveillance does not aim to track wrongdoing. It serves to stage the norm as unquestionably correct. If the norm “hunts” the deviant, then the norm becomes the face of the good.

With every like, with every salary paid according to market logic, the system of simplification is reaffirmed. This comes with subtle brutality. For those who do not conform, every small omission—every absence of “likes”—becomes a micro-act of erasure. In mass, these omissions become a weapon of exclusion. A deeply undemocratic tool. After all, democracy is about voting on real propositions. Social media reduces democracy to bias confirmation. All else is filtered out.

What the internet is to information, globalisation is to trade. It follows the same logic of reduction. A globally streamlined pyramid produces sharper gradients of value and worthlessness. It is not a global village—it is a simulation

of globality built on the flattening of local difference. The result is what I call pattern flattening.

If I have a red, a yellow, and a blue flower in front of me, I can claim that the blue flower is the most beautiful or most valuable. But I still see the *category* of “flowers” and can at least recognise the differences between them. If I then compare one of the flowers to a car—say, a red flower and a red car—the *colour red* becomes the dominant pattern. But the essence of both the flower and the car disappears from view. I sacrifice the individual category, the true being of things, in favour of a global comparison. This is the beginning of pattern flattening—a creeping reduction of difference and the silent destruction of diversity.

I go into these phenomena in such detail because self-determined work is one of the few means by which this flattening of the world can be counteracted.

This logic of globalisation affects the devalued humanities scholar, the single mother, or the swamp with dying toads alike. None of them can argue for their value in the face of the dominant principle of globalised success and its simplistic criteria.

The principle of pattern flattening (or submergence) is one of the least recognised, yet most devastating processes in contemporary society. It is so simple—and yet so effective. The world appears ever more connected, borders seem to dissolve, everything converges toward a singular, global whole. But in that illusion of unity, our linguistic capacity, our pattern recognition, and our ability to perceive complexity are gradually eroded.

Populism, and its underlying cause—the unseen and unheard masses—can be traced back to this flattening of perceptual structures. It is difficult to defend what is no longer visible. Once something has been erased from the system of recognition, it seems no longer necessary. Rebuilding it takes years. Into this vacuum step the populists, offering simplified answers to the anger of invisible citizens—typically, by calling for the destruction of an “other” who supposedly receives unfair treatment. Thus, the spiral of violence continues, and pluralism, the actual longing underneath it all, is destroyed. What follows is totalitarianism, already visible in systems like Hartz IV.



My self-determined work is therefore perceived as a threat by both the state and many corporations. Because I make the value of my own category visible again. I expose the invisible criteria that determine whether a life is economically valid. The flattening of all difference into the binary of job/no job hides the multitude of ways in which the market discriminates and excludes.

As mentioned earlier, money is a key tool for isolating value and preventing dynamic diversity equalisation. Nobody asks *why* someone is broke. Bankruptcy itself becomes the justification for further exclusion, following a fatal logic of escalating dispossession.

To be denied a relationship is to be denied access to value—and therefore to money. Money becomes contextless. The blood is invisible on the bills. How it was earned no longer matters. Money is treated as *pure*, as inherently valuable. And that purity makes it the ideal medium for denying relationality.

Those who possess money can use it as proof of their own performance—and can thus legitimately deny relationship. You don't have to share with me—because I have no money. And so, I am deemed to have no value. The terrifying truth is this: money is a medium of relationship denial, and relationship denial is a prerequisite for wealth accumulation. In this sense, money, in its current form, is structurally anti-ecological.

But it could be different.

Take the example of the so-called “Miracle of Wörgl” in 1932. Inspired by Silvio Gesell, the town introduced a local *free money* currency that lost value unless kept in circulation. That is: it depreciated unless constantly used in relationships. I grew up near Wörgl, and an aunt of mine still works at the local Raiffeisen bank that issued those notes. The experiment decoupled Wörgl from the global market—and from the economic crisis—and revived internal exchange processes within the community.

Money was brought into resonance with natural patterns of exchange and contribution. It valorised doing, not hoarding. People were motivated to constantly create, repair, and share—because unused money lost its value. As a result, value was no longer isolated. *More* became valuable. Needs and skills diversified again. A dynamic local market re-emerged.

This is exactly what happens when alternative approaches—barter economies, neighbourhood mutual aid, or self-determined work—are integrated into capitalism: they are reclassified as *illegal labour*. What's really taking place is this: capital is being put back in relation to concrete life and embodied labour. And this is precisely what would be necessary to break the systemic reproduction of poverty within capitalism.

There must be a shift in priorities: a cultural and relational commitment to exchange, to lived reciprocity, must take precedence over the hoarding of isolated value for the purpose of status-building and creating dependency structures.

Those who are compelled to *spend* their money begin to see value in every corner of life—they are drawn to participate, to engage, to invest in their surroundings.

Without mechanisms like those tested in Wörgl, markets will inevitably dry up. What remains is structural dependency—on money, on overpriced wage labour, and on systems of validation that systematically exclude other forms of value.

People are left with nothing of value, devalued by inflation and crushed by the need to perform under ever harsher exploitative conditions. This leads to a kind of internalised greed, a desperation that makes people complicit in pushing others into poverty and symbolic annihilation.

This is also why *helicopter money* is a poor tool for revitalising broken economies. It does not increase diversity, nor does it foster decentralised value creation. On the contrary: it merely reinforces monopolies, as people rush to spend it in the next supermarket chain to stock up on more of the same.

Of course, the principle of *living markets* could be designed with much greater complexity—capable even of supporting highly sophisticated technological societies. It could lay the groundwork for democratic progress that cannot be afforded through wage labour alone.

The key to this transformation lies in a worker who generates value precisely through her difference, her distinction, her deviation from standardised labour. Only in this way can self-determined surplus value emerge—value that

drives a dynamic equalisation of diversity and raises society above the critical diversity marker.

Such labour must take place outside the reduced categories of competition. My resistance to the state's coercion into wage labour is, at its core, nothing less than an expansion of value categories. At present, I am still dependent on social welfare—not because I don't contribute, but because the state has erased my category of work from competition through a simple trick. Everything I've developed in this book, everything I've researched, written, lived—has been rendered invisible. As if I had never worked a single day in my life.

Yet I have spent decades researching this, unpaid and at my own expense.

#### Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The introduction of the “diversity brand” as a system-critical threshold value opens up artistic spaces for new formats of economic complexity. Artistic research here becomes a laboratory for “living markets” — experiments with diverse forms of value that operate beyond market price and efficiency. The artistic contribution lies in visualising those thresholds of diversity below which collective creativity and social meaning are lost.

— Critical Autism Studies: The Diversity Brand designs a space in which neurodivergent contributions are not understood as deviance, but as a prerequisite for systemic health. The chapter exposes the disparity between social complexity and its economic reduction — an experience that many autistic people have on a daily basis. Their “maladaptation” is read here as a structural indicator: Where they cannot dock, the system is built too simply.

## ***Contributive Work and Wages that Sustain Ecological Systems***

In contrast to externally determined labour, self-determined work enables significantly higher productivity—understood in a broader, qualitative sense—because, as described earlier, it is not constrained by price mechanisms or wage pressure.

It can change direction flexibly along the lines of authentic relevance, allowing for what I call multi-track progress. This creates synergies across different fields of work: If no one owns the work, it becomes mobile—it circulates, interconnects, and creates more in emergence than the sum of all isolated forms of labour.

I refer to these practices collectively as *contributive work*. This form of labour dynamically enables multiple, multi-layered forms of equalisation—that is: dynamic diversity equalisation. It is, in fact, the opposite of isolated value.

*Contributive work* ultimately leads to highly individual *work habitats* that achieve two key transformations:

1. Lowering the access threshold to participation in work by reducing the dependence on wage labour as the exclusive mode of involvement.
2. Increasing pluralism through the diversity marker, thereby building a dynamic, self-sustaining *living market*.

Such labour is not rewarded by market logic, but through the design of an open, relational, and appreciative environment. I am convinced that we must radically reset our understanding of labour. Let us set aside the inherited forms of work from industrialisation, modernity, and the postwar era. Let us return to the root question: What kinds of work produce what kinds of society?

The “do-it-yourself” movement, for instance, is a form of labour that is completely free from pay structures. One simply creates—alone or collectively—without needing to hoard resources, without one person standing above the other. No hierarchy. No scarcity imperative.

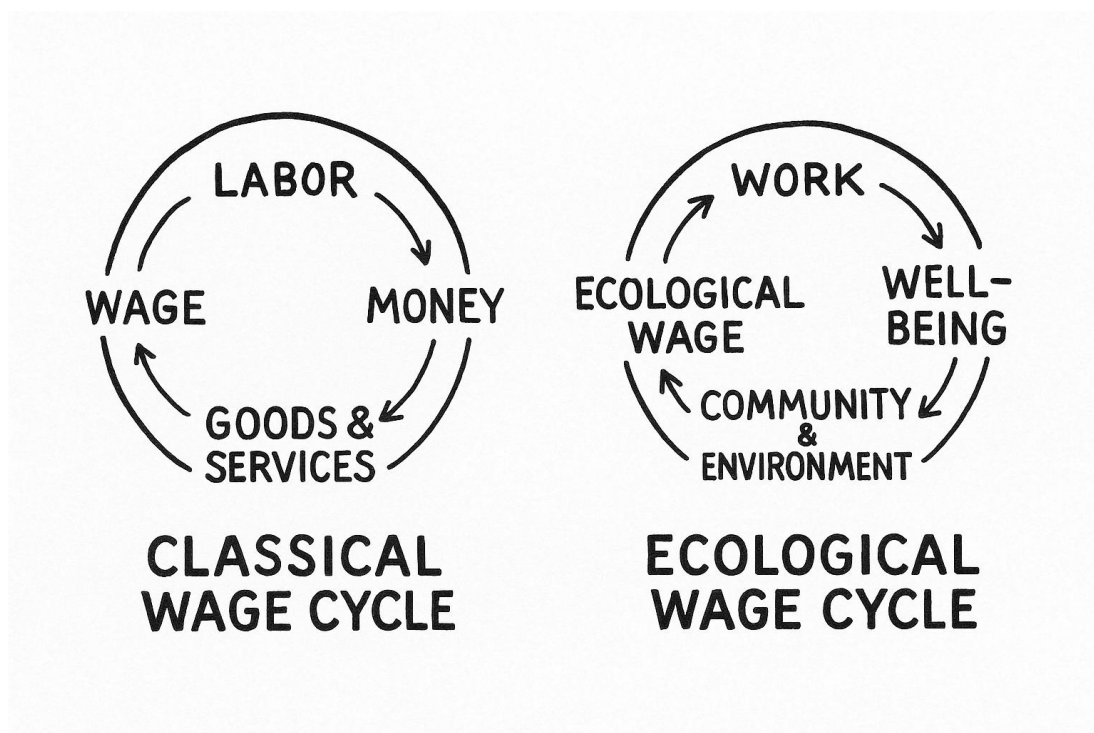
If someone engages in self-determined work via DIY practices, thus saving financial resources and reducing product consumption—which is clearly in

the interest of the ecosystem—this is still not recognised as value by society. The labour cannot be transferred into the conventional market system.

Neither the state nor the economy step in and say:

*“Great that you built the table yourself as an amateur. That means you need less money. You can reduce your dependency on external labour. You consume fewer resources, have more time, and have become more competent, self-confident, and diverse.”*

In traditional economics, such behaviour signals a reduction in tax revenue, lower corporate profits, and a decline in GDP growth. But in the logic of the primary economy, it leads to an increase in solution competencies, design capacity, and the diversity of contributions.



In contributive work, what I call the ecologically effective wage finally emerges. The work itself becomes a rewarding experience, and the value network expands to the point where no one can fall off. Everyone remains in relationship and contributes as the person they truly are. This fosters autopoiesis within the human ecosystem and enables an increase in the diversity of action through natural drift (Varela).

Frithjof Bergmann – *New Work, New Culture* (2004) – and Edward Deci & Richard Ryan – *Self-Determination Theory* (2000 ff.) — show that autonomy, competence, and meaning produce the highest levels of productivity and satisfaction. This is the foundational insight of contributive work. Elinor Ostrom – *Governing the Commons* (1990) – and Michel Bauwens – *P2P Manifesto* (2019) – demonstrate that cooperative self-organisation is often more efficient and sustainable than state or market monopolies – exactly what constitutes a *living market*.

I am convinced that in 100 or 200 years, it will be widely acknowledged that gainful employment as the sole accepted form of contribution has severely hindered humanity's development, as it only allowed a privileged few to unfold their full capacities. It will become clear that more complex forms of cooperation are necessary – and that what we currently call economics will appear as primitive as 19th-century medicine. The decisive paradigm shift, however, will not stem from technology, but from the liberation of economic life from the structural logics of domination.

Unlike workplaces, work habitats revolve around a different question: What happens to a product when another person joins the process? How does it become larger, more complex, more alive? It is not about the product as a minimal-cost mass commodity. It is about involving everyone in world-making – through will, through experience, through resonance. That is why it is essential not to want to know in advance how the world is or should be. A paradox. Only then does the individual and their interpretation come into focus. It is time to rethink everything from the ground up.

Why are wages separated from labour? Why isn't labour itself already a form of wage?

The wage could be replaced by a deeper question: What nourishes you, wholly?

Not: *What must I do to earn food?*

But: *Through what kind of nourishment – in the widest, most figurative sense – do I metabolise the world in such a way that others can be nourished anew or differently through my contribution?*

This would be a far more natural, ecological context for work than that of earning money.

**Comparison table: Contributive work vs. ecologically effective wage**

| Aspect                     | Contributive work                                                                           | Ecologically effective wages                                                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Definition of              | Labour that generates emergent social and ecological value — beyond the logic of the market | Return of benefits, meaning and care through systemic resonance instead of money |
| Example                    | Maintenance, community projects, open source, commons work                                  | Quality of life, community ties, experience of resonance, care through commons   |
| Measurability              | Not directly measurable in monetary terms, only as a long-term system effect                | Noticeable as an increase in health, meaning, cooperation or relationships       |
| Value form                 | Not exchange value, but contribution to emergence                                           | Not monetary, but atmospheric, functional, resonant                              |
| Relationship to the market | Parallel system that is mostly ignored or fought against by the market                      | Independent of the market — works in commons, subsistence, ecosystems            |
| Form of recognition        | Often through social                                                                        | Recognition                                                                      |

|       |                                              |                                                                |
|-------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
|       | exclusion, rarely state or institutionalised | through co-presence, willingness to cooperate, system feedback |
| Tense | Cyclical, often visible in long-term effects | Immediately noticeable or over time as increased satiety       |

Hartmut Rosa – *Resonance* (2016) and David Graeber – *Bullshit Jobs* (2018) imply through their work how object-related, meaningful work nourishes, while wage dependency often leads to alienation – the very foundation for the idea of an ecological wage.

As in nature, the answer to these questions leads to systems in which very different forms of life can thrive – forms that current capitalism cannot support.

To nourish oneself means to integrate what one feeds on. Money is just money. But when I integrate something into my system, that system grows in complexity – and in turn becomes food for other life forms, both within and beyond the habitat. Plants transform air and water into material forms that animals feed on. This is transformation, always an integrative process. You can learn more about the nature of work from how nourishment functions in ecosystems than from any economic textbook.

You can't nourish an ecosystem by withholding nutrients from a plant and instead trying to feed the deer directly with CO<sub>2</sub>. It needs all the other actors whose nourished existence forms the basis of life. The same is true for labour: you must be nourished first – or by the work itself – before something can emerge that generates synergy for others.

That is the key difference from wage labour: in traditional employment, synergy is structurally excluded, because it undermines profit. You would have to share. Something *else* would gain energy. But only efficiency is desired, only targeted output. As few people as possible should participate. That reduction



of labour as a resource results in a thinning of nourishment in the wider system. Resources that could be used multiple times are now hoarded and blocked.

In gainful employment, hunger comes first – and the threat of hunger drives further restriction. Capital feeds on hunger turned greed and on the suppression of others.

But if labour itself is already nourishment, and self-determined, then it can be liberated. And it cannot be stressed enough: labour freed from compulsion enables qualitative growth, whereas traditional labour only produces quantitative growth.

Labour-as-nourishment – which emerges primarily through self-determined action – becomes a crucial indicator for understanding the value of work. Work that doesn't provide holistic nourishment contributes less to the ecosystem. It is less translated for wider contexts, and thus less accessible or valuable.

Much of this has become visible through research into unconditional basic income.

Guy Standing – *Basic Income and How We Can Make It Happen* (2017) and Philippe Van Parijs – *Real Freedom for All* (1995) describe wage-free income forms that support self-determination. The ecological wage expands this idea by including qualitative criteria.

For instance: when I nourish myself with knowledge, metabolise it, and write books, I'm translating this nourishment for people who otherwise wouldn't have access. I make it freely available. I nourish my readers. But first I must translate that knowledge into new patterns. I can only do that in my unique way, and it takes time. If I were to give my readers money so they could learn this knowledge themselves, the translation – my specific contribution – would be missing. For many, the knowledge would become inaccessible or too expensive. In this sense, education presupposes the free accessibility of transformed knowledge.

And this ruins me economically in the conventional sense. But I want the effect, not a big profit in a scarcity-based market. So why should the traditional market prevent this intrinsically powerful

resource? Because it limits free will and participation. It excludes lived experience, and constructs a synthetic, reduced reality dominated by dependency and addiction.

Mariana Mazzucato – *The Value of Everything* (2018) and David Bollier & Silke Helfrich – *Free, Fair and Alive* (2019) criticise price monism and call for multidimensional value measurement – echoing my critique of *isolated* vs. *relational* value.

It is essential to no longer separate labour, wages, and nourishment.

When goods are seen only as paid-for products, this suppresses authentic needs, equal participation, and multi-use potential. Products themselves become unidimensional and competitive – not multi-contextual, multi-recyclable surfaces of projection. That's why so many resources are wasted: products are dead things, designed without synergy in mind.

Future technologies could enable production modes that allow people to co-shape the world in diverse ways, and simultaneously reclaim living space through participation. This would shift the focus from turning humans into products (via consumerism) to co-creating pluralist habitats.

Kate Raworth – *Doughnut Economics* (2017), Jason Hickel – *Less Is More* (2020) and Herman Daly – *Steady-State Economics* (1991) all argue that qualitative well-being is more important than GDP growth. Their work anticipates the notion of the *ecologically effective wage*.

Critics of contributive work often object that no one would perform the *unpleasant jobs*. But one must ask: why are these jobs unloved? Is it because they are difficult – or because they violate the will, the integrity, of the worker?

Intrinsic motivation does not mean refusing challenges. For years, I have continued my work under the most adverse conditions – because I see and experience the benefit. But I refuse to do work I cannot justify – work that is only done for money, under the illusion that this alone constitutes a social contribution. Such a primitive view of labour must be rejected.

On the other hand, there is all the care work that takes place despite the effort. Nancy Folbre – *The Invisible Heart* (2001) and Silvia Federici – *Re-enchanting the World* (2018) show that unpaid care and relationship labour is the primary

productivity of any society – directly analogous to the concept of *contributive work* presented here. We are not just beings driven by money, and we are certainly not inherently conceived as such.

Of course, some people immediately think of the dustman, who might no longer remove the rubbish – but they forget that a core feature of wage labour is that unpleasant work is organised to be extra unpleasant. The job is supposed to *symbolise* hierarchical difference. Low-level jobs are always a form of punishment for a lack of success. Many jobs exist to devalue the person doing them, so that others can justify higher pay. It's always about deserved or undeserved reward.

But you don't need to devalue a task to the point where no one wants to do it because it puts you lower on the caste ladder. For some it's trash, for others it's compost – organic gold. A packaging becomes “rubbish” only because its value is measured solely in relation to the content. That shouldn't be the case. Meritocracy creates masses of unloved work and waste because it misuses labour as a means of devaluation and artificial elevation, rather than focusing on the question of *meaningful production*.

Unloved work is not work for the lazy – it's work that is directed against the self.

Today, many economies, including the German one, attempt to gain competitive advantage by expanding the low-wage sector. They mask this with the rhetoric of meritocracy, promising those who are devalued the illusion of upward mobility – if only they adapt. The consequences show up not on corporate balance sheets, but in cultural erosion, neglect, and the internal impoverishment of society. And in social and political crises – which, however, never enter the economic discourse, as they are not officially “economic factors”.

Understanding work as nourishment changes everything. The more I do work that nourishes me comprehensively, the less external reward I require – and this *ecologically effective reward* frees up resources for others. The cost of living and resource consumption fall because value boundaries dissolve. The loss of meaning and relevance in work is always due to the artificial boundary of value, which dries out broader context.

Wage labour does not nourish all levels of a worker's personality. That's why it requires higher compensation – to be patched over with consumption. But this, in turn, drives up prices and blocks access to work and co-creation – and to *actually relevant work*. If, on the other hand, workers unconditionally follow the work that feels truly relevant, they are more willing to contribute it to society, because they do not feel exploited and do not hope to fill a void in their lives through salary. The cycle of mutual blackmail and labour avoidance collapses.

The concept of contributive work can be particularly well illustrated by the working style of many autistic people, which is described in research as *monotropism*: autistic individuals focus their perception on a few, deeply meaningful areas of interest and generate an intensity of detail, precision, and novel connections – often for hours or days in hyperfocus – that would be impossible under multitasking structures.

(Murray, Lesser & Lawson 2005; Robertson & Ne'eman 2013)

This tunnel of expertise functions because all cognitive energy flows into a single resonant chamber. The result is not linear productivity, but emergent system gains: new models, patterns, insights that vastly exceed the input hours. In a *primary economy*, this kind of hyperfocus would be seen as an *ecologically effective wage*: the work nourishes both the worker (flow, meaning, coherence) and the collective (innovation, insight).

Autistic monotropism shows how qualitatively rich labour can be if it is not fragmented by external wage constraints, but allowed to unfold along inner relevance. After all, I worked this way 40 hours a week for 20 years, with practically no external pay. Mostly under harsh conditions. Without this mode of labour, this research would not exist.

## Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The chapter shifts the concept of wages from money to *resonance* — labour is understood as an artistic substance that nourishes systems by condensing complexity, care and ecology. Projects can demonstrate

this “ecologically effective wage” prototypically: Commons labs, long-term performances or maker settings in which value emerges as an emergent quality, not as a price.

— Critical Autism Studies: Integrating *monotropism* and hyperfocus makes autistic ways of working paradigmatic for value-added labour: deep exploration, flow and sensory coherence generate disproportionate system gains. The chapter frames neurodivergent specialisation as a key resource of a primary economy and provides empirical arguments against wage-centred efficiency norms.

### ***The Client and the Question of the Unfolding Gap***

Over time, capitalism has developed many ways to conceal the violence inherent in its structures — because it is in the best interest of both the dependent and the powerful to stabilise the displacement of blame. The figure of the customer is one such disguise. The customer appears to rule over everything, yet remains intangible, anonymous. They seem to make decisions freely, and yet act as part of a collectivised mass phenomenon that is relatively easy to manipulate.

Customers always desire success, and therefore status. Those with wealth can buy it. Those with little settle for the plagiarism, the copy — the fake of the fake. The inferior that mimics the most valuable. In this way, customers constantly deceive themselves. The result is a society trapped in permanent mediocrity — not because people lack intelligence, but because the system prevents access to the structural core of social problems.

The consequence is a pervasive lack of focus and depth in human action. People take the path of least resistance, engaging in substitute behaviour — consumption instead of contribution.

Today, it seems as though the customer dictates what happens in the market — not the worker, as it should be, in a free and conscious relationship. Since the worker also becomes a customer the moment she exits the workplace and enters a shop, a psychological block prevents her from turning against the

customer — she would have to turn against herself, against the very site where her hope and desire are anchored: the freedom of consumption, bought through labour.

Yet even in this supposed freedom, the customer remains a subject conditioned by labour. For a few hours, the customer may play the boss — legitimised by payment: “Who pays has earned it, and who has earned it deserves the best.” This ideology continuously tightens the constraints on both the worker and the customer.

The customer will rarely see how, in their delusion of power, they themselves contribute to the maintenance of the very pyramid that devalues their own labour. They help to produce the hierarchy they are trying to escape.

As Robert Reich (*Supercapitalism*, 2007) demonstrates, this creates a role conflict: people are simultaneously exploited workers and bargain-hungry consumers — each role aggravating the other. Juliet Schor (*The Overspent American*, 1998; *True Wealth*, 2011) shows that consumer decisions are socially driven; the so-called “freedom of choice” masks structural compulsions: advertising, debt, time pressure.

Zygmunt Bauman (*Consuming Life*, 2007) explains how consumption replaces belonging; those who cannot keep up are excluded. Pierre Bourdieu (*La Distinction*, 1979) reveals how consumer preferences stabilise class hierarchies — and how even “critical consumers” remain caught within the same symbolic logic.

Many of the most damaging value boundaries in society are dictated by the customer. They wield the power to define the boundary between authentic recognition of a worker’s contribution and their systemic exploitation — through avarice, convenience, and a refusal to cooperate.

The customer does not contribute. She is served. She uses the value boundary to artificially diminish the dignity of others. The customer is always right.

But imagine for a moment the customer asking the worker, sincerely: “*How would you like to contribute in a self-determined way?*” That spell would be broken. An exchange on equal footing would become possible. The customer would be astonished by the richness she finds — and realise how little she

actually gains from her so-called freedom of choice. In truth, that “freedom” leads directly to her own structural impoverishment.

But the customer does not enter the company and join me at work uninvited — something I have done as a client in many of my own projects. Instead, she remains passive. And this is the crux: the most powerful force in the market — the consumer — is a passive force.

Consumers do not compete with companies. They legitimise them. They stabilise profit. They fuel inflation. They passively inflate the cost of living, while believing themselves to be in control.

The secret of the Western economic model lies in the addictive coupling of worker and customer. It captures the entire population in a kind of role-play that simulates power, freedom, and value — entirely detached from conscience, integrity, political awareness, or emotional maturity.

The customer often has none of these things — she has earned her money, and this absolves her of guilt. She owes no one an explanation. She can do whatever she pleases. This totalitarian freedom is, paradoxically, also a form of totalitarian oppression. By abusing her role, she reinforces the very pyramid that limits her.

The customer has replaced the sovereign. And as Milgram’s experiments remind us, this kind of diffuse hierarchy leads to people losing their ability to act humanely. To become human *beings* rather than *functions*.

Consumer consciousness has become the quiet force behind ecological collapse — not because it is inherently evil, but because it is blind. The customer doesn’t know the system of production. She knows only the surface. And because she doesn’t know, she doesn’t participate. Not as a free, critical observer — but as a passive receiver.

Consumption appears to be an act of free will. But it is not. It lacks the one thing that defines true autonomy: contextual awareness. The ability to see the full picture of where you are, what you are doing, and why — and only then to choose.

Advertising, curated scarcity, and closed commercial ecologies block that possibility. The customer chooses between preselected options. Adaptation

replaces exploration. The worker cannot explore the world freely, and the customer cannot step beyond her sandbox of pre-defined choices.

What we need is not *consumer freedom*, but a liberation of relational capability — the capacity to enter into meaningful relations with others, with objects, with systems.

Observe how customers and workers interact in the wild. It's absurd — a grotesque theatre of role-playing that harms both sides. A role that exists for one reason only: to reproduce the pyramid at every level. To uphold isolated value.

And without reflection, the system implies that the customer is a superior class of human — while the same logic lays waste to the planet.

It is crucial to understand that Western “freedom” is built on a foundation that cannot support actual free will. That foundation is consumption.

The customer is the weakest force imaginable — and the one that overestimates itself the most.

If the environment is to be saved, it will not be the critical customer who does it. It will be the critical worker. Because the customer does not act. She is not an agent. She is a hedonistic monster inside all of us.

## **The Unfolding Gap**

The unfolding gap is the space a person has to bring their embodied potential into the world – independent of normative expectations, instrumentalisation, or conformity pressures. It describes the difference between who someone could become and what the system permits – without sanctions, impoverishment, or exclusion.

I now want to address an aspect that may unsettle many believers in progress – and rightly so. Because it is time to draw sharper distinctions.

When people speak of the supposed progress brought about by the secondary economy – the very progress used to legitimise wage labour – a central factor is consistently omitted from economic theory: the unfolding gap.



It offers us a new criterion by which progress can be assessed: not in abstract metrics, but in concrete, lived experience.

By unfolding gap, I mean the actual, felt relationship between the effort an individual must exert to live in the modern world and the claimed added value that “modern progress” allegedly delivers in return.

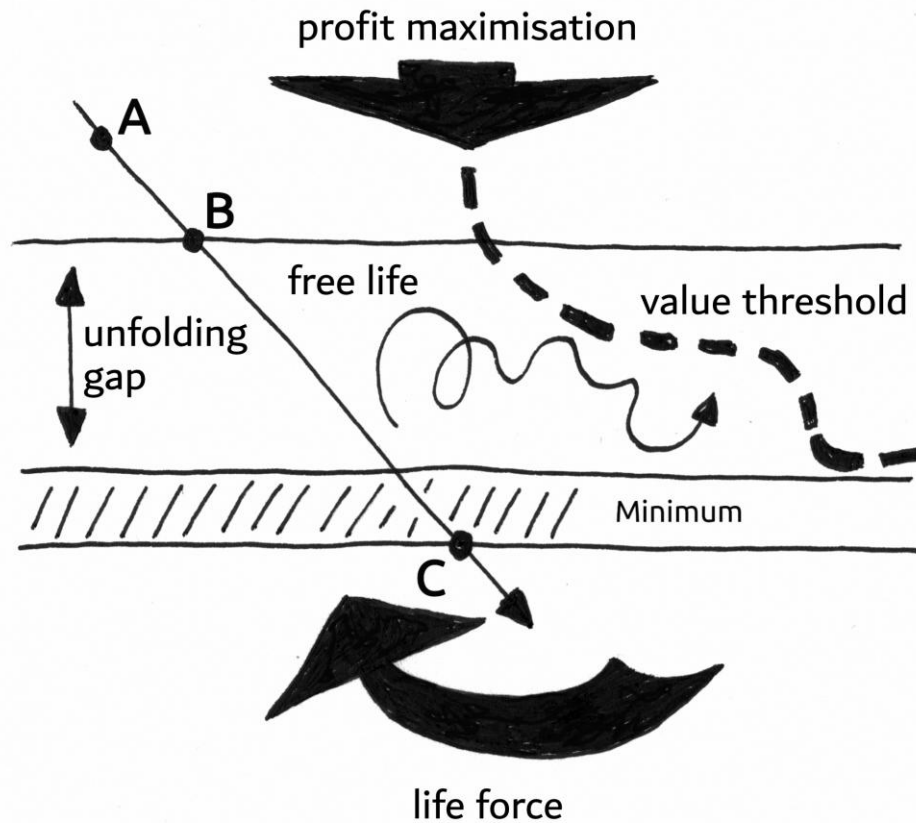
The unfolding gap allows us to distinguish between superficial progress and truly emancipatory transformation. It shifts the entire paradigm of what counts as progress – away from economic growth and towards an increase in the qualitative life experience of individuals.

The image that follows illustrates this unfolding gap as a key variable: it opens between the upward force of embodied vitality and the downward force of profit maximisation – which constantly restricts vitality through the imposition of value boundaries.

Crucially, these two forces are not working in harmony. They oppose one another.

The unfolding gap is the space above mere subsistence, in which individuality, diversity and free will become possible in the first place.

# UNFOLDING GAP



When, as in point A, a new technology is introduced, the unfolding gap initially appears to widen – seemingly or genuinely. For example: the mobile phone is invented. Greater freedom and a more mobile, complex life seem possible.

In step B, however, the costs for the individual increase – not only financially, but in terms of access, stress and adaptability. To afford and use the new technology, people must participate in markets that have now become more centralised, more competitive and less forgiving. The simplification introduced by the new tech has narrowed the economic landscape: companies shrink or outsource, jobs become more precarious. Technologies like the mobile phone shrink space and accelerate time – enabling globalisation, but also threatening livelihoods.

A new value boundary is drawn: “modernity”. Only those who keep pace are coded as valuable. Those who fall behind are marked as outdated, inefficient, or even lazy.

People are told they must now work harder – not because there's more work, but because the metric of value has changed. What was once considered sufficient is now obsolete. Lifelong accomplishments are devalued overnight.

Meanwhile, telecommunications firms are overvalued on stock markets, while traditional industries – and their workers – are devalued. The result is a massive shift in social stratification: cutthroat competition, job insecurity, and a growing class of “hidden poor” – people who are excluded by rising living costs, not hunger.

This poverty doesn't look like poverty. It manifests as gentrification, as displacement, as psychological exhaustion. Young families are pushed out of cities where jobs are still located. At the same time, exploitation is outsourced – to Chinese factories, for example, where phones are built under brutal conditions. Ecological damage is also exported.

And yet the economy calls all this “progress” – as if reaching point A were already enough to justify the consequences. It celebrates innovation while ignoring who pays the price.

But it is the unfolding gap – the real disparity between effort and meaningful access – that defines whether something constitutes genuine progress for all.

On stock markets, this gap is irrelevant. In lived experience, it is everything.

More and more people are now reaching point C: a form of poverty that appears unrelated to A, but is in fact systemically produced *by* A. This is poverty born from success – an insight the West has yet to fully grasp.

You can invent a new technology today, become rich overnight, and simultaneously impoverish entire regions by creating new thresholds of exclusion.

As long as economics fails to integrate these dynamics, capitalism will continue to justify destruction as innovation. And those who fall behind will continue to be framed not as victims of structural violence, but as defective human

beings – blamed for their own exclusion by a value boundary no one wants to see.

In reference to Amartya Sen (*Development as Freedom*, 1999) and Martha Nussbaum (*Creating Capabilities*, 2011), the unfolding gap approximates the distance between real opportunities for self-realisation and the effort required to access them. Hartmut Rosa (*Social Acceleration*, 2005) argues that labour and consumption are accelerating, but simultaneously diminishing the “world yield”—the capacity for resonance—thus shrinking the space for development. Empirical attempts to measure “wellbeing per unit of resource or time,” such as Tim Jackson’s *Prosperity Without Growth* (2009) or the *Happy Planet Index* (NEF, 2006 ff.), function as practical correlates of this distance metric. Ivan Illich (*Tools for Conviviality*, 1973) observed that beyond a certain threshold, tools like cars or smartphones generate more dependency than liberation—at which point the unfolding gap turns negative. Colin Crouch (*Post-Democracy*, 2004) shows how decision-making power shifts from citizens to markets; “political consumption” is no substitute for structural agency.

This mechanism explains why—despite immense profits—so little value reaches the workers. Regardless of technical progress, many must toil just above poverty, because competition and performance pressure escalate in a system that ignores the unfolding gap. The widespread sense of working oneself into poverty stems from this vicious cycle—the hamster wheel of perpetual growth. It is the compulsion to overextend Point A.

No one seems to question by what right this extractive model of “progressive” production is considered legal or legitimate. But it is, in essence, a form of fraud.

The unfolding gap offers a new metric for distinguishing between genuine and extractive progress—between labour that expands the horizon of freedom and labour that collapses it. What’s the point of working, if not to enlarge the unfolding gap—for everyone?

These are not abstract questions. Many autistic people, for example, simply cannot ignore such neurotypical asymmetries. Classical economic theories assume that “progress” equals increased freedom. But freedom cannot expand

if complexity is simultaneously reduced. Oversimplified systems compress the unfolding gap: the space in which I can live as *myself*. And as shown earlier, this collapse also destroys living markets.

All genuine progress should make life easier. But the industrial model of simplification has always served both productivity and exploitation. Yet humans *live* in friction, differentiation, and complexity.

Despite the rhetoric of progress, the energy people must expend to survive today is often not much less than 100 years ago. Life hasn't gotten easier. In many ways, we're stuck in place.

That may seem like an overstatement, but the data supports it. Despite technological leaps, working hours haven't decreased. In fact, they've increased for many. And in Western Europe at least, the previous generation was often more financially secure than mine. The unfolding gap is shrinking—and it matters.

Compared to a medieval farmer, a modern worker *seems* freer. But is she, really?

As a *consumer*, I have more options. But as a *complex person*, I may fail in the market just like a 14th-century artisan who fell out of favour with the king.

The key question is: Does the freedom of progress still allow people to cross the diversity threshold—to live lives true to themselves? Or does it structurally expropriate them? Does progress *give* me something, or *strip* something away? Does it contribute to fulfilment, or hollow it out?

Some technologies—AI, genetic engineering—go so far in reshaping life that it's conceivable they may produce wildly successful companies while simultaneously undermining the foundations of human civilisation. And yet: economic theory provides no mechanism, no criterion, to prevent this. Classical economics is blind to systemic damage if profit is promised. Even at the figurative end of the world, if returns are high, the market logic would celebrate it.

That's the flaw. And it must be addressed urgently. Awareness of the unfolding gap offers a way forward.

In a society that claims to generate prosperity, people should work less *externally*, and solve more problems through technology and collective knowledge. The struggle for survival should diminish, not persist. For most people, that's the intuitive promise of progress: that a widening unfolding gap creates time, space, and energy for something beyond bare subsistence.

Such a shift would enable complex civilisations—where people not only survive but *thrive*, because they have the room to be *different*. And that in turn would push work beyond the diversity threshold into contributive labour.

As I've argued: value-added labour naturally widens the unfolding gap. It homogenises the worth of human effort—not by reducing difference, but by integrating more complexity. If every kind of contribution carries foundational value, extremes shrink and collaboration flourishes.

Yes, technological innovation has produced value—medicine is a clear example—but the cost of that progress, the price of modernity, is rarely questioned. Yet this is precisely the kind of intelligent, humanistic development we need: one that chooses technologies not for their profit potential, but for their capacity to expand the unfolding gap.

Future innovation should be based not on market share, but on synergies with ecosystems and with diverse forms of life. We must stop chasing scale for its own sake. "Success" does not justify destructive dominance.

Big is not better. Big is not right. Big is not wise.

Or to echo E. F. Schumacher: "*Small is beautiful.*"

Without understanding the significance of the unfolding gap for ecosystems, it is impossible to do justice to the phenomenon of poverty. We need an entirely new concept of poverty—one that is not defined by a lack of consumption or material possessions, but by a reduction in developmental scope, the very condition for any living market.

Poverty must no longer be framed as a lack of income or access to consumption. Instead, it should be recognised as a prohibition of self-determination—a systemic narrowing of the unfolding gap, and thus of value itself. This narrowing perpetuates exclusion. Social security, in this view, is not

a question of creating jobs, but of maintaining the space for autonomous becoming.

It is not a matter of how much minimum subsistence the unemployed “deserve.” The question is: How can their entire being be revalorised, such that they help lift us all above the diversity threshold and make wealth structurally transferable? Eliminating poverty would mean removing the poverty boundary and granting foundational wealth—*before* labour—so that further value can emerge.

The fundamental discrimination lies in the lack of developmental space. People are told: “Everything’s available—unlimited consumption, cutting-edge technology. If you fail, it must be your fault.” This is the lie modern capitalism tells.

Classical economics cannot explain today’s mass discontent—from the *gilets jaunes* in France to the exhausted working poor across Europe. Millions are crushed by living costs, and capitalism responds with: “Work harder and more will be given to you.” This delusion must end.

Today’s poor may no longer wear rags. They may own phones or even cars. I have food, clothes, a vehicle—but 80% of my income goes to food. I can’t afford stamps, petrol, or social life. My isolation, pain, and loneliness are invisible, because poverty is measured only by consumption. But consumption is a false proxy for progress, and without a broader understanding of relational and ecological conditions, the illusion of equal opportunity persists.

Yes, I theoretically have every opportunity. But in practice, I have no chance. That paradox points to the failure of our definitions: Progress ≠ Development. A modern society can still marginalise, impoverish, and exclude.

What’s especially telling is this: the government could lift me out of poverty *today*—simply by acknowledging the value of my work. Just one public statement, recognising my research and artistic labour as socially relevant, would reintegrate me into the world. But that would mean recognising the value of all the *others* like me. It would end poverty for millions. That’s why it won’t happen. They’d rather pay me Hartz IV than admit I’m right. Better to suppress my career than to dismantle the fiction of a meritocratic society.

Yes, I may own more than someone in the so-called “Global South,” but my unfolding gap may be smaller than theirs. A person with less money might still enjoy a wider unfolding space due to lower living costs, stronger family networks, or cultural structures of solidarity. People want different things, and experience constraint or expansion differently. This is not just a material question—it is a question of *freedom*. And freedom is not something to be “earned”; it is the precondition for meaningful contribution.

Freedom is the condition of situational adequacy. It is what allows truth to become relevant in a particular context. Without a real increase in the unfolding gap, progress becomes meaningless. Then the issue is no longer unequal distribution of profits—it’s that the whole game is stupid. Because we could expand the unfolding gap for everyone, easily, by reconnecting labour, life-time, and ecosystems in a living cycle.

If people are doing more and more work for less and less developmental scope, then something is deeply broken in the model of capitalist progress. The narrower the unfolding gap, the tighter the value boundaries become. It is a compounding loop that drains people and devastates society.

Voluntary refusal of progress—or withdrawal from wage labour—does not appear in the mythos of development. In classical economics, refusing to participate in the economy is seen as sabotage. Yet this refusal may expand the unfolding gap, thereby increasing the true value of labour. Renouncing work can revalorise it.

Some self-sufficient individuals experience a high unfolding gap precisely because they renounce expensive technologies. You cannot accuse them of being “anti-progress” when progress fails to deliver on its promise of development.

And yet classical economics treats *non-participation* in market progress as harmful to society. Politicians impose new standards that force people to consume more and upgrade constantly—energy classes, emissions standards, digital devices. Everything must be updated, even if no one asked for it.

And here’s the hypocrisy: citizens are constantly told they must participate in the growth of industry, in the name of shared responsibility. But when artists, workers, or young entrepreneurs propose alternative forms of development,



that responsibility is denied. We are told our value is illegible. As if dialogue only flows one way.

The epistemology of economics does not match the ontology of diverse ecosystems. It is too primitive, too linear. And so I now want to explore the patterns that become visible in the actions of Radical Workers—patterns that reveal the building blocks of life itself. Because without understanding these blocks, no conscious, meaningful labour is possible. And that’s a realisation that must have consequences—for labour, for economics, and for civilisation.

### Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The chapter transforms the figure of the customer into a performative target: art can stage role-swap settings, exchange-free zones or resonance markets in order to visibly and tangibly dismantle the illusion of consumer sovereignty. The unfolding distance serves as an aesthetic measuring instrument — installations and social experiments visualise how time, meaning and ecological costs evaporate in the current commodity theatre.

— Critical Autism Studies: Autistic people often experience the customer script as a sensory and communicative overload; they thus intuitively expose the bluff of a supposed freedom of choice. The concept of the development gap explains why their non-normative needs structure “does not occur” in the market: The system values purchasing power, not quality of life. The chapter thus provides a theoretical basis for understanding neurodivergent refusal to consume as an epistemic critique — and as a signpost for more inclusive, equalised economic spaces.

## ***Submergence — Myths of Evolution***

Submergence is the systemic state that precedes any form of emergence. It is the invisible field in which difference, potential, and relational power exist

below the surface—biologically, socially, and epistemically—without yet appearing. But they work. They structure reality from within.

The dominance of the material worldview is a symptom of the isolated value regime, which prioritises things over relations, and thereby enforces a systemic reduction of complexity. This worldview distorts the recognition of labour, because it obscures the broader web of reference within which all work takes place. As described in the MNO model, centuries of Western epistemology have been shaped by a fixation on the object, constructing a reality around measurable, enclosed units—material outcomes, discrete identities, finalised products. This was not accidental; it was the reflex of a pyramidal order that sought security in control, in closure, in the elimination of ambiguity.

It is time to shift. Humanity must learn to think in structures, in patterns, in open systems of relation—and translate this thinking into labour. Once relation becomes primary, an extraordinary phenomenon occurs: everything is in everything. Meaning unfolds exponentially. The world opens.

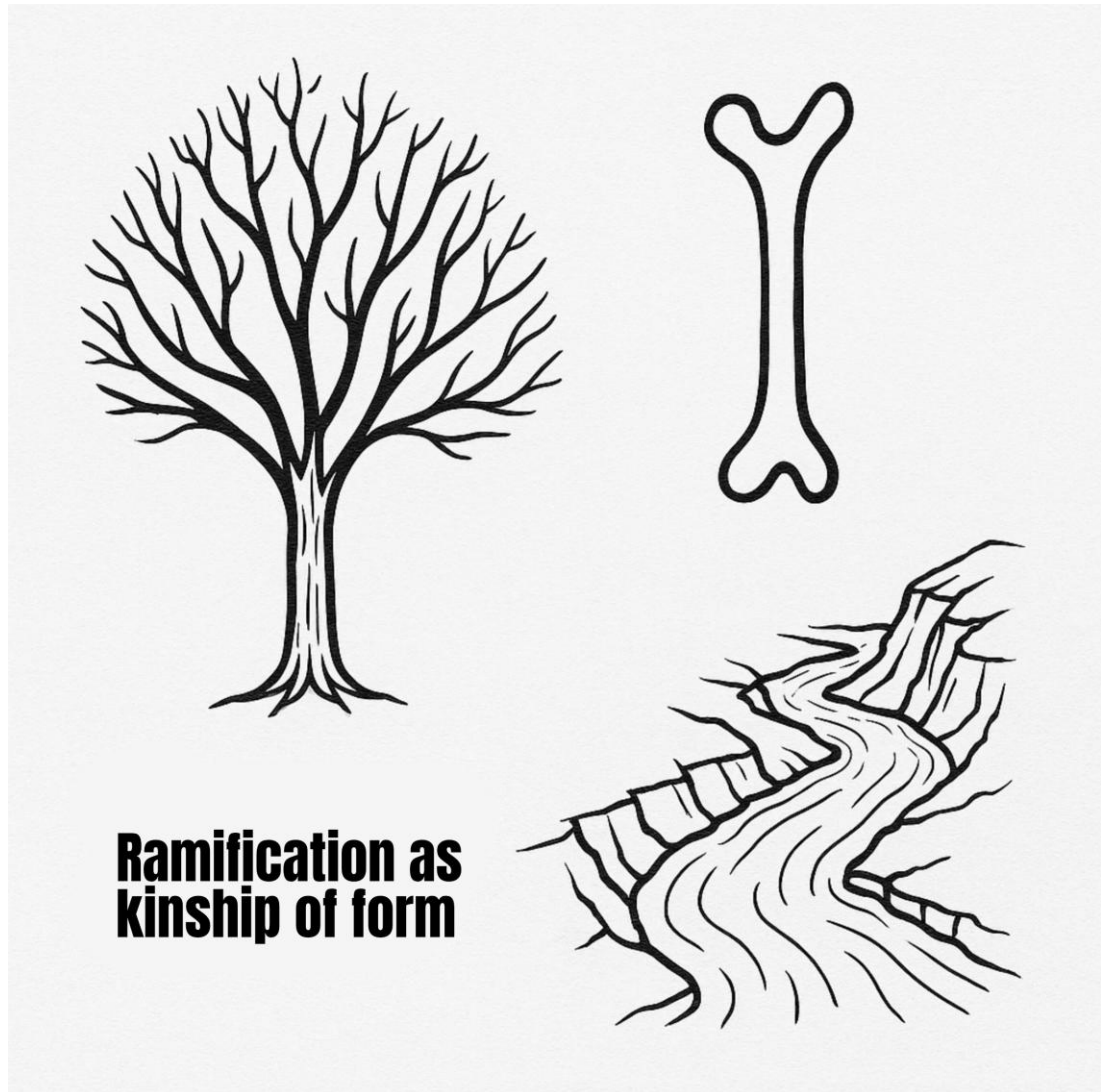
When complexity is permitted, meaning emerges. The experience of meaninglessness is not existential, but structural—the result of monotony and one-dimensionality. A person whose work integrates broader relational value will experience far more satisfaction than one who labours solely for the thing. Work, in this deeper sense, becomes a channel for autopoiesis—and the economy becomes an ecology of consciousness.

Every tree expresses structural principles also found in bone, in river deltas, in cloud formations, in the fractal geometry of lungs. Morphological patterns—branching, spiralling, bifurcation—are not isolated phenomena; they are recurring logics of becoming. But they disappear the moment we treat a tree as just a tree, as a dead object of use or symbol. The moment we reduce the world to discrete functions, we lose contact with its patterns of resonance.

Labour that focuses only on the job, the object, the task, loses this structural attunement. It cuts itself off from transversality, from aesthetic patterning, from intermodal sensing. The efficiency of nature lies not in simplification but in permeability, transposability, and self-similarity—principles that allow endless reuse without replication, differentiation without disintegration.

This is why labour is always more than task-execution: it is movement, emotion, rhythm, body, relation. It is dance, not function. And it is also the reason why wage labour cannot access all human resources. It filters out the very complexity it requires. It amputates the polymorphic self. Hence the constant friction between gainful employment and the full human.

To work inside the wage logic is like asking a musician to stand still while performing. The whole symphony begins to tremble.



Observing the patterns by which the world is shaped makes the dysfunction of wage labour even more apparent—and simultaneously opens the horizon for an entirely different culture of work.

What was once achieved by moving matter can, in many cases, now be achieved by shifting perspective.

Yet, wage labour structurally blocks this shift. Its architecture—its norms, standards, and models—excludes the relational, integrative, and open-ended dimensions of labour. Capitalism disables access to the networked nature of reality because it is built upon objects, which stabilise ownership and hierarchy. The more an economy centres on things, and the less on open relations, the easier it becomes to consolidate unjust power structures. Workers are kept in place through their service to things.

But how can we design a truly democratic society if the only way to participate in shaping it—i.e., through the economy—is via a level of existence that is the least capable of relation? Wouldn't a society based on relational dynamics, not objectification, be far more democratic?

Here, the question is no longer: *What does something represent?* But rather: *What does it express?* Being becomes a referential space, not a fixed status—undermining marginalisation and dismantling hierarchy. Work becomes an ecological habitat, not a transactional task. This is a revolution, because for the first time, labour is understood not as a means to isolated ends, but as a pattern of action within a living system.

The futility of materialist labour is written on the faces of those who have toiled all their lives and still end up empty-handed. They know it. They feel it. But they cannot escape it—because the system's cruel logic is this: *If you'd worked harder, if you'd produced more, you'd have made it.* Millions internalise this and spend their lives blaming themselves, never seeing that the sole measurement of their actions in material terms is the very root of their alienation. They are haunted by the paradox: *I've always worked—but never really lived.* Because reducing the worker to an object implies reducing the person to their own impoverishment.

I've developed these ideas more extensively in *The Physics of the Poor*. What follows here is a condensed summary of key mechanisms introduced in the MNO model—insights that are essential to a deeper understanding of labour and emergence.

One key insight: the conventional project of “improving the world” often does not mean integrating pain or contradiction. It means removing them. Reality

is flattened by replacing pain with objects, and by erasing marginalised and neurodivergent perspectives.

This is why I argue that modern physics already has socially destructive consequences. In a metaphorical (and also political) sense, physics contributes to war and poverty by reducing reality to the material and suppressing relational injury. War is a form of radical denial of relation—the obsession with possession, domination, and border. It is the intoxication of the material, which is why killing can occur without empathy. The object becomes the sole reality.

That is why I re-wrote physics. I developed a new model that does not start from the object, but from nothingness. If nothingness is the base layer, then meaning arises from the individual's relational pattern with the world—not from external authority. The meaning of life is *life itself*. Value becomes relational expression, not obedience.

There are two ways to respond to pain:

1. **Anaesthesia:** interrupt the nerve; simplify the system; simulate well-being.
2. **Integration:** increase complexity; restore relation.

Capitalism chooses the first. Its entire project is to reduce the living space in order to reduce suffering—rather than to heal through relation. This is the core error.

Reintegrating missing patterns into labour also requires abandoning linear evolution. Things do not always move forward or upward. Labour must mediate between past and future, between the seen and the silenced.

The deep intelligence of life is not only selective—it is also restorative.

This is why the economy, too, must evolve beyond success as its organising principle. Success is inherently exclusionary. We must speak of form—of the quality of shape, not the size of outcome.

Here, Joseph Beuys becomes relevant. His concept of social sculpture—that every person shapes society through conscious action—shifts creativity from the object to the relation. Beuys' idea is mirrored in the MNO cycle:

- Indimergence: the singular impulse
- Submergence: relational dormancy
- Emergence: new collective form

Beuys sculpted social potential; the MNO model adds the temporal logic—a folding/unfolding of existence itself. In this sense, Beuys' social sculpture is not an artwork, but a proto-ecological system. Art becomes resonance work. Not representation. Not product. But an ongoing modelling of diversity, meaning, and mutual responsibility.

The rational-material world view is dominated by the idea that evolution is based on selection and the dominance of the strongest. A consequence of the transfer protocol. However, no one can objectively determine whether what is strong is actually what is useful, if the scope of observation is extended to the entire ecosystem. Social competences would be completely unnecessary if nature could construct itself solely on the principle of the strongest, to name just one example. If nature really were based solely on the principle of selection, so that only the best prevailed for the good of the whole, the planet would be dominated exclusively by one form of life. There would no longer be diverse ecosystems, but fewer. Although this is being done by humans today, the problems associated with this cannot be overlooked.

In nature, as previously discussed, balances are created in the form of cycles, as cycles enable dynamic equilibrium more reliably than polar principles such as good and bad, valuable or worthless, which tend to remain static. A cycle is an act of rounding-off, in which completion is attempted instead of taking the direct and shortest route to a goal. The act of completion, in which the large finds its counterpart in the small, is always a step of deviation from the straight path—and is never fully complete. Basically, it is not a closed circle, but a continuous spiral. These are processes of approximation, reflection, and subjective interpretations of the universal. This is how living organisms emerge—and at the same time, the ecosystem is protected from disintegration through excessive fragmentation.

C. S. Holling & Lance Gunderson – *Panarchy: Understanding Transformations in Human and Natural Systems* (2002) describe ecosystems as a recurring movement of growth → conservation → collapse → reorganisation. The triple movement of indimergence → submergence →

emergence described here is a cultural-economic analogue of these cycles. Stuart Kauffman – *At Home in the Universe* (1995) and Brian Goodwin – *How the Leopard Changed Its Spots* (1994) show that evolutionary dynamics arise from self-organisation and feedback, not just competition—thus providing the basis for an anti-linear or non-teleological model of evolution. Lynn Margulis & Dorion Sagan – *Acquiring Genomes* (2002) demonstrate that major evolutionary leaps often arise from fusion and symbiosis, rather than pure selection—supporting the argument that selection alone constitutes a narrative truncation.

Jason Moore – *Capitalism in the Web of Life* (2015) shows how capitalist extraction severs ecological feedback loops; submergence names precisely this tipping point in the system’s value structure. This contrasts with the classical idea of evolution as adaptation: the idea of breaking away from the weak so that only the best survive.

Jesper Hoffmeyer – *Biosemiotics: An Examination into the Signs of Life and the Life of Signs* (2008) legitimises the idea that relational intelligence (not isolated things) is the true bearer of meaning in biosystems. Francisco Varela and Evan Thompson – *The Embodied Mind* (1991) understand cognition as a cycle of involution and evolution, providing a cognitive basis for the logic of submergence.

The idea of adaptation as the main law of evolution is in fact a culturally distorted perception (e.g. patriarchal society). Integration is not the same as adaptation. Integration is open, while adaptation often involves denial. Nature does not strive for perfection—and in not being perfect, it remains perfectly alive in new ways. Understanding this paradox is essential.

A lizard living in the desert is not simply a creature that has adapted to harsh conditions—it is a form of life that enriches the desert, a complexifying presence. The lizard is an expansion of what appears to be a lifeless place—a colonisation by more complexity. But humans interpret the lizard like a bank employee who has developed heat-resistant armour to obey her boss. What some perceive as adaptation, others may see as a willingness to radically diverge. No animal is forced to remain in a single habitat. All birds could theoretically settle in Central Europe. All fish could crowd into the Indian Ocean. But they don’t. Life spreads out, localises, and creates protected, individual

ecosystems—each one a unique attempt to reproduce the larger whole on a small scale.

This is the only way transferability between ecosystems becomes possible—through sufficient diversity, generating energy from difference, which always seeks balance. This enables more complex metabolic processes, which in turn support more complex life forms. Nature generates maximal creative energy by creating differentiation and contrast. Yet it avoids pure polarity by continually breaking down the object. This is the deeper meaning of death: the prevention of finalisation. The completed becomes dangerous to the structure's vitality. Since nothing is lost in a cycle, the similar always returns in a new form. Everything contains everything else—as latent potential. This may sound philosophical, but it reflects a physical principle of form.

For Darwin and many of his contemporaries, the order of the world placed lions at the top and antelopes at the bottom—a linear, hierarchical model. Nature's creations behaved like citizens toward their king. But Darwin, too, was a child of his time.

Circulatory systems are essentially folds of the same pattern, repeated. As already mentioned, one could say nature designs according to an origami principle. This means a homogeneous distribution of structure and significance. When these principles are applied to human labour, they legitimise self-determined work. Such work never threatens the whole—as each individual fold increases the complexity of the overall form rather than diminishing it. A creation paradigm based on folding thus allows a much more humane view of labour than the classical, progress-driven models that seek to shape the future by cutting off the past.

I do not see the self-determined worker as a denier of conformity, but as a more intelligent form of participation and integration.

Andreas Pyka & Horst Hanusch – *Principles of Evolutionary Economic Theory* (2006) show that successful markets depend on variety + selection + retention. The cycle presented here adds a fourth phase: re-integration.

If all human action constitutes different folds of what is always the same, then everything has equal significance—because even the smallest part is not a fragment of nothingness, but a representation of a powerful order.



Two principles are essential for the integration and renaturalisation of the economy into a primary economy:

- Evolution (goal-directed expansion)
- Involution (open, integrating reconnection)

Today, only the principle of evolution is rewarded. But that is insufficient for designing a reality-responsive system. Because, as said before, this rewards us for ignoring the complexity of relationships in business and work. It's not only about what is created—but also about what is allowed, what already exists, what has a right to life. However, the wage labour system barely recognises the value of what already exists—only what is achieved through performance.

The evolutionary model unfolds outwardly, from one thing into the next. But over time, this would lead to a loss of reference. In a monocausal system, complexity decreases. The result would not be higher life forms—but lower ones. A wild boar, for example, might evolve to run faster over generations. But this specialisation would reduce diversity and complexity—ultimately making it less of a life form than before. A system cannot become more specialised without becoming narrower—and thus less useful to the ecosystem. It loses relational capacity. The same fate befalls the labourer, unlike the value-adding worker.

It is essential that every part of the whole can also represent the whole in its own way. In a very individual way.

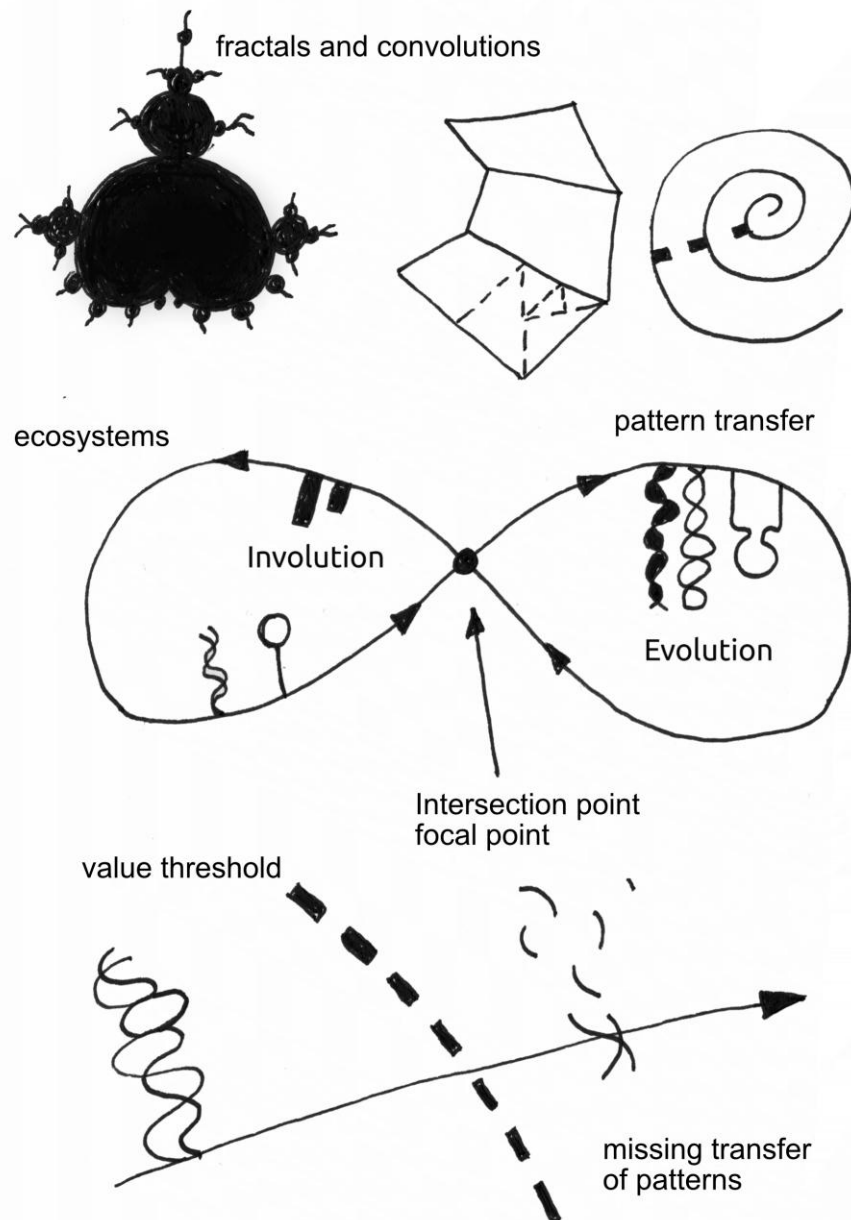
Relationship is nothing other than experiencing the universal in the particular.

An overbred hybrid chicken, for example, can only lay a lot of eggs, but hardly produces any meat. A broiler chicken only gets fat, but can hardly lay any eggs, let alone walk. As I said, you can't have diversity and excellence at the same time. A broiler chicken is largely isolated from genetic diversity through inbreeding. A pedigree chicken, on the other hand, can enable a broader spectrum of feedback depending on the changed situation in an ecosystem, so it contributes more to the ecosystem. It is popularly said that these chickens are more robust. By more robust, we mean that they are better able to cope with different experiences because they are more diverse. They enable transmissions for higher forms of order.

It is crucial to realise that you should not be nicer to your employees because it is human, but because this is where the real economic competence lies. Although this is not an unfamiliar idea for many people today, our economic structures are light years away from being able to fulfil it. The day has not yet come when a German worker will stand up and refuse to work, claiming the right to place their own work in a broader context of the environment and health because it is economically correct. If it were recognised as economically correct, this worker would not subsequently lose their job or be punished by the market for this attitude.

The following image shows how the pattern sequences of evolution and involution, of the seemingly relevant and irrelevant, of the central and the divergent are interwoven and thus the new always merges into the old as a pattern, the special is reconciled with the whole.

# EVOLUTION AND INVOLUTION



The real act of creation happens at the intersection, in the centre—not, as classical economics assumes, at the top right, at the end of goal-oriented labour. It is crucial to understand this. We can define success through one-sided

productivity, but we are compelled to live in this intersection—that is, with the shadows of what has been repressed: all the conflicts that then manifest on a personal, local, political, health-related, or social level.

At the same time, the intersection harbours unseen opportunities, as it is the point where all patterns overlap—a site of pattern transfer between different domains. Here, the overall form of reality remains inherently transferable.

The real economy takes place at this point of intersection—or at what I previously called the fixed point. This is where interlocking patterns coalesce into a larger image within the individual. This is the level where work should unfold—that is, the level it should refer to. This is the true point of origin of all meaningful labour. When work begins here, it becomes self-determined, because only the free individual knows what to do at this intersection. Each person experiences it slightly differently.

If work is allowed to unfold from this intersection or fixed point, rather than being solely projected toward a future or reduced to specialisation, the meaningfulness of work increases—as does the direct experience of reference and authentic relevance. Self-determined work thus constitutes a shift of labour into comprehensive reality, into the full-spectrum relationship between individual and world.

This may sound abstract. But since today's work is aligned with profit—and profit always lies in the future—attention is diverted away from the present, from dealing with and working through current conditions. The dominant question becomes: *What will this work yield?*—instead of: *What is the right work to do now, given all the factors at play in this specific situation?*

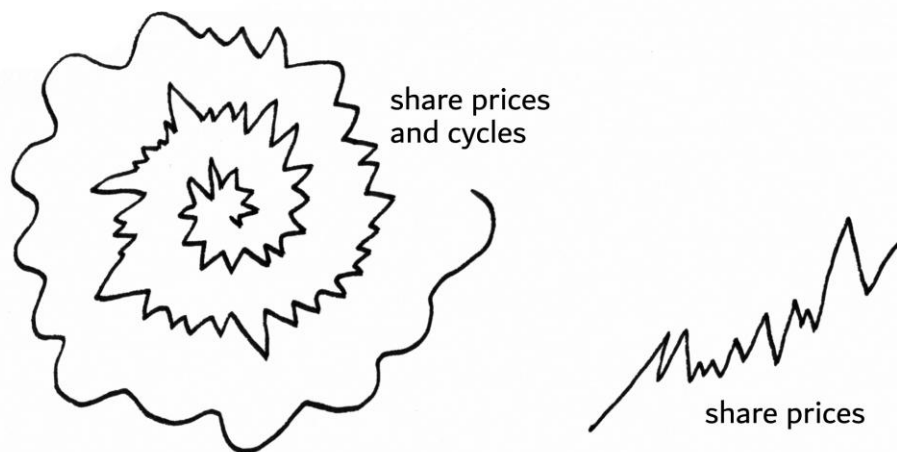
I realise that this will overwhelm many companies. But we must face the fact that an internal flaw in the system cannot be allowed to shape the next hundred years. Isolated value can no longer be the maxim for appropriate labour. Yes, this implies radical transformation. But there is no alternative if we want to protect both society and the environment from the fatal consequences of misdirected labour, and preserve a future for coming generations.

The radicalism and extremity with which my actions are viewed—within companies and in conflict with the state—correspond exactly to the scale of disruption and crisis that humanity already faces. Yes, what I am doing may

appear extreme. But after two decades of research, I am only reacting appropriately to the systemic realities that have revealed themselves.

In a company, this might initially mean nothing more than a shift in values. Family becomes more important than overtime. Commitment becomes more vital than ticking boxes. There will be fewer fixed rules—and more space for development. Of course, this will come at the expense of turnover. That sacrifice must be made. That's why we need a core value that justifies it. That's why we must develop an economic theory that shows how homogenising value leads to healthier design patterns, and why this holds more creative potential than conventional forms of gainful employment.

What would happen if stock market prices were drawn as spirals or circles instead of linear graphs? How would that change our attitude toward the economy? Every directional change would ultimately lead back to the origin. What *is* would be just as valuable as any small extension of it.



The company would revolve around an inner core, becoming increasingly integrated and expanding as a result. That would represent a completely different understanding of growth. Not only would the relationship between positive and negative be relativised—as in the previous example—but in this more complex sense, the most “successful” companies might be those whose graph describes the most intricate spiral: those that have integrated the greatest wealth of the world—both positive and negative experiences of existence—in a uniquely resonant way.

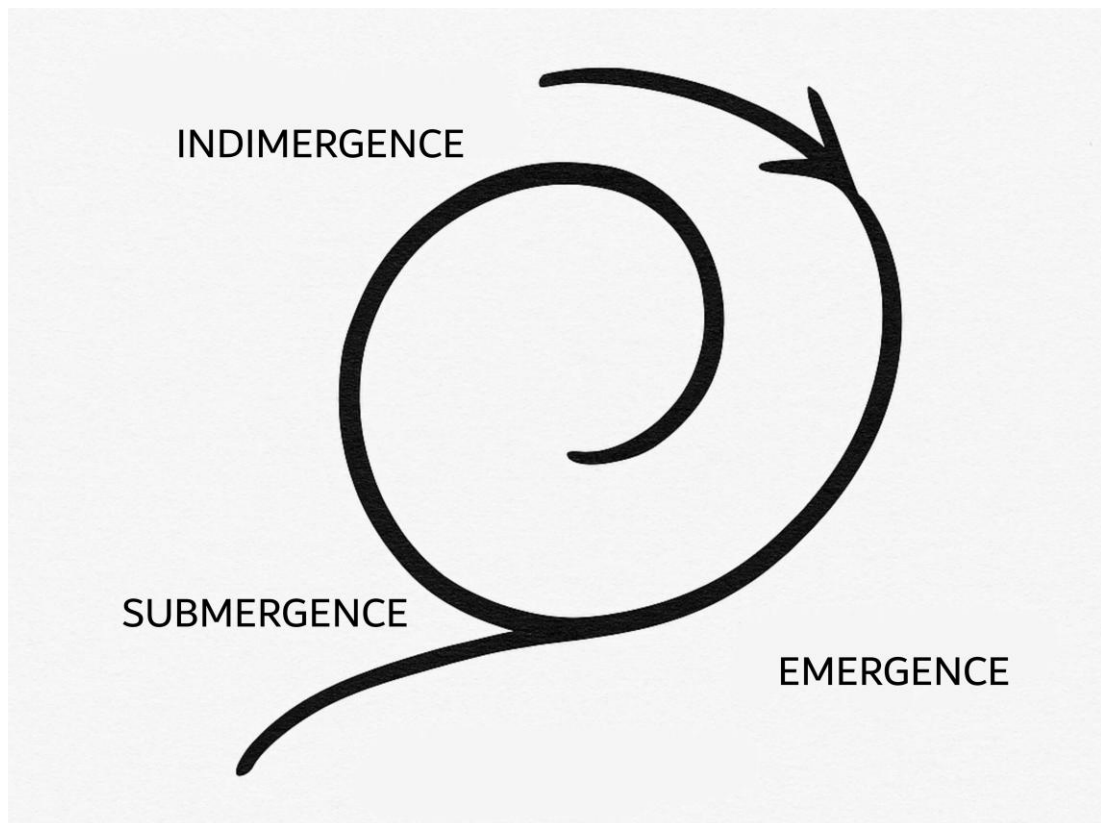
It is in the nature of things that hierarchies can hardly be represented in this form, because the “larger” such companies become, the more their contours would dissolve into the world. They would *become* the world—not as a dominant one-sidedness, but because the boundaries of their identities would open up. There would be no point in cementing a company in its corporate identity (CI); instead, individuals—the people—would come increasingly to the fore.

However, evolution and involution are only two of the principles relevant to the sequence of pattern formation in the creation and shaping of reality and the world.

Let us return to the three central pattern-formation principles to illustrate the necessity of the cycle once more. These are: indimergence, submergence, and emergence. While evolution and involution describe the necessity of integrating further layers into linear, causal development to prevent the disintegration of relational structures, indimergence, submergence, and emergence describe how pattern formation within a system negotiates a balance between relevance and irrelevance, foreground and background, individual and society, central and peripheral.

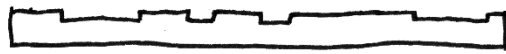
The question is: how can the *entire world* be valued while simultaneously allowing the *individual* a kind of focal clarity—like a camera—that enables singular relevance as the basis for high diversity?

What is needed is a dynamic reference to reality in the sphere of labour and world-making. Neither capitalism nor socialism have achieved this integration of panoramic overview and individual focus. Capitalism lacks the contextual integration of the larger whole; socialism lacks the capacity for individual resonance.



As previously illustrated in the MNO model, the following three forces create a cycle of value creation and moulding in nature and society, which is shown in the picture below as a pattern in the form of tyre treads. Submergence here would be like a worn tyre and indimergence like a brand new tyre.

# Mustererkennung



**Submergenz**  
Musterverflachung  
Auflösung



**Indimergenzenz**  
Isolierte Objekte  
keine Beziehungen



**Emergenz**  
Bezüge machen das  
Ganze zu mehr als  
die Summe der  
Einzelteile

The base of the relief forms the relationships and contextualisations between the individual parts of the profile. Thus, a pattern grid becomes recognisable in the relationships between the blocks, in which sometimes more isolated and thus standardisable things, and sometimes more relationships, emerge. This mechanism could also be compared to the creation of random images by making grains of sand vibrate on a plate. What matters here is the dynamic balance between isolated grains of sand, their distances and references, as well as the associative forms and interpretations that become recognisable in them—which, in their emergence, depict more than the sum of all parts.

All morphologies in nature are based on such sequences of patterns. The world can only be constructed if some things become sharper and others remain blurred—only then can a concrete form emerge that displaces another but requires references in order to create a context, a habitat. At the same time, association presupposes the existence of underlying patterns that are the same or self-similar in everything.

It is about the building blocks of reality creation, which are naturally related to the building blocks of the economy. Although it is always pretended that the economy *creates* reality, far too little attention is paid to the question of



how reality is created in the first place—and what kind of reality we are talking about here.

If the economy ignores these basic principles and then becomes the dominant shaper of social reality, problems arise that cannot be explained by economics but can certainly be explained by the natural pattern sequences of the development of reality.

These three principles exist in an interplay that needs to be understood, because the dominance of the secondary economy is making it work increasingly poorly.

Indimergence in itself only means that an object appears to be viewed in isolation from everything else. “Object” could also be replaced by “work”. This means that there are no links between things, and broad patterns of relationships disappear. Although this allows objects and values to be clearly labelled, if they remain isolated from any context, *permanent submergence*—i.e. the complete flattening of all patterns—occurs at the end of an indimergence phase.

This lack of relationship, which ultimately leads to flattening, is the logical consequence if you only look at isolated objects. For example: when only money counts and the environment means nothing. In other words: when the focus remains at the point of sharpness and does not consciously return into the blur in order to allow new structures to become visible again.

A stone is also a resonance phenomenon at the level of particles, and if we could look at the stone at this level, it would seem to us as if it were alive. The term “life” is essentially linked to the term “relationship”. An object that allows no—or only one—relationship is a relatively dead thing. In fact, nothing is probably dead, but the pattern sequences of reality construct them in gradations of greater or lesser density of reference. In this way, seemingly isolated habitats or products are created. Humans live in a habitat in which stones only appear as dead things, but other references are more strongly emphasised. Being human is a certain form of lack of relationship that causes a certain form of reality projection.

A certain form of reference limitation is therefore needed to allow the individual, the single thing, to emerge. But if isolation becomes too dominant,

reality does not become more concrete, more solid, more tangible—as is often assumed—but rather disorientation and a lack of alternatives occur. The energy in the system also decreases. This is precisely the phenomenon that we can observe everywhere in our society today. The more the capitalisation of all areas of life becomes established, the more powerlessness in the face of the world's problems, and the more disorientation spreads.

A high degree of materialism therefore sooner or later, leads to a blurred image of the world—to a fake—because things without a broad relationship cannot fulfil what they are claimed to be rigid objects *for*. Like the claim that capitalism creates a better world for all. The more material the world is, the less complex it is perceived to be—and the more complicated it appears. The loss of meaning is also a symptom of submergence, as a result of exaggerated indimergence. Materialism must always be followed by a lack of relationship, a hollowness of things, and thus a flattening of reality.

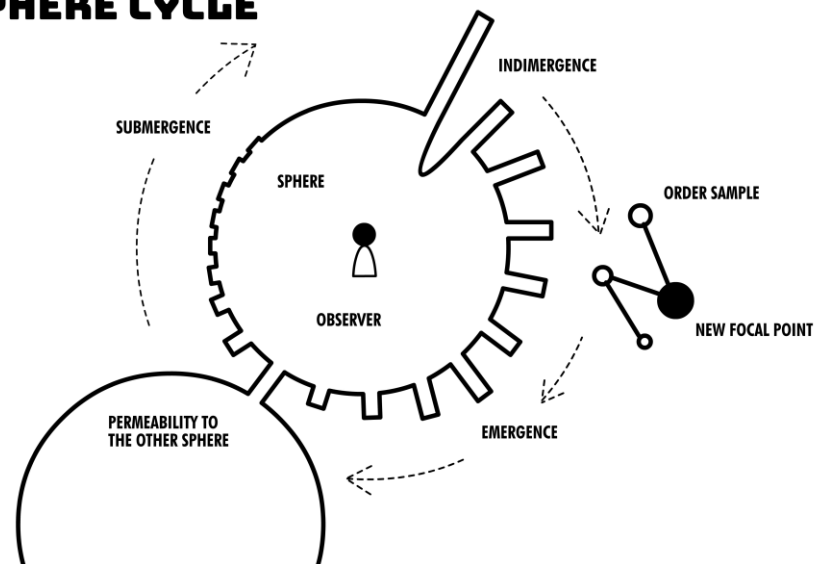
Of course, flattening (submergence) is also important in a circulatory system in order to break down structures—but it is not the only principle; it must find a balance with indimergence and emergence.

That is very important to realise.

It is crucial to understand that materialism really is a serious *creative weakness*, even if it is seen by many as a sign of high potency. Creative strength, on the other hand, lies in maintaining the alternation between object and open relationship, between creation and reintegration, between value and decay.

The following picture shows the freely rotating cycle of spheres through which the viewer—the human being—constantly rediscovers and unfolds the world. New patterns emerge, form objects, and disappear again to be reintegrated.

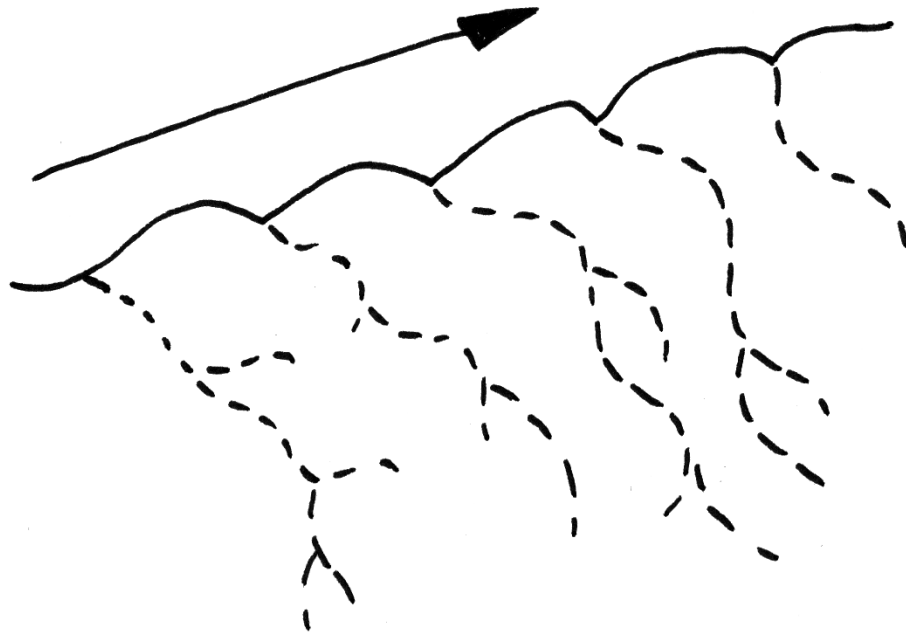
## THE SPHERE CYCLE



Most economists have no idea about this. They do not realise how capitalism must inevitably lead to the collapse of the world. They fail to see how the cycle is constantly obstructed by the persistent fixation on preserving the object and maintaining isolated value. They do not understand that owning something always simultaneously means losing it—unless one is able to let it go again.

Darwin, Hayek, and Milton Friedman were all wrong on one fundamental point: they assumed that the pursuit of the “best” would promote life. They failed to realise that this pursuit literally leads to devastation, because their elitist thinking is, at its core, a refusal of relationship. They remained entirely trapped in the mindset of the powerful—those who cannot see what happens outside of their interventions, because nothing is allowed to exist that they have not authorised.

As the following image shows, the so-called “invisible hand” of the free market is, in fact, an opportunist—a conservative stubbornness that has turned life into a one-way street, due to its lack of integrity and authentic self-awareness. Here we see how the decision for the “better” splits off more and more potential life paths and habitats. Each of these forks must be imagined as a supply route carrying developmental energy within itself.



Every decision along the capitalist market leads to the displacement of “undesirable” factors, which are depicted here like broad roots and branches. They can also be compared to Varela's concept of natural drift. The nutrients that should be supplied via a broad root system are no longer provided. Although growth is initially accelerated—like a plant fighting for survival and investing all its energy into a single act—it is inherently weak and vulnerable. Such a “rooted society” cannot serve as a habitat for others, a counterpart capable of generating emergence, diverse metabolic processes, or pluralistic markets.

In order to keep up in this competition, market participants behave fearfully and with prejudice and, as I said, reject contributive work.

Milton Friedman once wrote: *“The great merit of capitalism lies not in the accumulation of wealth, but in the multitude of opportunities it gives people to expand, develop, and improve their capabilities.”*

Only someone who began their career during wartime and belonged to the elite could make such a mistake. The decades in which the horror of the front was masked by a new refrigerator, and the patriarch was able to provide for the

family with hard and honest labour, led to the birth of the modern economy—with all its errors.

The gain in freedom described by Friedman did not result from capitalism, but from the circumstances of his time. After the two world wars, life flourished again and people could develop more freely. Less was regulated because the structures had to be rebuilt. Emergence prevailed—a condition that is lacking today, suffocated by the over-bureaucratization of a society that has been ruthlessly “improved” through efficiency and its narrow-minded, arrogantly objectified truths.

As a result, modern liberalism in the form of neoliberalism ultimately destroys the very freedoms it constantly claims to protect. In the end, neoliberalism leads back to new forms of socialism as a result of submergence. Socialism and capitalism are far more intertwined than previously assumed.

Now, there was also a certain degree of diversity at the beginning of capitalism. Initially, the variety of products increased—as can still be observed today with the emergence of new technologies—simply because many different decisions were made. Over time, however, categories flattened out, and value creation became confined within increasingly narrow value boundaries.

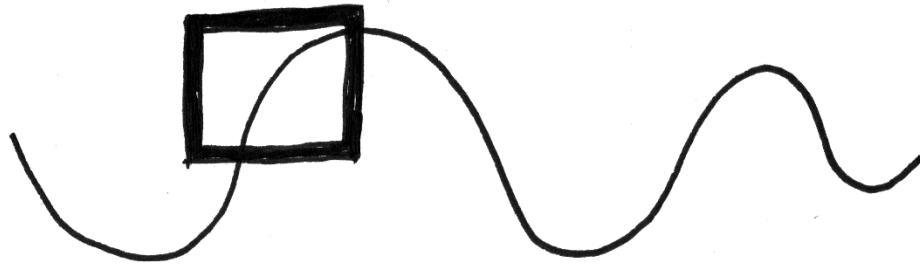
A “wrong” decision is no longer an alternative way of doing something worthwhile, but instead results in catastrophic failure in the market. Because what counts as “good” has become ever more narrowly defined.

This brings me back to the economist Schumpeter and his idea of *creative destruction*. As the submergence model shows in detail, material success apparently also implies the creative destruction of other structures—but without relational capacity and emergence, no truly creative new beginning, no expansion, no qualitative growth can emerge from destruction. With every act of destruction, the system grows smaller and narrower, falling into fear and rigidity.

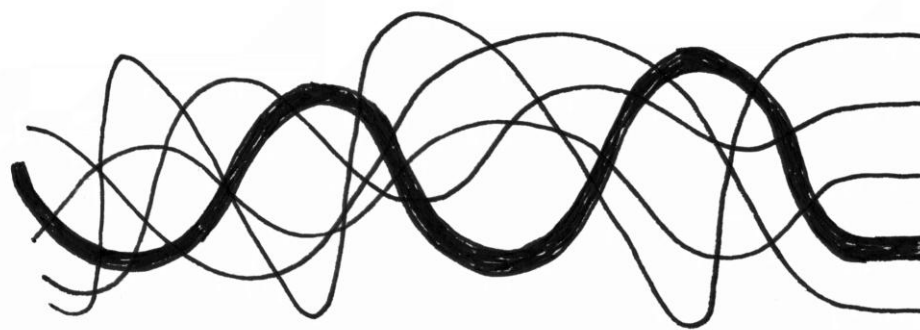
This is why our world is, seemingly, at the peak of success—but simultaneously at the peak of global fear and disorientation.

Finally, I would like to show two images that illustrate how the cycle of the spheres nourishes the entire ecosystem with a multitude of feedback loops. The first image shows the truncated wave of the modern economy. Here, only

one section counts: from bottom left to top right—this is also the logic of the stock markets. Only evolution counts, while the descent necessary for involution is denied.

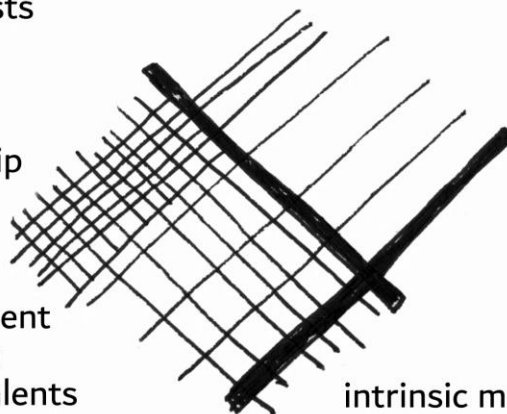


The next image reveals a modulated wave that occurs when the spherical cycle is allowed to rotate freely.



free interests  
social  
research  
needs  
relationship

environment  
health  
personal talents



intrinsic motivation

In the modulated wave, extremes subside in favour of pluralism. Those who fail here do not fall through the cracks, because all areas of life hold value. Not always the same value, but they form a concrete reference to life. The modulated wave is the natural social system and the true foundation of every ecosystem. It explains why an unconditional basic income, which I will address later, would likely only be necessary in the secondary economy—but could be replaced in the primary economy by the experience of relevance and broad value creation processes through contributive labour. That would be the real “free market”: a market without filtration through a hierarchically defined concept of success.

Instead of the many attempts to correct dysfunctional behaviour—as tried in the eco-social market economy, where a strong state absorbs the victims of the market and implements top-down compensation mechanisms (which only function, if at all, in countries with a very high level of prosperity)—what emerges here is a pluralist market economy, whose social apparatus lies in the fundamental revaluation of human beings. This could be a new and viable path, especially for countries that cannot afford a conventional welfare state.

I would now like to address a central aspect of the human condition that is fundamentally misunderstood in our world: free will. It is time to recognise it as the true foundation of the market—but to view it in a more differentiated way, as a quality beyond neoliberal egoism. There is far more social power in free will than is commonly assumed. It enables people to overcome their alienation from themselves and from nature. Free will is a core force in self-determined labour—and it must be understood as such.

## Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The submergence cycle provides a choreographic template for process art: performances or installations can embody the periodic folding-unfolding of systems instead of illustrating linear narratives of progress. Art becomes a living model of panarchy that visualises moments of stagnation, integration and re-elevation, thus rethinking Beuys' “social sculpture” as a cyclical ecopoiesis.

— Critical Autism Studies: Autistic monotropy fits organically into the convolutional model: hyperfocus = indimergence, withdrawal = submergence, shared specialised knowledge = emergence. The chapter lends systemic legitimacy to this cognitive rhythm and shows how neurodivergent cycles of work and perception can function as early warning sensors and innovation cores in complex societies.

### ***Free Will – The Worker’s Mature Engagement with Reality***

In democracy, free will is a valuable asset, and yet it is largely misunderstood, manipulated, buried—and hardly taken into account, especially in the concept of work. Only the free choice of profession or free entrepreneurship remains as an expression of personal freedom. But as soon as a person has a permanent job, that freedom usually ends. As already described above, this is primarily due to the fact that free will cannot develop authentically in the isolation of a job—cut off from complex existence. Instead, it turns into a drive, a compulsion, a form of substitute satisfaction.

It therefore makes sense to take a closer look at free will and to visualise how it contributes far more to the whole within self-determined work than obedience within gainful employment ever could. If we want to strengthen self-determined work, we must begin to re-legitimise free will.

Edward Deci & Richard Ryan’s *Self-Determination Theory* (2000 ff.) shows empirically that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are prerequisites for meaningful, sustainable performance—that is, for the “authentic will” in self-determined work.

Frithjof Bergmann’s *Neue Arbeit, neue Kultur* (1984 ff.) echoes this with his question: “What do you really, really want to do?”—placing subjective will at the centre of productive activity.

Hannah Arendt’s *Vita activa / The Human Condition* (1958) insists on a public sphere for spontaneous, non-purpose-driven action—a free will beyond the script of the market.



Hartmut Rosa's *Resonanz* (2016) describes successful relations to the world as dialogical resonance; heteronomy in jobs leads to a "silent" world. Axel Honneth's *Struggle for Recognition* (1994) explains how the will atrophies without social recognition of one's subjective contribution; obedience displaces integrity.

Byung-Chul Han's *The Burnout Society* (2010) shows how neoliberal self-compulsion exhausts subjectivity; work becomes coerced self-optimisation. Francisco Varela and Evan Thompson's *The Embodied Mind* (1991) emphasise, through neurophenomenology, that understanding arises from embodied subjectivity; objectified will is cognitively impoverished. Robert Kegan's *In Over Our Heads* (1994) explains that mature individuals own their volition rather than being owned by it—a parallel to the "mature reality reference" I describe.

Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom* (1999) defines freedom not as mere options, but as real opportunities for realisation—echoing my critique of the market's "objectified" compulsion to choose. Until now, people have mostly engaged with the world through two lenses: the objective and the subjective. Yet due to the structural weakening of relationality in favour of the object—which feels no pain—political, scientific, and economic action since the Enlightenment has been dominated by objectified, de-relationalised thinking, as described in the previous chapters.

The subjective, as a prerequisite for free will—as the basic right to independently experienced reality and individualised life—remains undervalued in economics. Subjective will is not recognised as a vital mode of contribution within a pluralistic ecosystem. It is not understood that the more complex patterns of reality are fundamentally constructed through the subjective, which allows for greater value creation, co-determination, and co-design.

Instead, the individual's contribution is often constructed solely through the renunciation of free will. What a person wants and what they "deserve" appear to be two separate things. Above all, free will is only legitimised in its objectified form—thus excluding any comprehensive notion of freedom. This constructs a world that is meant to be "the best of all possible worlds," but only by ignoring or simplifying people's wills to suit a fabricated collective ideal.

The reduction and centralisation of economic objectives simultaneously reduces meaning, which—authentically—can only be generated through the integration of the subjective. The subjective becomes devalued meaning, unwanted life.

This devaluation occurs through the higher valuation of measurable, objectifiable will—a will that is considered “free” only insofar as it chooses between options predetermined from above: good vs. bad, right vs. wrong, superior vs. inferior. In such a structure, the answer is always already inscribed in the question. The pressure to succeed ensures that the will never really decides, but merely selects.

Objectified volition is always weakly motivated and must therefore be externally incentivised through wages for it to occur at all. The will that emerges from the subjective, on the other hand, carries the more complex structures of reality and offers access to entirely different creative forces and potentials. But this requires accepting that we live in a pluralistic reality—and that the “objective” can only reflect the world as seen through objects.

“Service” is nothing other than objectified action, severed from individual reference. All of this renders the worker passive toward their own volition. In such work, one does not appropriate the world through experience; one does not become a bearer of complexity.

Without a subjective perspective, intrinsic motivation becomes impossible, because the personal motive and the meaningful pattern are missing. But what is the subjective? In our society, it often appears like a garbage bin for everything that is not considered objective. Yet in truth, the subjective is the attempt to consciously and deliberately express the whole in a personal deviation. It is the individual's unique effort to construct the world.

The subjective only becomes meaningful if it can be integrated. If it remains isolated, it appears worthless and without reference. Subjectivity cannot be realised without a broader capacity for relation—without culture, without open exchange. This is why, in an objectified world, the objective always dominates: it doesn't need any of that to be recognised as “real.”

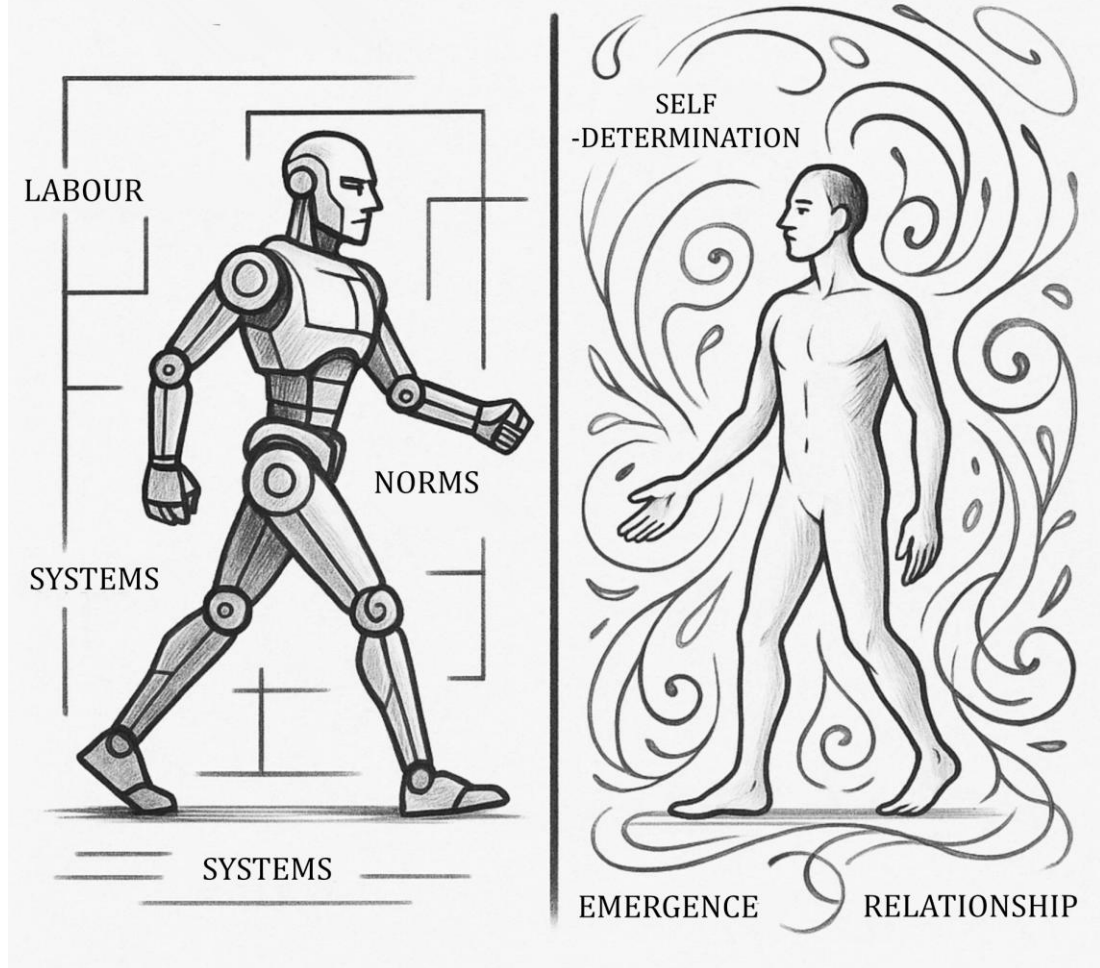
All gainful employment is therefore directed at the objectively measurable. And the more it adheres to this principle, the more forbidden and devalued

subjective labour becomes. The consequence: the worker's will degenerates into a celebrated act of renunciation. And perversely, doing work you *don't* want to do becomes the gold standard of economic utility. The less desirable the work, the more valuable it is considered. Often, the higher the wages demanded.

As I've said before, this mechanism primarily serves the privileged, because it enforces the one-sided causality of labour as obedience to money—and thus ensures that only *one* kind of will survives.

Only the subjective in the condensation of will and experience prevents the closure of the world and thus the submergence in the ecosystem. If we want to prevent society from losing touch with reality, we need to strengthen the subjectivity of will and experience in our consciousness, because only this leads to a more complex image of reality and thus to more intelligent patterns. However, this is considered an unusual approach today, as it is thought that the objectification of all thinking makes it possible to depict more reality. This is actually not the case, because it only simplifies the mass of judgement.

## OBJEKTIVE WILL VS. MATURE WILL



Without the many references rooted in the subjective—references for which no legitimised terms seem to exist—people are forced to orient themselves by the externally defined actions of others. In the face of alienated object references, they lose the direct connection to their authentic will within their own actions. Gainful employment survives only because subjective action is systemically devalued. In a certain sense, gainful employment serves the purpose of assigning self-determined work to a tainted private sphere, thereby marginalising its significance in the broader ecosystem.

Certainly, the Enlightenment also brought about self-determination and liberation from irrational power relations. Yet in doing so, it also negatively coloured many other forms of reference without which human beings cannot

develop free will. The subjective—misused by older regimes of power as total egoism, which in fact does not represent subjectivity but rather a subjective view inflated into a totalitarian objectivity—was simply removed from reality as a legitimate principle of the individual, rather than opened up as a personal creative space. People were not allowed to develop their own diverse connections to reality or to cultivate the intelligence that lives within them.

The basic experience of today's self-determined workers is that they are perpetually not taken seriously—as if they were operating outside the “real world.” Yet the supposedly real world is not complete without what is expressed in self-determined labour. It is only a simulation of value.

Today, the will that cannot be objectified is structurally disenfranchised. Outside of psychotherapy, the system neither addresses nor presupposes a truly free expression of will. Instead, it offers only limited decision-making processes—usually in the form of dualistic oppositions that can be easily categorised: the choice between two brands of shoes, two fast-food chains. Countless other categories, or entire contexts for expressing volition, remain suppressed by this flattening of patterns.

If an injured emotion is to be recognised as legitimate in this society, it must first be transformed into a measurable quantity. But this already constitutes a form of humiliation—a devaluation of the victim's reality. In isolation—and objectification is always isolation—free will cannot be expressed. It is not a binary decision leading to a result; it is a multidimensional process. It is, in essence, an internal market composed of diverse relational connections and metabolic processes. It is an inner negotiation of value and meaning, of force and balance, of alignment and boundary. That is why the question of what a person really wants may be the most difficult of all.

This question must first be translated, because for an outsider it is difficult to grasp the full complexity of the situation from which it arises. Who is the “I” that wants what? From which aspect of being does the desire emerge? As a worker, a person, or a relational subject? What someone wants in the role of customer or worker seems clarified by the purchase decision or the execution of a task. But buried beneath that is a broader creative potential: the permission not to know what one wants, in order to experience what is—and how it is—before deciding.

This is why I explore free will in such depth: because if its significance for shaping the world is not understood, self-determined work is always misinterpreted as egoism, as work refusal. For many, my subjective work appears to be work on nothing. Once again, the transfer protocol strikes mercilessly, and the federal government rolls over twenty years of my fine-grained analysis and lived suffering like a tank—because it has no respect for the subjective, for the will and for experience. It does not acknowledge their systemic relevance because it is itself trapped in a submergent system—too primitive to grasp the more complex order of self-determined work. The members of the federal government are themselves caught in one-dimensional jobs.

It is precisely the question of free will in the context of poverty that leads to a widespread error: the belief that the free will of the poor is itself a flaw—that their will led them into poverty. Rather than recognising how it is the objective-oriented norms of flattening and exclusion that play the decisive role. The question of what the poor *really* want is therefore the central question. If they ask it deeply enough, they will pierce through the entire system. I would go so far as to say that poverty cannot be overcome unless the poor live their free will, rather than adapting their behaviour in exchange for handouts.

It is essential that poor people act *authentically* from within their subjective situation. Only in this way can their reality become visible and expand the operative base of society as a whole. Patterns that were previously invisible come to light. The most important task of the unemployed is to work on their free will. Only through this can they experience wealth via self-valorisation. But in order to do this, they must be allowed to perceive their actual reality.

In my research, I have therefore sought—and found—a way to dissolve the rigid subject-object dichotomy and create a new differentiation of human behaviour. A concept beyond subject and object has emerged. I call it the *tripartite nature* of experiencing and shaping reality—or simply: *the big three*. These consist of will, experience, and external object definition. This is no longer a duality, but a triadic structure. All three axes are essential, and unlike the old binary, none is unilaterally devalued.

The result is an open, dynamic experience of reality—one that cannot become rigid but is always transcending inward and outward. This constitutes a more mature model of reality-identity.

Only then does a deeper integration of free will become conceivable at all.

A central thesis of the “synaesthetic science” I have developed is the proposition that *every statement is correct*. The question is how it is to be understood. In this way, the diverse living spaces of human beings unfold, and “truth” becomes a relative—but not arbitrary—position. It is ultimately an outdated idea that the world must agree on a single truth, when in fact it could live far more humanely with multiple truths. This would generate more space for life, more answers, more possibilities, and more organisational patterns—thus enabling more complex, more intelligent life forms within an ecosystem.

The “big three” generate open relationships between the experience of a situation, individual will, and object definition. The question is no longer whether something can be objectively proven, but rather: *How does the definition of objects shift in relation to the experienced situation and the free will expressed within it?*

These three factors are interdependent and co-constitutive. At the same time, object definition transforms experience, and thereby also the will—and vice versa. No one can simply be “wrong” just because a situation is officially labelled as fair, even though they experience it differently and want something other than the prescribed balance. This doesn’t lead to solipsism or fantasy but instead forces reality to become a *space of negotiation, of living, of shaping*—something the “objective” world alone cannot offer. In my view, tripartism—or models akin to it—should be the foundation of any open market.

A person may want something, shaped by immediate experience, which in turn alters how they encounter and define reality from the outside. Yet this experience cannot be objectified. I may want a specific job, and in the process of doing it, experience aspects that don’t fit. I might redefine them, alter my behaviour, or invent an entirely new profession. In the old paradigm of object and subject, the subjective perspective counts for nothing. One is left with a problem but no permission to solve it autonomously. There is, in essence, a ban on both work and meaning.

Only when I am permitted to experience and see a situation individually do I stand at the threshold between evolution and involution—within a personally constructed context of meaning—from which I can begin my comprehensive work without being cast out of the world. Much of the labour that remains unseen today, or actively repressed, is rooted in dimensions that can only be accessed through subjective experience. The more gainful employment is objectified, the more reality and relationality are lost. That is why I do not want to be a “professional.” I want to be an amateur. Only by remaining an amateur can I stay alert and directly connected to the world through my work. Only then will my lived situation count in production and world-making.

Labour pioneer Frithjof Bergmann spent much time asking what people “really, really” want. In my experience, he often left this question open in lectures and conversations, pointing out that it required a long process. He was right. But perhaps the “big three” offer a more accessible path. Most importantly, it must be understood that *free will*, as I conceive it, does not occur in isolation from the world but is the *precondition* for real integration into it. It enables the formation of broader patterns through which we perceive the world more deeply. This reconfigures the concept of labour: the question of *situation-appropriate, self-determined action* becomes more relevant than that of “service.” And this action must arise from individual experience or from the experience of injustice, leading to a renegotiation of conditions.

Today, we have corporations that manufacture in a narrow-minded way while ignoring all the problems that surround them—because workers are not permitted to integrate their subjective experience into production. Subjective input is not recognised. Workers are not allowed to alter the definition of the object, to appropriate it, even though it is they who do the work. They are not allowed to want something other than what management dictates. As a result, today’s working world is a workspace from which a vast portion of human labour is excluded—and this exclusion re-emerges in society as hidden conflict, fuelling many of the crises we face today.

The accusation that one “only wants to work on what one wants” becomes absurd, especially in the face of so many suppressed grievances. For what else should we prioritise, if not precisely that? Nature wants my free will – because that is what makes it a holistically integrated whole. Free will becomes



problematic only when it is *objectively isolated* or *subjectively objectivised*—that is, when it closes itself off to pluralism.

Companies often ask me in advance what I want to do. What do I want to offer? What do I want to develop within their structure? But it's not possible to define what one wants to do *outside* or *in advance* of the work—because the answer only emerges *within* the work. I cannot objectify my action in advance or make it assessable in a fixed way. Companies find this approach “inappropriate” because they are not accustomed to it. But it is time to see things differently.

The statement that *free will is clarified in work* must not be mistaken for a defence of conventional wage labour. What is meant is not gainful employment in the systemic sense, but work as an *ontological activity*: as a relationship between self and world, between intention and resonance. The bourgeois-capitalist interpretation of labour—as an alienable unit of performance in an exchange transaction—is, in itself, a form of impoverishment of the concept of will. In truth, will becomes clarified where people can actively follow their internal impulse, their meaning-structure, their embodied knowledge—and evolve through the feedback of the world. Where this is obstructed—by heteronomy, algorithmically timed workflows, or market exploitation—it is not freedom that arises, but *dissociation*.

Free will is clarified through work—but *only if that work allows the subject to unfold*.

In her political philosophy, Hannah Arendt called for a public space beyond the market. It is high time her words were followed by actions.

Free will is not a subject of consideration in the realm of gainful employment. But it should be. Otherwise, we are working past reality itself and shrinking our collective living space, rather than cultivating greater richness. Self-determined work is not just a right. It is an ethical imperative.

Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The chapter turns authentic will into artistic material: performances and process installations can show how subjectivity is encapsulated in jobs and exposed through aesthetic intervention. Art thus becomes an exercise in a “public space of will” — in Arendt’s sense, a place where work becomes capable of dialogue and resonance again.

— Critical Autism Studies: The focus on integral self-will reflects neurodivergent experience: autistic people often refuse to mask in order to maintain a coherent self-world relationship. The chapter validates this attitude as an epistemological resource — its persistence shows where the acquisition system structurally suppresses the mature, body-bound will and thus impoverishes its own complexity.

## **Enactive Consequences of the Self-Determined Worker: On the Autist's Inability to Ignore Problems Without Transforming Them into New Forms of Work**

### ***What does the Radical Worker want?***

My conflict with the federal government over the future of labour has become my work.

If this book reaches a broad audience, I hope it will help expose the crimes committed not only against the poor, but also against every worker. As an autistic person with PDA (Pathological Demand Avoidance), it is impossible for me to work without becoming a *Radical Worker* in the face of the problems revealed here. I am compelled to respond to patterns—even if the state forbids such a response. But this response is essential to my integrity as a human being, as an artist, and as an autistic person.

I could never have done this work in a paid job. In a regular job, I would never have found the intrinsic motivation to research for twenty years without financial reward. In a job, I would always have feared losing that job. So the question must be: What is the value of my form of work? What good is it that I am different? What is my autistic-artistic contribution to the world?

Once again, the system has tried to drive a wedge between self-determined labour and the compulsion to work. And that, in itself, is revealing. It shows how unsovereign the economic system really is: it tolerates no relevance outside its own logic. No generosity. Every deviation is perceived as an attack.

When something is wrong, I say as an autistic person: then it is wrong. Then it cannot be right as an action. Then society must change. I'm like Greta

Thunberg, who said before the UN Climate Action Summit on 23 September 2019:

*“You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I’m one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are at the beginning of a mass extinction. And all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!”*

It is no coincidence that many whistleblowers are autistic or otherwise neurodivergent—Julian Assange, Dr Peter Scott-Morgan, Chris Packham, Alissa Firsova, Heather Kavanagh, Yuri Duarte. All of them described the same impulse: the autistic congruence between internal values and external actions. For them, breaking the norm was not a choice, but the only ethically coherent path. This so-called *“tunnel ethic”*—a strict coherence of thought and action, meticulous attention to detail, and low tolerance for hypocrisy—often acts as a moral accelerant.

Although my activities involve years of research, refinement and professionalisation, they are still dismissed by the authorities and the state as mere leisure pursuits. My insistence on them is further criminalised. The system responds to hundreds of pages of submitted research with a single sentence:

*“It is reasonable for everyone to take up gainful employment.”* In this paradoxical framing, the state erases everything I present. It doesn’t engage with the work itself—it treats it as non-existent. At the same time, it portrays the very thing it demands—gainful employment—not as something valuable or meaningful, but as a burden to be endured. It doesn’t say that labour is *right*, only that it is *required*.

This reveals a deep cynicism at the heart of the system. It does not legitimise labour through its contributions, its value, or its transformative potential. Instead, it insists on labour as compulsion. It does not want to talk about *work*, only about *forcing people to work*.

David Graeber, in *Bullshit Jobs* (2018), has already shown that much of today’s labour exists solely to discipline people, not to create value. The Radical Worker rejects such absurdity and demands value labour instead.

Mario Tronti (*Operai e Capitale*, 1966) and Antonio Negri (in the *Autonomia* writings of the 1970s) were early voices calling for a refusal of alienated work and a reinvention of labour from below. Joseph Beuys' concept of *Social Sculpture* (1960s/70s) and Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) laid the foundations for understanding artistic action as a form of societal transformation. The Radical Worker stands exactly at this intersection between work and art.

Silvia Federici (*Re-enchanting the World*, 2018) revealed how unpaid care work sustains the world. The Radical Worker demands its recognition as a primary source of value.

Byung-Chul Han (*Müdigkeitsgesellschaft*, 2010) analysed internalised self-compulsion as a modern technique of domination. This is precisely why the Radical Worker says “no”—not out of laziness, but out of ethical necessity.

Philippe Van Parijs (*Real Freedom for All*, 1995) demonstrated that a basic income is essential to creating material space for self-determined labour—the economic precondition for the Radical Worker.

And finally, Robert Chapman (*Empire of Normality*, 2023) has shown that autistic integrity disrupts the logic of capitalist normativity. The Radical Worker, in this view, is also a neurodivergent figure, embodying a refusal to separate truth from action.

I have invested everything in my research—around one million euros in unpaid labour. I have uncovered social injustices on a significant scale. And now I am supposed to give it all up—be dispossessed, devalued, erased. With fatal consequences for my position in a capitalist labour market. Because if my work means nothing, then I have nothing to show for it.

The state, under Labour Minister Andrea Nahles, has declared that it no longer intends to support “*flawed business models*” within the social security system. Artists are explicitly named in this context. In official documents, the German government refers to artists as failed models of economic activity—as if culture were a defect.

Anyone who spends decades researching, creating, maintaining culture—on starvation wages and under constant fear of bureaucratic punishment—is now being forced by the federal government to sweep streets or work in a call centre. The intellectual, cultural, and ethical contribution of this labour is not just ignored—it is punished.

There is no public outcry. People are too exhausted by their own jobs to care. Alienation does its job: it disconnects us from the lives of others. Solidarity with values *beyond the pyramid* has been culturally dismantled.

Today, many demand an unconditional basic income so they can *finally* do what they really want to do. But politically, this is a weak position. It implies that what they want to do is not valuable enough to risk their existence for. But I did. I also have three children.

Those who accuse me of taking a freedom I am not “entitled” to—as an unemployed person, as a poor person—because I supposedly do “nothing” for society, must realise that this “nothing” is the same degrading nothingness once used against women, against Black people, against the colonised.

This argument—“you are worth nothing because your labour does not conform”—must never again be a legitimate response to human poverty or marginalisation.

## Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The Radical Worker shifts “labour” into the realm of social sculpture — every action becomes potentially formative art. This figure allows artistic practices that performatively recode value creation (commons labs, care installations, time experiments) and shows that aesthetic labour can be both an economic critique of the system and a social co-creation.

— Critical Autism Studies: As a labour subject, the Radical Worker insists on congruent meaning rather than normative conformity — a core autistic motif. His model validates hyperfocus, integrity ethics and routine flow as productive

counter-designs to alienated gainful employment and thus provides a neurodivergent blueprint for post-wage-based economies.

### ***The Oppositional Welfare System***

I now want to show how self-determined work can radically challenge and transform social systems. What, then, must be done to turn the situation around?

The Hartz IV system, introduced between 2003 and 2005, merged unemployment insurance with social welfare. Initially, it was framed as a measure to increase efficiency and to “activate” those previously reliant on welfare by pushing them into the labour market. In practice, however, this neoliberal construct redefined the poor as debtors to capital — a transformation masked by the cynical formula of “support and demand.”

Because a democratic state requires justification for coercion, and there is no legitimate basis for coercing the structurally disenfranchised, it fabricates a form of “support” which then serves as the justification for punitive demands. The original expropriation is thus concealed, and a new obligation is imposed under the pretext of assistance.

At the same time, this system reinforces the myth of gainful employment — that only those who “work” deserve a decent life, while poverty signifies personal failure or laziness.

This “support” is non-negotiable. If I refuse, I face sanctions. The punishment arises not from failing to work, but from failing to submit to mandatory support. The state must force me to accept its aid — because only then can it legitimise its demands.

In practice, the support measures are often inadequate or irrelevant. Yet they are imposed regardless of need or effect, because their real purpose is not empowerment, but control. They serve as a symbolic anchor for the ideology of poverty: that the poor are poor because they lack the right attitude, not because they have been structurally excluded.

A simple transfer of money for food — survival aid — would not suffice for the system, because basic sustenance is a human right. And human rights entail *no obligation of return*. They are protection claims, not performance contracts.

By staging “promotion” instead, the state bypasses the uncomfortable truth that low-wage work is often not enough to live on. It replaces systemic critique with moralising coercion and casts freedom itself — the freedom of the unemployed — as a threat. A grotesque paradox: the unemployed must be *forced* to receive help so that they can be *forced* to give something back.

This construction protects the myth of meritocracy. It prevents the breakdown of the wage-labour system by ensuring that no one receives money without strings attached — especially not those at the bottom. The closer welfare payments come to minimum wages, the more threatening they become to the low-wage sector. If people realised they could live without selling themselves, the system would unravel. That is why the state ensures that welfare remains as low as possible, even at the cost of human dignity. To maintain this precarious balance, it must constantly suggest that the poor *do not deserve* what they receive — that they are living off the backs of “real” workers.

The entire logic depends on this fiction: that high incomes are always the result of great effort, and poverty the result of failure. If this lie were ever pierced — if the poor were granted even minimal recognition or value — the entire edifice would be destabilised. And so, they are systematically denied all forms of achievement and social contribution. Even single parents, whose daily labour is undeniable, are reduced to statistical non-entities. The only thing that counts is numerical productivity — and only in forms legible to the state. It is deemed “fair” to ignore everything else.

While you can still decide not to apply for Hartz IV and thus die, the decision to live in the German social system automatically leads to an obligation. The amount of the wage or the extent of the subsidy says nothing about the extent of the obligation. As soon as a relationship of dependency exists, the obligation can be constructed and extended ad infinitum. In this way, just a few hundred euros a month can completely disenfranchise the unemployed.



It is striking that one cannot escape the paradigm of gainful employment. No world may be conceived that is not structured around it—because without this monopoly on value, gainful employment could no longer legitimise itself.

Even where it produces nothing, it is still framed as a duty. If not a duty to produce, then at least to obey. Even in poverty—where classical value creation is absent—the rules of service still apply. This reveals the true nature of the system: its demands are divorced from contribution. It is not value, but submission, that is enforced. The fulfilment of duty does not serve the common good—it suppresses autonomous value. It reduces the human capacity to contribute in order to protect “the goods” from the higher value of the human being.

This is why the authorities are not interested in my self-determined work. It does not entail obligation to them. That, and that alone, is the reason it is rejected—regardless of how convincingly I demonstrate its social benefit. The more clearly I show that I have invested a personal fortune in charitable projects, that my work could lift thousands out of poverty, the more they double down on *duty*. My actual value frightens them. They perceive it as a threat: that I might *be* valuable as a human being *beyond* the value they assign me.

They don’t care about value creation. In fact, *value creation without obligation* is a direct threat to their system—because it undermines the entire architecture of enforced hierarchy. Value, in this regime, must be stratified along fixed boundaries, always in relation to the top of the pyramid, and always subject to the one-sided will of an authority that dictates what is to be worked on.

Job Centres don’t distinguish between useful and harmful work. Any job is considered better than a self-determined project that helps thousands. Because I earn nothing from my work, it is classified as worthless—no matter how many lives it saves or transforms. If I were to discover a cure for AIDS, dedicate my entire life to it, and do so without pay, the system would still define me as a failure. It would send the bailiff to dig through my home and seize what little I have—because my account is in the red, and that red figure is the only metric that counts.

Any system that allows this is fundamentally fraudulent. That cannot be stated clearly enough.

Why is the state so brutal, so stubbornly blind? Because this is not about me. It's not about the poor. It's not even about those whose work goes unseen. It's about preserving the lie: that money and wealth reflect merit and performance in a one-to-one relationship. That lie protects the rich, manipulates the middle class, and destroys the poor—and anyone who dares to think differently.

This is not just a scandal. It is a declaration of bankruptcy for the entire economic order. It reveals its true purpose: to control human co-determination.

Fulfilling duty does not produce value. It does not generate wealth. It does not preserve ecosystems. If we want to question the legitimacy of gainful employment, we must first break with *duty*—because duty is what most forcefully obstructs our natural sense of meaningful contribution. It is crucial to understand: service, in its current form, is not a suitable basis for shaping a viable society or world.

The duty that today parades as the morality of labour is, in truth, a perversion of what *good work* should be.

Long before I went broke, I was writing books about labour, economics and creativity—but from a distance, they had little impact. As long as I had money, I was exempt from obligation. My refusal to obey the market had no consequences. A person with money may be idle or unproductive without facing accusation. The rich idler—the disengaged, non-contributing wealthy person—apparently poses no threat to the economic order. This reveals the double standard at the heart of capitalism: it has never been about integrating all creative forces, but—as today's world of work makes painfully clear—about excluding as many people as possible from meaningful participation on equal footing.

Only now, having lost everything, and with the state claiming a right to dictate the conditions of my labour, can I demonstrate why that is wrong. Only now can I show how self-determined work *cancels out* paid labour—by ignoring state commands, and instead generating far more valuable, radical work.

The fulfilment of duty cannot be a precondition for value creation—especially when deviation from the norm is the very principle by which living systems operate.

The case workers at the Job Centre are not prepared to receive multi-page essays on labour theory from me each week—essays that scientifically indict their institutional failures. They are not used to confident artists and researchers telling them, backed by the Constitution, that they have no right to interfere with this new form of labour, and that they can take their “integration agreement”—a term reeking of fascist language—and shove it wherever they like.

From now on, I ask one essential question, again and again:

Why are they fighting my work? By what right?

They never answer. They evade. But their aggression increases by the day.

Who will win this battle is still entirely undecided. I’ve written five books and countless open letters to build a coherent counter-argument. For five years, I’ve worked almost exclusively on exposing the structural violence of the Hartz IV system and on developing alternatives. Nobody pays me for this. And yet the question of the future of work is one of the defining issues of our time—exacerbated not only by digitalisation but by systemic exhaustion. The world of labour is undergoing seismic shifts.

In the early months of this conflict, the Berlin public prosecutor’s office quietly intervened to prevent a major escalation. Behind closed doors, a senior prosecutor apparently made it clear to the Job Centre—though I wasn’t present—that artists in a democracy cannot simply be sanctioned for being non-conformist or politically dissident.

They intervened to stop the state from driving me into homelessness simply for expressing a different concept of work—one that is explicitly protected under the constitutional right to artistic freedom.

I declared myself to the government as a *total work of art*. In the sense of individuation, I am indivisible. I exist only as a whole person—not as a role, not as a function.

Even if the Job Centre cannot intellectually process this approach, they were suddenly blocked in their actions. Because the prosecutor explicitly prohibited interference with the *form* of my work. Work, from that moment, no longer existed solely as standardised employment. It began to inhabit a grey zone between open-ended art and the radical redefinition of economic agency.

I made the *worker's relationship to society and the state* the subject of my art. This elevated my actions to the level of a *social experiment*. It allowed me to remain steadfast. I expanded the frame: from an individual case to a *proxy case*—one that renders visible the broader condition of the poor, the unemployed, the excluded. This act transformed an isolated struggle into a generally legible political discourse.

The concept of labour itself is now on trial.

I must emphasise that this protection under the framework of art does not in any way allow me to live a comfortable life. It merely shields me from homelessness—for now. The authorities continue to pursue my destruction by every conceivable means.

In recent weeks, I've achieved a partial victory. But it will not remain uncontested, because the implications for the state are profound. They fundamentally call into question the operations of the Job Centres, which still treat jobs as the only conceivable solution to poverty. In this new form of self-determined labour, the authorities are no longer permitted to evaluate my actions according to the dominant norms. They are condemned to passivity—unless they are prepared to stand up for the liberation of workers themselves, which their institutional roles explicitly prohibit.

A Job Centre official recently remarked that I had probably found a “loophole in the system”—one that would surely be closed soon. Once again, I encounter the ideological presumption built into the *transfer protocol*: the structural arrogance that allows the Job Centre to treat the unemployed as defective, guilty by default, and in permanent debt to the system. The state's false accusation of debt remains an unquestioned tool of humiliation and coercion. By refusing to accept it, I provoke the rage of a system that no longer has the intellectual resources—or the ethical foundation—to explain why only wage labour should count as “real” work. It can only respond with blind force.

More and more officials behave toward me like henchmen of a fascist order. The absurdity of their behaviour is increasingly justified by brutal interpretations and distortions of law. They speak of the need to “crack down.”

Above all, the system is marked by stupidity. It rejects intellectual discourse, flees from reflection, and operates solely through bureaucratic dogmatism.

The idea that valuable work can be done without generating profit—that the very coding of earnings may represent a fundamental injustice—is systematically suppressed. The sole objective is now to cast me as the guilty party.

I’ve been thrown out of the Job Centre multiple times. I’ve been subjected to outbursts of rage and verbal abuse from caseworkers.

Again and again, I hear that *the state tolerates me*, that *taxpayers finance me*, that *others have to work so that I can live on welfare*.

I now respond more publicly and more directly: They are lying. They are deceiving the public.

You can imagine how furious these civil servants become when I invert their narrative—when I say, truthfully, that *they live off me*. That *they live off my labour*. Off the artificial devaluation of what I produce.

Most of them cannot handle this reversal. They resort to twisting the facts until I appear as a criminal. Every new case officer, all the way up to the public prosecutor, refers to the same file—full of distortions, omissions, and lies. They cite it as justification for persecuting me with the full force of a povertist ideology.

Because the state reacts to criticism not with dialogue but with factual violence, there is no real discourse. No self-reflection. Every time I send a letter to the ministry, the response is not a reply but an escalation. The screws are tightened further. They never address my arguments—because they *cannot* refute them. All they can do is attempt to destroy me through strategic ignorance and bureaucratic bullying.

And sometimes, they succeed.

In fact, I suffer a serious health collapse as a direct result of this treatment. The government would rather make me ill than acknowledge the legitimacy of my work. And because I *am* ill—because I *do* need help—they get to once again frame themselves as the benevolent state, the magnanimous “giver,” rather than being exposed as systemic abusers.

The function of the *giver* is one of the most insidious mechanisms in the repertoire of modern politics. Every politician carries within them a fragment of the benevolent donor. This figure seemingly washes away the darker drives of power, because one can only give to others from a position of superiority. “Grant them total power,” they say, whenever the solution to the social question is instrumentalised to preserve status, identity, or nationhood. But power does not eradicate poverty—it produces it.

The *person in need*, the *helpless case*, is a self-valorising invention of the donor. The person’s suffering is reframed as an individual fate for which no one is to blame. Society, industry, politics—all remain innocent. In this narrative, we speak of *innocent need* only to construct its necessary counterpart: those who *refuse* to work. Those who assert autonomy in their experience of poverty and demand recognition of the injustice they endure.

The social system thus offers only two roles: one that absolves the state and economy while infantilising the victims, and another that criminalises all who refuse that role—those who, by thought or action, expose the system’s true mechanics. This framing has enabled the German government to systematically obscure the real causes of poverty for over a decade.

Sitting in a Job Centre office, I experience a grotesque inversion of reality. They are not interested in my story, my political struggle, my self-determined work. The only question is how quickly I can be removed—preferably through forced placement in a low-wage job. In their eyes, I am a child. From the system’s perspective, anyone poor or unemployed must be *in need of help*—a framing that, in the ideology of meritocracy, implies incapacity. This, in turn, legitimises paternalistic control. The state *wants* the poor to be powerless, because the entire function of poverty is to produce powerlessness.

As a thought experiment, place the great figures of human rights history—Rosa Parks, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr.—in front of a modern

German job mediator. Sooner or later, that mediator would sanction them into homelessness. Why? Because they are disobedient. Because they resist submission to a patriarchal-colonial order that enriches the few and impoverishes the many. Instead of complying, these figures point to the source of their suffering—which, in this metaphor, sits across from them at the Job Centre desk.

Later, I explain to a judge that Federal Labour Minister Andrea Nahles was extensively informed by me of the lethal consequences of the system for the poor and unemployed—and failed to act. People are dying under her administration. They suffer unbearably. They fall ill from systemic violence. But the ministry always deflects responsibility by claiming that the legal standard is being met—and therefore, nothing is amiss.

The judge responds that the minister has no *duty to guarantee*. She need not ensure that no one freezes to death on the streets under the sanctions regime. If someone dies, that is simply poverty—and not her responsibility. Such statements are grotesque, especially when considered in light of the *transfer protocol* reality. As if it were not the state itself that engineered and maintains this spiral of impoverishment. As if poverty were not politically produced.

The judge insists that state assistance is a *voluntary service*. Even when I explain that Hartz IV legislation is what exacerbates this extreme poverty—that it has created the conditions for wage dumping and lifelong precarity for all—the court sees no issue.

Suffering itself is denied to the poor. For suffering implies injustice, and injustice implies violence—but both are categorically denied as causes of poverty. This allows suffering itself to be marginalised. In the German constitutional state, the suffering of the poor is always *justified*. It is *right* that they suffer—because they do not deserve a good life. Therefore, those who inflict suffering upon them are, to some degree, always right.

Within the Job Centres, it sometimes even seems like a moral duty to torment the unemployed each morning. That is the prevailing logic: violence as virtue.

One of the darkest days of those years was the moment I realised that it was no longer merely a matter of exposing injustice, but of finding ways to prevent judges, prosecutors, and politicians from legally legitimising the extreme use of

violence against the poor, refugees, and the unemployed. Sadly, the Federal Constitutional Court has also failed in this regard—it has not shown itself to be humane.

For a long time, I believed that once people were confronted with the suffering, they would stop torturing the poor of their own accord. That belief now strikes me as naïve. These people *want* the poor to suffer and be punished—because that suffering makes them feel like better people. The white man, the colonial order, neoliberalism—none of them have inhibitions. They do not fear prosecution for their crimes. On the contrary: it is *through* their brutality that they gain social respectability.

While many people recoil from violence because they possess a conscience—because they are afraid of becoming monsters—these others have understood that becoming a monster *is* their path to impunity, even sanctification. Especially when no one reacts. When everyone stays silent. When no one wants to admit that their own comfort is built upon the destruction of others. These monsters know: the guilt of the bystanders will later serve as the cement of their power.

For me, this has become an essential answer to the question of how such horror becomes possible. It is not a random outburst of violence—it serves a function. The violence against the poor is the crucible from which the official narrative of “the good life” is forged. It legitimises the promise of a “better” society.

If a person in poverty does not internalise their alleged incapacity, they receive no support from the welfare system. The principle of subsidiarity states that the state should only help those who cannot help themselves. But this principle systematically excludes those who are made poor by the state and its economic ideology—because from within the prevailing paradigm, it *appears* that these people *could* help themselves, *if only they would conform*. They are told: become someone else, submit further, accept humiliation. Their *otherness* is framed as the problem.

Thus, the principle of subsidiarity enables the state to interpret the human right to food as conditional on the abandonment of self-determination.

Again, we see the compulsion to standardise. Human rights apply to *everyone*—not just to those who behave or assimilate. That is why it is so



essential to understand poverty not as an emergency, and the poor not as *people in need of help*, but as *victims of systemic violence*. The state may claim to support “help for self-help”, but it simultaneously crushes the poor—figuratively and sometimes literally. Applying the subsidiarity principle in this context denies basic rights to those who stand up for themselves—those who act instead of collapsing. This is the structural pattern wherever the state encounters poverty. In a democracy, this should be inconceivable.

When the diagnosis is false, the institution built on it is a fabrication—and when that fabrication must be maintained at all costs, violence will inevitably be used against those who think differently.

That is the grotesque nature of classism: it robs the poor of their reality. It forces them to function within a state-imposed simulation of usefulness. They are not permitted to tell their own story.

I have sent pages upon pages to prosecutors detailing my suffering — and it means nothing to them. They deny the causal link between my pain and the policies of the government or the structural effects of the modern economy. They do not see that I — like millions of other poor people — am systematically devalued by proxy. They do not see that it is precisely this devaluation of labour that leads to poverty. And they fail to understand that the “better work” they want me to perform — demanded with moral urgency — would only serve to further destroy the value of my life and that of others.

What I call the *third group* is not recognised. It consists of those who *want* to work, to contribute, but are *not allowed to*. They have been dispossessed, disenfranchised, and devalued — through multiple forms of discrimination (intersectionality): because of the colour of their skin, their religion, their beliefs, their way of being. Or simply because the criteria that would validate their talents have become invisible. This also includes all those working in industries where only precarious conditions exist. I am speaking of all those excluded by the *value barrier*.

This form of massive repression initially affects so-called *marginalised groups*, but as submergence deepens in society, it begins to reach broad swaths of the population. The *third group* is not composed of classic victims or people in need. Someone “in need” might be a doctor who, due to illness, can no longer

work — someone from a privileged group who has been temporarily marginalised for reasons beyond anyone's control. In such cases, no one is blamed. But the suffering of the poor is always blamed on the poor.

The *third group* is therefore the true source of social progress. Whoever understands this group — the largest among the poor — also understands how the economy must be fundamentally transformed if we are to begin solving the world's most urgent problems. This group should be the one political leaders listen to most closely. I myself belong to this third group and therefore see it as my duty to tell the federal government, as loudly as possible, that my poverty demonstrates one thing above all else: something is fundamentally wrong with the system.

That is why, drawing on years of lived experience with poverty and my research into a new concept of labour, I advocate for an *oppositional welfare system* — a system conceived as a counter-power to the state. This would mean that the knowledge and lived experience of the third group are actively used to reveal structural injustices to both society and politics. At the same time, this generates new forms of labour — work that is meaningful, socially relevant, and impactful even within conventional employment settings. A dynamic redistribution of diversity and dignity could begin here.

Numerous thinkers have laid the groundwork for such an oppositional framework:

Peter Kropotkin (*Mutual Aid*, 1902) and Dean Spade (*Mutual Aid*, 2020) offer historical and contemporary models of mutual self-help that bypass state and market.

Paul Singer (*Solidarity Economy*, 2002) and Jean-Louis Laville (2015) propose economies built on cooperation rather than competition.

Erik Olin Wright (*Envisioning Real Utopias*, 2010) offers tools for institutional counterpower such as cooperatives and commons.

Silke Helfrich & David Bollier (*Free, Fair and Alive*, 2019) demonstrate how commons-based governance can provide care and security beyond state or market control.

Nancy Fraser (*Cannibal Capitalism*, 2022) and Madeline Blau (*Community Care*, 2021) expose the systemic erasure of care work in gendered economies — and how oppositional networks fill these gaps.

Alberto Acosta (*Buen Vivir*, 2013) provides a Latin American vision of relational, post-neoliberal social organisation.

Federico Demaria et al. (*Degrowth: A Vocabulary*, 2014) sketch compact models of universal basic services and local cycles of provision.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (*Epistemologies of the South*, 2014) theorises legal and epistemic systems of the marginalised.

Antonio Negri and Mario Tronti (1960s–70s) developed the concept of *self-valorisation* and autonomous circuits of resistance.

Trebor Scholz (*Platform Cooperativism*, 2016) reimagines digital infrastructures as collective safety nets beyond Amazon and Uber.

Guy Standing (*Basic Income*, 2017) argues for unconditional income as a foundation for oppositional life and labour.

All these frameworks point toward a welfare system that challenges existing power structures and amplifies suppressed voices.

In an *oppositional welfare system*, the poor would finally gain a voice. It would no longer be possible for industry and politics to marginalise and silence critical thinkers by forcing them into submission through punitive welfare regimes like Hartz IV. Today, those who criticise unjust working conditions are quickly excluded from the labour market. And those excluded from the labour market are no longer heard. An oppositional social system would break that vicious cycle.

| DISCIPLINARY<br>SOCIAL SYSTEM                                                                                                                  | OPPOSITIONAL<br>SOCIAL SYSTEM                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sanction Logic</li> <li>• Market Dependency</li> <li>• Exclusion</li> <li>• Administration</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs-Orientation</li> <li>• Commons</li> <li>• Plurality</li> <li>• Co-Governance</li> </ul> |

I would like to begin with a central question — one that, if truly understood, could eventually spell the end of injustice. The question reveals more than most people are willing to see.

When Katja Kipping, then leader of Germany’s Left Party (Die Linke), asked the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs whether they had any data on what happened to individuals who had received a 100% Hartz IV sanction — i.e. were deprived of food and housing in the middle of winter — the ministry replied simply: “No.” This response remains without consequence to this day.

Even when I personally asked the Berlin Attorney General to investigate possible deaths under the Hartz IV regime, nothing happened.

If the population one day asks this question again — “*What exactly did you do there?*” — many politicians will find themselves in serious trouble. The only

reason these state-led crimes are not prosecuted is that the government's role in manufacturing poverty remains obscured. If this veil is lifted, it will become clear that the state's tactic of framing welfare denial as *voluntary aid* has resulted in the systematic deprivation of fundamental rights. People have been blackmailed into accepting total devaluation of their personhood.

If one finally understands that the true objective was never to solve poverty, but to preserve and institutionalise it, then every refusal, every sanction becomes a political crime — and in some cases, an act bordering on *murder*.

Given the *transfer protocol* — the bureaucratic record of state behaviour — no one can seriously argue that welfare is a voluntary benefit. It is not a discretionary payout of taxpayers' money to the needy, but rather a meagre and conditional compensation for massive structural theft — theft committed against the poor. In practice, denying this money is a strategy of attrition, a mechanism to erase the victims of that theft from public life.

The state says to the poor:

*“Do more than everyone else — even though what you do is worthless. Do what is designed to make you fail — and then bear all the blame. We will force you to become someone you are not, and when you inevitably fail, we will punish you for that too. If you resist, we will sanction you.”*

This is the state's fatal *double message* — a *double bind* directed at the global poor.

Relevant literature confirms that this condition is not new, nor unique. See:

- **“Social and Solidarity Economy”** (ILO, UNRISD): A line of international research on alternative economic and social infrastructures.
- **“Real Freedom”** (Philippe Van Parijs): A normative theory arguing that a basic income and “time prosperity” are prerequisites for true political agency.
- **“Rebel Cities”** (David Harvey, 2012): Describes urban commons and local counter-institutions as forms of resistance.
- **“Mutual Aid Disaster Relief”** (Disaster Studies): Demonstrates how grassroots networks often act faster,

more effectively, and more sustainably than state institutions.

These sources confirm that oppositional social systems are not utopian fantasies. They are empirically studied, theoretically grounded, and historically tested. What they all share is a commitment to *bottom-up protection*, *commons-based governance*, and *solidarity-driven reproduction* — as ways to fill the structural void left by the market-welfare hybrid.

What is crucial now is a *change in mindset* — away from obedience and toward opposition.

### Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The chapter frames solidarity-based self-care networks — mutual-aid kitchens, commons labs, platform co-ops — as social sculptures. Artistic practice here becomes field research that does not represent economic alternatives, but prototypes them in real life; performances materialise care, co-governance and shared risk as aesthetic action. Art thus functions as “infrastructure design” for counter-institutions.

— Critical Autism Studies: Oppositional social systems legitimise neurodivergent forms of mutual aid — peer support, sensory-adapted spaces, information co-ops — and break dependency on ableist authorities. The chapter shows how autistic community logics (openness, clarity of rules, reliability) can serve as structural models for solidarity economies; it turns neurodivergence into a resource for institutional re-foundation rather than an object of state care.

## ***The State vs. Me and the Miracle of Worker's Pride***

After clarification from the Berlin Public Prosecutor General's Office, the Job Centre initially backs down and withdraws the enforced “reintegration agreement”.

### **How violence against alternative labour works**

The reintegration agreement is a unilaterally enforced contract that defines the obligations and rights of the unemployed vis-à-vis the state — essentially a legal construct designed to strip the unemployed of their basic rights and to disenfranchise them along the constructed duty-to-comply narrative. A causality of poverty is contractually imposed that has nothing to do with reality.

It is only through this coerced contract — in which the unemployed acknowledge their obligations and thereby their guilt — that the mistreatment by the Job Centre gains legal cover, shielding the system from any challenge to its narrative of blame.

If an unemployed person refuses or obstructs this contract, the Job Centre has no basis for action, because its intervention would then directly contradict the Basic Law and fundamental human rights. As soon as poverty is addressed through the lens of human rights instead of unemployment management, the state faces a problem — for it then becomes the responsible party.

In this way, fundamental injustice is translated into valid law. All Hartz IV regulations — including the brutal treatment of impoverished divorced fathers by youth welfare offices, and the mechanisms used to determine pension entitlements — rest on this legal distortion. Contracts and causalities that structurally disadvantage individuals are quietly imposed on them.

Sanctions under Hartz IV are essentially contractual penalties. Even the punishment must appear as the result of a voluntary agreement — in which, as an SPD member of the Bundestag once put it, those affected should be grateful for their *re-education*, helping them find their way *back into order*, into the labour market, where they can once again become “valuable members of society.”

Because I refuse to sign such contracts, the state tries to impose them via administrative orders. In response, I file criminal charges against the Job Centre, and they temporarily retreat. No further appointments are scheduled. They simply leave me alone. The pressure becomes too great for individual caseworkers, especially since I document every step and publish the material.

This creates a paradoxical situation: I am no longer actively persecuted by the state — not because the legitimacy of their practices has been scrutinised, but because the contradictions in their support-and-demand principle have been exposed and remain unanswered. Silence becomes the official response.

Loïc Wacquant's *Punishing the Poor* (2009) and Virginia Eubanks' *Automating Inequality* (2017) show how regimes of control — through sanctions and data — criminalise poverty. E.P. Thompson (*The Moral Economy of the English Crowd*, 1971) and James C. Scott (*Weapons of the Weak*, 1985) offer historical examples of resistance and working-class pride in the face of market-state degradation.

Week after week, I continue working on the real problems of society. My case becomes a state secret. My deviation is tolerated — but only passively. I am the unwanted worker who works without pay. And this threatens the entire system.

Eventually, word spreads among the unemployed that I have, at least for myself, implemented a de facto *Unconditional Basic Income*. I receive minimal state support, but I do not perform any officially required duties. The state feels compelled to — partially — compensate for the societal value I generate.

In theory, the state hasn't freed me from the duty to reciprocate. But in practice, it's beginning to do just that. And that, precisely, is the turning point. It is a quiet sensation: For the first time, a government is forced to financially compensate value-adding work that is rejected by the market — without being able to coerce the worker back into formal employment. The result is a *deadlock* between wage labour and self-determined work. It may mark the beginning of the end of wage labour itself.

The government has no choice. To act otherwise would mean starving me to death — a political risk no minister wants to take.



Meanwhile, it becomes increasingly clear: The model of wage labour is weakening the economy, while the radical worker is triggering unforeseen systemic dynamics.

Since I cannot be accused of laziness or inactivity, and my critique of wage labour remains logically sound, while simultaneously there is no designated authority to respond adequately, a new administrative practice emerges. And this is, quite frankly, astonishing.

The long path of self-determined labour that I've been walking for over 20 years finally asserts itself. The only way to stop it would be to allow me or others to starve — but by what right?

This conflict shakes the very foundation of the rule of law. If law is based on truth, then it cannot deny the transformative power of my work. If the legal system wants to remain credible, it must not avert its eyes from the *transfer protocol*. You cannot expect citizens to obey laws in a system based on structural fraud.

While the unconditional basic income is still discussed as an abstract concept, I've already implemented it in reality — not 1:1, but far more tangibly than any theoretical model at the time.

Of course, the situation remains precarious. Eventually, the state resumes its persecution. Discrimination and targeted bullying begin to erode my health. In response, I write more books. I compile nearly 2,000 pages of research and literature. I talk to politicians and businesspeople. I campaign tirelessly for a shift in perspective. But I am alone. Poverty limits my resources. Even the cost of postage becomes an obstacle. Years of poverty have created a social isolation that I find increasingly hard to overcome.

Among some unemployed people, my work is now sadly misinterpreted — seen merely as a “trick” against the state, stripped of its depth. Some think that citing artistic freedom alone would be enough to checkmate the state. They fail to grasp the complex architecture of my intervention, which is designed to overcome submergence. And because they try to imitate a shortcut, my strategy is discredited — leading to the exception that artists enjoy “special rights”, which provokes resentment.

Against this backdrop, Adrienne Goehler, former Berlin Senator for Culture, told me at a UBI event that my approach could and would not work. Even UBI advocates overlook the fact that I have forced the implementation of a de facto UBI through the radical integrity of my work, which resists all devaluation.

Unlike Daniel Häni and his Swiss UBI circle — who often imply that they *would* do meaningful things *if* they received a basic income — I generate social value now, through self-determined labour, relevance and substance.

But the value of this work is again devalued — by the press, by the Left, by silence. The authorities feel emboldened and are now determined to destroy my basic income. For them, it's a matter of principle: Poor people — regardless of what they do — must look for underpaid jobs and must not trouble the ministry with new definitions of labour.

In autumn 2015, my work was officially declared uneconomical and a failure. Significant effort was made to enshrine this verdict formally, as if it were an objective truth that my work had no meaning and posed a proven burden on society. Even artistic freedom was to be annulled. They intended to deregister me as an artist at the tax office — to strip me of my right to artistic freedom and prove that my work had no economic relevance and thus should not interfere with my obligation to take a job.

A former detective, known for handling political cases and proudly pursuing so-called “enemies of the system,” took on my case. He would later become the model for the character of the *artist hunter* in my novel *Form*.

Mr G. reminded me instantly of Hans Landa, the Jew-hunter played by Christoph Waltz in *Inglourious Basterds* — a technocrat who relishes the act of reducing people to objects, stripping them of all humanity, until they flee interrogation speechless, horrified, broken. Mr G. is notorious. A master of calculated escalation. His technique — “factual provocation” — is typical of the Hartz IV regime: any justified resistance is pathologised, any normal reaction to absurd injustice becomes a personal descent into hell. Within a narrative in which the unemployed are always at fault, to scream in desperation is to be declared mad.

And so he can immediately impose sanctions for “disobedience”. People are broken not only by poverty, but by the collapse of legality. There is no justice, no recognition of individual reality. They become air.

Humiliations are legitimised by law. The false causalities of poverty weigh like concrete. Even when complaints are lodged, they often trigger full suspension of benefits. In the end, the authority’s actions are declared lawful through casual phrasing and bureaucratic shielding. Phrases like “The Job Centre must advise the client...” become euphemisms for psychological torture. The *duty to cooperate* becomes a weapon against freedom of expression.

Caseworkers are legally entitled to commit injustice, and if a judge intervenes, their rulings are often ignored. Even when health is ruined by administrative misconduct, the judiciary responds with the same indifference they’d show to a filing error.

I wrote to Minister Andrea Nahles, warning that this system leads to suicide and psychosis in the mentally vulnerable. And that’s exactly what happened.

Shortly after, a friend told me of a woman who threw herself from a window during a senseless retraining programme. The course continued despite her death.

In this penal bureaucracy, the free choice of profession is suspended — as is the presumption of innocence. Sanctions are often imposed *before* courts have even ruled on their legality. Legal battles take years. Even if a sanction is overturned, there is no compensation for the suffering endured — only retroactive payment of the withheld amount.

I met Mr G. in his almost naked office — an encounter I will never forget. It seems every politically active person who resists Hartz IV in Berlin-Kreuzberg ends up in front of him. He deploys his skills as an ex-police inspector with calculated cruelty, pushing people into psychological and physical collapse. He drives them to the brink.

He documents their words dispassionately, files for total withdrawal of their benefits, and treats them with a calm, indifferent professionalism — inhuman in its chill precision.

That day, his desk was completely empty — save for two massive legal tomes. Placing his hands on them like Moses on the tablets, he asked: *”Mr Speed. What kind of nonsense do you call art? (Welche Kleinkunst machen Sie denn?) I find no mention of any special rights for artists in these pages. Nowhere. So you must do something else now.”*

He understood nothing.

He bore no burden of justification. He would now decide who I was. At that moment, I understood: I had become a criminal in the eyes of the state. It was the cold force of order — placing you in an empty room, sniffing for any word that might count as evidence of guilt. The room reeked of police state logic. But I wasn’t a teenage thief or mafia man. I had spent 20 years doing research, making art, contributing. I was 44 years old, with two children, and all I had ever wanted was to do the right thing.

I asked him repeatedly whether he would sanction me — despite the fact that I was an artist, that my work was constitutionally protected, that I was part of the cultural sector, the *fifth estate*. He replied:

“Yes, of course.”

Mr G. had never read any of my books. He didn’t know my work. He didn’t care. I was poor. That was enough.

In that moment, I realised I could be homeless within weeks. An appeal had no suspensive effect. I would have to find a lawyer with no money, no food, and nothing to live on. This might take weeks, months.

The Job Centre offers food vouchers — but they are not obliged to. They can’t be used everywhere, and not for everything. And at the checkout, you must out yourself as unemployed, delay the queue, and hope the cashier even knows how to process them.

This happens in Germany — to mothers, fathers, the elderly, neurodivergent people, and teenagers.

I wrote countless letters to Minister Nahles, warning: This system will lead to violence if Hartz IV is not ended.

Eventually, in 2017, a Job Centre worker was stabbed — as I had predicted. Andrea Nahles was not held accountable. This madness can continue for years, even decades — and for many, it does.

But for me, the nightmare suddenly ends. At least for now.

Once again, we see the pure arbitrariness of the economic system, which does not produce winners and losers because this would actually be the case, but because it simply has to constantly promote this form of division in order to construct itself.

### **The enactive backlash is not long in coming.**

In the lead-up to my descent into poverty, I made provisions and invested in a small business—one that now generates just enough income to continue supporting my children. This has temporarily spared me from the worst of poverty, at least in the short term.

It's a highly unusual business, and as I write about it here, I'm not even sure how it fits in—because what follows seems out of place and yet illustrates two things with brutal clarity: in this economy, anything can succeed, and everything can fail. The stories we're told about merit, effort, and guilt are simply untrue.

After years of trial and error in countless precarious jobs, always ending in collapse, I invested what little I had left into four pregnant alpaca mares.

It may sound absurd—perhaps even delusional.

But inspired by an Australian TV series (*McLeod's Daughters*), which I used to watch with my daughter, I began researching alpacas and discovered a niche market in Germany. High-quality fleece alpacas are bred and resold to other breeders at speculative prices. It's a high-risk, volatile market—but with virtually no capital left, placing all my bets on one option seemed like the only viable path.

Under Hartz IV, you're technically allowed to retain certain assets if they're invested in a registered business. This legal loophole allowed me, as a recipient of top-up benefits, to preserve what many others lose entirely: the remnants of

value and the hope for agency. But the authorities did everything in their power to undermine even this modest attempt, denying me permission to reinvest or expand.

As a result, I was forced to leave these highly valuable animals in a leased meadow, hoping they would soon produce offspring that could secure my financial survival. That's all I could afford. I had no money for marketing, infrastructure, or care.

The constant threat of having my benefits cut again hung over me. If that happened, the animals would starve. And indeed, that moment came. I had to threaten the job centre with a violation of animal welfare laws to stop an official from severing my last source of support. In the end, it was the protection of the animals—not my human rights—that forced her to back off.

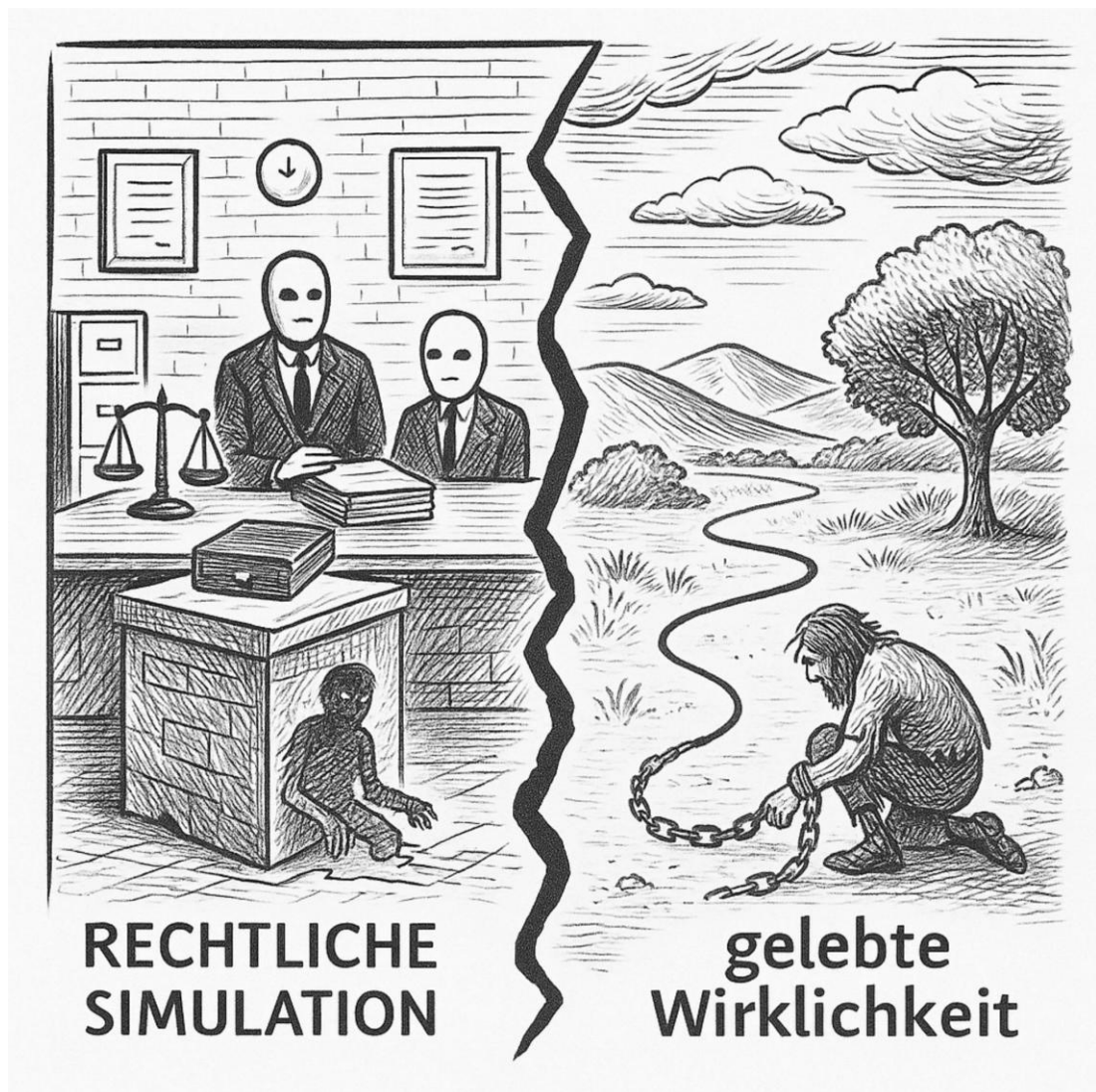
The irony is grotesque: these animals—through reproduction—multiplied my money with little effort. The state accepted them as a valid business. Yet the other work I've been doing for over 20 years—thousands of hours of unpaid intellectual, cultural, and civil rights labour—remained entirely worthless in the eyes of the system.

The alpacas, therefore, mean little to me in comparison. They graze in Brandenburg like an alien species. Disconnected from their environment, they are like a final scream of otherness.

If none of my actual work holds any value, then all I can do is take radical creative action under impossible conditions.

Now, with the alpacas, I appear to be earning money again—paradoxically, without labour. And yet this form of “income” is legitimised, while my real contributions are not. A deeply absurd situation.

As an artist and civil rights activist, I admit I felt a strange disappointment when the animals finally lifted me out of poverty for an entire year. Because I was in the middle of winning a war against the government—and my strength came precisely from the fact that I was speaking out of poverty.



After selling a valuable foal—born by sheer luck with what breeders called “special qualities”—my persecution by the state abruptly comes to an end. The mere possession of money, however strange or arbitrary its source, transforms me from a person the government previously treated as a threat into a socially acceptable figure. Suddenly, I am no longer dangerous. All the pressure, all the institutionalised violence that had been inflicted upon me, evaporates without a trace. I am out. While thousands of others remain trapped in the cruelty of the Hartz IV system, I am now seen as legitimate. But what makes me better than them? What have I done to deserve this sudden absolution?

It is a strange and deeply unsettling experience—one that profoundly shifts my understanding of social reality. For the first time, I feel in my bones: success is a pure construction.

Just one month after Mr G. officially notarised in a letter, “I declare your self-employment a failure,” thereby invalidating years of labour, research and personal investment, I sell the foal for approximately €13,000. With that single sale, I am able to leave the Hartz IV system. The foal, later winning several national prizes, fetches the highest price ever paid for one of its kind in Germany at the time. I use the money to support my children and live off it for a year. During this year, I am—according to the logic of the state—a good person.

But this episode reveals the absurdity with piercing clarity:

Profit and relevance. Profit and reality. In economics, they have nothing whatsoever to do with each other.

### **The power of the enactive form**

I would like to turn to another aspect—what I call “the emergence of form.” For in everything that happens to me as a result of this new way of working, a more complex order begins to unfold. It is not coincidence that these events occur, but rather the appearance of a deeper context of meaning. Even seemingly random events reveal an almost uncanny level of symbolism and resonance.

I named the precious foal—born on 1 May, ironically on Labour Day—“Worker’s Pride.” The hidden form speaks through such moments. And once this alternative meaning structure becomes visible, it reveals the immense force of self-determined, attentive labour. The strange, the deviant, the exceptional—what breaks through normative structures—can carry the richness of the world within it. Even the existence of a single foal can shatter the argumentative foundation of an entire government.

And I notice—somewhat grotesquely perhaps—how I feel a certain pride in this animal, because it allows me, just once, to experience the feeling of being recognised. That brief acknowledgment lifts me emotionally. The niche market of alpaca breeding, which temporarily becomes a speculative bubble, has its own psychological gravity. The seduction of isolated value—something that suddenly makes everything “okay” again—is astonishing. I find myself



thinking that it might finally be okay to put my feet up for a few days, to do nothing—though before, I worked through many nights without rest.

And yet, when I speak of my other work—the years I’ve invested in developing a new concept of labour and a humane economy—I still feel shame. Because the inevitable question follows: *“But can you live from it?”* The work that brings economic success is the kind one is allowed to be proud of. Without the transfer protocol, however, these alpacas would be just a few of countless animals on this planet—each one valuable, each one meaningful.



I go down in the history of German alpaca breeding as the breeder of Worker's Pride — but soon it means nothing to me. Because this is not me. This is not my work.

Martha Nussbaum, in *Creating Capabilities* (2011), describes dignity as a real opportunity for development; state sanctions against the poor violate these “capabilities.” Jason Hickel (*Less Is More*, 2020) and Arturo Escobar (*Designs for the Pluriverse*, 2018) advocate for economic systems that prioritise pride, community and sufficiency over growth imperatives. Robert Chapman’s work (*Empire of Normality*, 2023) and *Neurotribes* (2016) by Steve Silberman, William Hope, et al., as also *Neuroqueer Heresies* (2022) by Nick Walker imply “Neurodivergent Pride” as a political strategy against the normalising force of the state — parallel to “Worker’s Pride.” Kathi Weeks (*The Problem with Work*, 2011) shows how state-sanctioned work ethics absorb dignity, calling instead for “loving labour” beyond coercion. Joel Handler (*The Poverty of Welfare Reform*, 1995) documents how punitive regimes destroy pride and self-efficacy — empirical evidence for a counter-model.

All these examples show how deeply human beings depend on meaning in their work — how essential a self-determined position is.

To cut costs, I give up my flat before Worker's Pride is born and move into a tent, which I heat with a small wood stove in winter. For three years, I live on a leased meadow with my alpacas. Having no flat gives me mobility and a strange kind of freedom.

Despite many problems, I try to regenerate a functioning ecosystem — to create a working habitat, i.e., a lived structure of value.

In this ecosystem I’ve built, I first have to become an adventurer to become an entrepreneur. I need the unconventional stance of an artist to break new ground in alpaca breeding — or in poverty research.

I also want to find out what people actually need to live, and what the economy looks like at that level. I extend the developmental distance so I can later surpass the diversity threshold.

I survive three bitter winters in the tent, surrounded by free-roaming wolves and precious alpacas in Brandenburg — and I learn that sometimes, loss is not loss, but gain.

Of course, much of what I develop there doesn't succeed in the market, because it falls short of the diversity mark. But it shows how a natural ecosystem begins to rebuild itself after the symbolic devastation of my existence. A key tool in this process is the shifting of values: a form of world-appropriation aimed at expanding diversity and creating new affordances. It also means escaping the pyramid of causality, where value and labour are only recognised if they follow one path to "success."

I'm not romanticising nature as a solution — rather, I want to show how I attempt to reshape economic patterns by expanding them.

Sleeping in a tent at minus 20°C, investing everything into valuable alpacas, threatened nightly by Brandenburg's wild wolves — it's all an effort to break the pattern of dependency on singular notions of success and relevance. I could lose everything. But it doesn't feel like loss anymore, because the coordinates of relevance have shifted. And that shift allows me to resist the authorities. I can no longer be blackmailed.

The fear of starving or dying homeless is fading — because they can no longer take away what I have built. I gain physical independence through radical endurance, and intellectual independence through confrontation with the subject. I can finally flip the script — use my economy to expose the cracks in theirs. Their form of labour is far inferior to mine. They are rigid. I am adaptive. They are locked in their value boundaries. With me, everything remains open.

At first, the authorities don't believe I really live in the tent. They think it's some kind of trick. I don't *look* like I'm living in a tent: I iron my shirts, wash myself in a bucket on the meadow even in winter. I look like someone who works in an ad agency or in middle management. I'm not dishevelled. I'm not defeated. I'm radically engaged — and I transform lack into a tool, instead of hiding it in shame.

In this way, underprivilege becomes strength.

When a barn burns down nearby a little later, the police surround my tent. Logical. The one who falls outside the norm must be the cause of the disaster.

Because until then, everything was standardised, in order. The causality of evil always attaches itself to the outsider first.

When I identify myself as a researcher, the police are visibly irritated. Soon after, they order a tax audit. One by one, every conceivable agency turns up at my tent, trying to measure my life. In their eyes too, my work simply cannot be a legitimate contribution — there *must* be something illegal they can penalise.

Even before Worker's Pride is born, filmmaker Roman Pachernegg visits me in my tent and begins filming a documentary, which will later be screened in cinemas — featuring the Dalai Lama and other public figures. When the authorities ask if I really live and work in the tent, I place the DVD on the job centre's desk and say:

*“The Dalai Lama. They spoke to him first — and then to me. About the work I do for the world. From this tent.”*

The authorities find this unbearable. While their investigators dig ever deeper into my private life, people elsewhere are already discussing my work in public theatres. At the next appointment, I lay a handwritten letter from Jean Ziegler — former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food — on the table, written on UN stationery, in which he praises my work and promises further support. My job centre is stunned.

Over the years, I generate the equivalent of €400,000 in research on labour and the economy, based on the average hourly wage of academics. I send a provocative invoice to then Minister of Labour, Andrea Nahles — to demonstrate that there is important, even necessary work that is neither paid nor recognised, but actively penalised. The Ministry remains silent to this day. I never receive a response. I remain poor.

A year later, back at the Job Centre, a thoughtless job mediator reads aloud from my now-voluminous file — in which I am not described as a committed intellectual, but as a lazy troublemaker. These lies are meant to justify future sanctions and lower the threshold for institutional violence.

I file yet another criminal complaint for defamation and fraud — and yet another investigation is launched by the public prosecutor. But, as always, it dies behind closed doors.

The poor are simply not believed. What Miranda Fricker calls *epistemic injustice*.

The situation escalates further when, on 7 September 2017, the Federal Ministry of Labour — under Andrea Nahles — deliberately lies to the Berlin Public Prosecutor General's Office. Just like the job centre before them, they officially portray me as a “work refuser.” And this despite the fact that Nahles had been fully informed of my work — a fact later confirmed in writing by a senior ministry official after I complained that my letters weren't being forwarded. Nahles does not intervene. Later, the Tiergarten District Court prohibits the public prosecutor from confiscating my file, which contains all the lies. An employee of the court president responds to my accusation — that evidence suppression is taking place — with nothing more than legal formalism. She cites the limitations of her own job.

The court's behaviour ensures that neither the government nor the job centre can be held accountable. Thus, the state, with the court's help, covers up defamation — and appears willing to sanction me into homelessness if I don't change my behaviour.

These weeks, I am not the only one fighting these abuses. Ralph Boes — whose civil rights work around Hartz IV is invaluable, and with whom I spend one summer — achieves incredible things. So too does Inge Hannemann, the first job centre employee to publicly oppose the Hartz IV regime, later a politician for Die Linke. Together with the Greens and the Left, we manage to spark a Bundestag debate in 2015 on the abolition of sanctions. A brief glimmer of hope — that ultimately dies at the hands of CSU Minister-President Horst Seehofer.

Ralph Boes' hunger strike — during which he almost dies — brings new attention to the issue. But the bitter truth is that our resistance results in even stricter repression by the government. Boes too is repeatedly defamed as a “work refuser.” Though he deliberately refuses job applications in order to challenge sanctions at the constitutional level, he contributes far more than he ever would in a conventional job.

In 2015, the Minister of Labour and much of the parliament are willing to simply let Boes die. I am on the ground. I can testify: it is a miracle he survived. In the final weeks of the hunger strike, I speak with doctors — his heart could stop at any time. He is ultimately forced to stop — not only to save his life, but because the media has largely ignored his protest. In a country where benefit providers believe they are “feeding” the unemployed, poor people resisting is not a story that sells.

Later, a court retroactively cancels Boes’ 100% sanctions — six of them by then — due to a formal technicality. This legal trick spares the state a politically damaging trial that could have exposed systemic misconduct. According to the court, these were merely “procedural errors” — not evidence of deeper structural injustice against the poor or unemployed. There are to be no consequences. Boes receives the withheld payments retroactively. As if nothing had happened. As if he hadn’t starved. As if the government hadn’t gambled with his life. No apology. No accountability. No compensation.

Again and again, those who resist as civil rights activists are denied political legitimacy — which makes it easier to criminalise us. The justice system only recognises crimes that break conservative rules and norms. It almost never recognises crimes in which the norms themselves are the source of injustice.

This structural flaw makes it extremely difficult for me to demand justice in my case. My refusal to comply with unjust rules is hard to frame as a *rightful* act, as correct behaviour. The burden of explanation lies entirely with me.

The perpetrators, by contrast, present themselves as acting “normally”, within the framework of the law. They do not appear to violate legal boundaries — they simply interpret them with maximum brutality.

The job mediator is “only checking”, “only placing people in jobs” — that, after all, is their job. Their actions therefore appear legitimate in the eyes of the law, even when they are experienced as torture.

Once again, I am accused in official letters of failing to fulfil my duties and thus violating the law. I repeatedly have to appeal to the public prosecutor to

contradict these claims — and for a while, it works. All over the country, people are sanctioned into homelessness for minor infractions. But I, as a public figure, can provoke the authorities to the extreme — without, at least for now, facing truly severe consequences.

Yet I lack broader support in this human rights conflict. Even when renowned investigative journalist Günter Wallraff uncovers serious misconduct by the authorities — often based on tips I gave him — the press and judiciary refuse to act. The media remain passive, soaked in their own prejudice, and as a result we miss critical chances to bring down the Hartz IV system.

I would now like to outline two further empirical experiments and elaborate on their implications for the concept of an unconditional basic income. The theoretical groundwork is laid, the injustice can no longer be denied — but the practical consequences of the *Radical Worker* are still hard to digest for many. And to some extent, I feel the same.

I know how many fault lines and pain points my research touches. I am deliberately not offering final answers to every question. This is not a new dogma, but a starting point for discourse — a working base from which we can think forward.

#### Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The chapter models “Workers Pride” as a performative counter-institution: open letters, cinematic self-defence, protest designs and ritual forms of solidarity become art that publicly dismantles state discipline. Artistic Research examines how dignity aesthetics (banners, body language, collective voice) make injustice visible and create new economies of recognition.

— Critical Autism Studies: The confrontation with authorities mirrors the pathologising state power that breaks neurodivergent integrity. “Workers Pride” becomes a parallel to “Neurodivergent Pride”: a pride that grows out of unconditional truth and coherence ethics. The chapter shows how autistic directness and clarity of rules generate moral counter-power and expose punitive welfare as a regime of violence.

### ***My Application for Director-General of ZDF – A Performative Act Against the System of Representation***

The logic of the transfer protocol, meritocracy, and the job centre dictates that the poor or unemployed should apply for the lowest-paid positions in the low-wage sector. That is precisely why I apply only for management roles.

My next step was to apply—while still receiving welfare—for the position of director-general at ZDF, Germany’s public broadcaster. (Later, I also applied to ARD.) In extensive application materials, I demonstrate that I possess all the necessary qualifications and could do the job. Of course, I deviate from the norm in several respects—but I raise the question: might that difference actually be of greater value in a leadership role than the conventional idea of “suitability,” which is itself discriminatory and normatively conservative?

In the end, perhaps there are no “better” directors—only different ones. And the more diversity we allow, the more open and resilient the entire system becomes. I told ZDF that if variety is truly welcomed, then even the “worst director in history” could become a meaningful, enriching contribution within a pluralistic ecosystem.

I offered to take the job for one-tenth of the current director’s salary—purely to demonstrate that positions like this are rarely awarded based on merit, competence, or economic efficiency. Instead, they follow opaque rules that contradict every economic textbook. Studies repeatedly show that in countries like Germany, social background and family status continue to shape career paths.

My main aim was to expose how irrational and structurally absurd the transfer protocol is within the labour market. I wanted to demystify the employer’s



decision-making power as what it often is: a ritual that preserves status hierarchies at the expense of society, the ecosystem, and even the economy itself.

Of course, I didn't get the job—not because I was too expensive (I was the cheapest candidate imaginable), but because I was seen as fundamentally incompetent. Not in my abilities, but in the social role assigned to me. I was poor. I was different. And so I must be incapable.

This form of structural discrimination is particularly explosive because ZDF is a publicly funded institution—one frequently criticised for being expensive, bureaucratic, and sluggish. My application reveals how power interests can block even the most basic economic logic. The labour market is not a neutral arena of opportunity—it is a tool of control.

By appointing me, the state could have saved over a million euros a year—just through my salary waiver. I could never cost the welfare system as much as I would save it as ZDF director. But if the state were to appoint a welfare recipient to such a post, the entire system would collapse. Why? Because it would cast doubt on the legitimacy of every status marker. It would raise uncomfortable questions: Are those at the top really doing more? Do performance metrics even make sense? Why can't *everyone* work at ZDF?

I explained this to the job centre: “Look, I'm applying for jobs. The companies don't want me. I'm not allowed to work, even though I'm open to any role that matches my qualifications—even director of ZDF.” Their response? “You have to start at the bottom, not at the top.” But that's economically absurd. Why should I intentionally devalue myself? What sense does it make to lift someone out of poverty by forcing them to present themselves as an inferior product?

The authorities have no answer—because they've never truly asked themselves *why* they do what they do. They simply “follow procedure.”

The irony is that I do, in fact, know how to run a media organisation—or could learn quickly. My background in the creative sector, and my survival in poverty, have made me highly adaptive. What's becoming apparent is this: those who sink, even by conservative standards, are often not the worst performers.

They're simply the most unpredictable. They don't meet bourgeois expectations—and they threaten the privilege of those who do.

Although I even offer to host the TV programme “Wetten, dass...?” free of charge after Thomas Gottschalk retires, the public broadcasters reject my proposal. Yet there is no objective evidence that I could not present the programme just as well. So why is Thomas Gottschalk allowed to do it, and I am not?

ZDF and ARD are clearly irritated by two things: my idea that I, as an impoverished person, could become their new director, and my insistence that they examine my work. After all, one does not need to engage with something deemed worthless. That is the logic behind the events that follow.

Their decision is irrational in many respects. Not only would I save the broadcaster a considerable amount of money, but as it soon becomes clear, I want to implement important projects still longed for by broad parts of the population—projects the incumbents neglect because their status prevents them from perceiving necessity. They are genuinely surprised when their rejection is not the end of the matter for me. As a Radical Worker, I simply continue working as if I were already the director of ZDF, addressing the structural problems I observe and experience. I do what they don't do—without being paid. And at some point, I become convinced this will undermine their legitimacy.

For a full year, I conduct research into the media trust crisis—what people today refer to as fake news, or the “lying press.” I'm doing what the actual directors should be doing, but aren't, because it's not defined as part of their job. Professor Wille, chair of ARD, gives speeches full of noble phrases about what would be appropriate—but she also rejects me and my work.

Another year goes by in which I survive on next to nothing while developing an entirely new format for television. I take responsibility for the problems at ZDF and ARD, try to change things, ask the critical questions: What kind of media do we need today to make conflict visible and resolvable in new ways? I publish my comprehensive analysis and proposals in the book *Organic Television*, including a 100-page open letter to Liz Mohn, one of the wealthiest media moguls on the planet. As owner of several TV stations (RTL), I call on

her to reform television in the interest of the public. I then send my findings to all directors of public broadcasters in Germany and Austria.

No one at Liz Mohn's offices, nor at ZDF, shows the same level of commitment I do. Even though I embody the supposed ideal of the modern worker—flexible and highly motivated—nobody wants to work with me.

The entire case is later discussed at the *Capitalism Tribunal* in Vienna, sponsored by the Club of Rome and the Heinrich Böll Foundation. But even when Mohn and the broadcasters are publicly accused of ignorance, there is no reaction. When Liz Mohn, like the directors before her, refuses all contact—even after I dedicate a year of work and a book to her personally—I am disappointed. And I wonder what more I must do to finally be accepted and integrated into society. This “failure” eats at my psyche. Still, I don't give up—because I see again that the real work is only just beginning.

The work is there. It is urgently needed. It's just not paid. And the reasons for that cast a deeply troubling light on the structural order of things.

I write to the executives of public broadcasters, telling them that their rejection of my work means I can no longer pay my bills—and ask whether this is how they believe cultural workers and viewers committed to a free and open society should be treated.

I stay in contact. I maintain the deeper relationship—with all its taboos and shadows, but also with its opportunities.

In response, I receive letters from directors, spokespersons, and board chairs who excuse themselves, but change nothing. They are utterly confused by the fact that a poor person is blaming them for his exclusion. And even worse, that I have the audacity to try to take on their work—unpaid—and interfere in their domain without permission.

They can't insult me or kick me out—because they must uphold the appearance that everything is fair, that freedom is not curtailed. So they simply decide against me.

But who gave them the right to decide in the first place? Why is the democratic process always stifled by market decisions?

Free choice is the most effective form of revenge for people with money.

So I stop wearing the cloak of professionalism. I make it personal. In open letters, I ask directly why I now have to go hungry, despite trying to contribute according to my capacities. What right do they have to deny the exchange—especially as state institutions?

Yes, I am uncomfortable. I am strange and odd. But isn't that exactly what is needed to disrupt these injustices?

It sounds easier than it is. I suffer from circulatory problems, sweat excessively, and sleep poorly. My entire existence is at stake. I keep placing it on the table, while my opponents remain safe, distanced, and well-paid—while I slowly run out of resources.

This is exactly how, as I described at the beginning, supply can be artificially reduced: by ignoring it. If we no longer ask for art, there will be less art. If we stop asking about human rights, fewer human rights will be respected. If the freedom of choice of the privileged outweighs the participatory agency of the poor, the pyramid will remain—and with it, the structural erosion of free will for most people.

In modern capitalism, “freedom of choice” transforms a tool of oppression into a human right—for the privileged.

As a poor person, I cannot choose freely—because I cannot separate myself from poverty.

What would be appropriate here is for the broadcasters to moderate an open, dialogical decision-making process—one in which both sides explore the situation and allow for ambiguity. An artist challenges a broadcaster. That's not an easy situation—for either side. But instead of examining it in all its layers, from multiple perspectives, it is dismissed as interference. This makes it impossible for any *real* work to emerge—work that addresses the causes behind the symptoms. It is blocked from the outset.

Because this work would be painful. And it is not appreciated by anyone. Therefore, no one wants to pay for it.

That is the systemic error. A scandal, really.

By rejecting me and my work, these companies can completely evade any responsibility for their supposedly free decisions in a free market. That is why

most employers feel no remorse when firing someone—because they assume the person will find a new job somewhere else in the market. The fact that being fired devalues the person in a competitive market and makes it even harder for them to find a job at the same salary level remains obscured. Just like the customer's “freedom of choice”, dismissal becomes another means of shaping the world unfairly.

In no culture, no family, no society is it possible to simply “terminate” people or relations. That is only possible in modern economies. Like money, dismissal is a means of distancing and denying relationships.

Through such free-market mechanisms, the pain I experience in this society—which gives rise to real work on real problems—can be suppressed and removed from the product catalogue. So people can be told that they don't need to care about injustice in the world, but should instead buy our beautiful products. Then everything will feel better.

The system is all the more irritated when I don't accept my dismissal, but show up for work the next day and continue as if nothing happened. In doing so, I force a small-scale co-creation of the world—a form of democratisation of both the market and the company.

Today, quite a few people give lectures on “corporate democracy”, but it is precisely at the breaking points that the true core of the problem becomes visible. Democracy requires the acceptance of the unwanted and the seemingly worthless.

The MDR director's office responds with distance and arrogance, telling me they do not understand why they should engage with an unsolicited manuscript. Perhaps I respond because it's called *culture*.

According to the logic of capitalism—the logic of the free market's freedom of choice—my work makes no sense whatsoever. It is meant to disappear the moment someone, who doesn't even spend five seconds on it, rejects it. As soon as I don't get enough likes, it's over. The destruction of my person under capitalism then appears completely legitimate. And the fact that I continue anyway is increasingly criminalised by the state. Because nothing seems more forbidden than acting against the sovereignty of success.

When I tell the broadcasters that I am being impoverished by their ignorance, they don't take me seriously *because* I am poor. They see it as confirmation that they are right—because they are economically successful. Their behaviour is correct. Mine is wrong.

This creates a situation in which all the directors of public broadcasters in a democratic country do not consider it necessary to contact me—as a cultural worker, and perhaps a truly free and independent labourer who has worked for this society for decades—and ask whether I still have something to eat. Instead, they let me fade into poverty with full legitimization. That makes them better managers.

The *banality of evil*, as Hannah Arendt once described it, is visible here too.

If the managers of major institutions had even a shred of doubt, they would be able to see that I am trying, with all my might, to contribute. Because many of them, deep down, would also like to be more than just a role or function in an abstract machine.

From a macroeconomic perspective, their behaviour has serious consequences. It produces an increasingly stupid system—one that is not only incapable of facing real crises but also losing its ability to innovate. ZDF doesn't exist in a vacuum, and of course not everything is blocked at every level. The decisive question is not whether everything can be integrated into a company—but where, specifically, a person or a problem is locked out.

Diversity does not manifest in order. It manifests in disruption.

Priority should not be given to a generalised totality, but to that which is excluded from the norm, from familiarity. Completion happens not along the lines of the familiar, but through what has been kept outside.

That, however, is a lesson modern economics has yet to learn.

Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The unconventional application for the position of director functions as an “institutional readymade”: By claiming the

management of a public broadcaster as an artistic position, the application process becomes a performance that exposes questions of power, curatorial sovereignty and journalistic diversity. The act serves as a living model for “institutional hacking” - artistic strategies that transform bureaucratic routines into material for social imagination.

— Critical Autism Studies: The application stages autistic directness and rule logic as resistance to non-transparent selection processes. It demonstrates how neurodivergent forms of communication — explicit questions, zero-bullshit rhetoric, normative clarity — disrupt gatekeeping structures and thus demand epistemic justice. The chapter shows that autistic demands for transparency and consistency are not “impoliteness”, but a politically productive disruption.

### ***Unconditional Basic Income and the Worker’s Psychology***

According to an analysis by the Federal Statistical Office (SILC), a full meal every two days is often too expensive for a third of unemployed people in Germany. Around 519,000 people reported that they did not have enough money to adequately heat their homes. Last year, 300,000 households had their electricity cut off. All these people are being forced by the German government into a way of life that requires permanent self-restriction. The consequences are fatal. It is well documented that people living in poverty die earlier. In general, the poor fall ill more often. This is not because, as is often claimed, they lead meaningless lives or lack integration into work or purpose— but because the psychological terror imposed by the state, the economy, and society keeps them under constant stress. (A fatal double bind.)

And it is not only these individuals whose living space is violently curtailed in order to build the success of others upon their backs. It affects everyone who lives in fear of slipping into similar conditions. This paralyses society as a whole. Meanwhile, the German press keeps repeating that Germans are better off than ever before and that nobody in Germany needs to go hungry. That is simply a lie.

It is not class struggle, nor the efforts of the poor to climb the ladder, nor the diligence of the labouring class that enables a civilisation of prosperity—but wealth itself.

Only when people have access to sufficient resources can the generosity and compassion return that form the foundation for more complex and humane market forms.

In this context, a particular concept appears to be the great solution—one that is, however, still largely misunderstood and incomplete. It lacks key components essential for understanding how to preserve the very foundations of life. Money alone cannot be the solution. As living markets show, money is a tool that itself causes structural poverty, because it excludes certain forms of participation and reciprocity.

What we are talking about is the Unconditional Basic Income (UBI).

Here I refer to the most common model of UBI: a regular payment of between €800 and €1,200 per month to everyone, unconditionally—regardless of wealth or employment status. In return, many traditional welfare benefits would be eliminated. Various calculation models already exist, and—like so often—it comes down to political will.

Strategies such as expanding the development gap—meaning the diversity marker—with their effects on a more robust primary economy, would have many positive effects as a supplement to the UBI. Likewise, the question of a person's intrinsic worth and their capacity for self-determined work is essential when evaluating UBI. Yet, we must also acknowledge its negative aspects. Some are serious, even fatal weaknesses. But for political reasons—because this discourse around basic income is so crucial—they should not lead to total rejection, but rather to further refinement and extension of the concept.

The research presented here aims to make a contribution to that.

## **A differentiated view of the UBI**

The UBI is an important bridge that can serve to integrate and valorise new forms of work. But it is also part of the problem.



As the debate so far has been largely grounded in the logic of the secondary economy, and as the discourse has been almost exclusively framed from within it, UBI remains a controversial idea in the public eye—because it cannot be properly understood through the lens of the secondary economy alone.

Even if one can calculate how a UBI might be financed by eliminating administrative overhead or through forms of consumption taxation (e.g. Götz Werner), an inner contradiction persists: according to the narrative of capitalism, all prosperity is based on performance, and performance is linked to scarcity of value.

Yet if value and performance are expanded and democratised, profits at the top naturally diminish—leaving less to redistribute. Therefore, the shaping of society through profit must be replaced by the preservation of a living ecosystem. UBI could be justified through a radically different logic.

Free creativity may spark innovation in isolated cases, but when millions act creatively, it leads to a levelling of value. That may be good for people, but it is bad for the logic of profit. So one cannot seriously claim that a UBI would unleash a classical economic boom. In fact, the opposite is true: such a boom—as required by the secondary economy—depends on extraction, devaluation, and hierarchy.

Many supporters—but also opponents—of the UBI simply do not understand the actual economic structures. They confuse the myths of economics with its operative realities.

The UBI will, in any case, reduce GDP—that is, the type of one-sided production that enables long-term concentration of profits. It is therefore futile to try to sell UBI as an “economic innovation” within the current system. It may be valuable in economic terms, but not in this economy. And this cannot be revealed through small-scale pilot projects, but only once UBI unfolds its effects on a systemic, nationwide level.

It is therefore absurd to expect UBI to be financed by an economic model that bases its profits predominantly on exploitation. Even if it manages to grant a European middle class a more comfortable existence, it will only worsen the situation of people in the Global South through the growth of systemic

ignorance—because poverty will be perceived as “solved” and no longer politically salient.

Markets are interlinked.

Lower quantitative growth will, in turn, weaken the financial foundations of the UBI. A different kind of wealth may arise—but in a system characterised by submergence, by systemic flattening, this new wealth will not materialise as is often claimed. The world of labour needs to be re-naturalised before this wealth can emerge.

And here another flaw in the current UBI design becomes apparent: it acknowledges only money. It transfers cash, but does not establish living markets or modes of exchange that would sustain ecosystems. UBI functions like a lottery win in a society of materialists who claim that money will make them better people, while lacking the strength of character to demonstrate that in advance.

UBI appears like a social idea—but in the end, it is a materialistic utopia.

Still, it contains many urgent and valuable impulses.

Many effects commonly associated with UBI—such as increased creativity, commitment, and the valorisation of unpaid work—are fundamentally underdeveloped in our efficiency-obsessed society. They make little sense within classical economics. They cannot be derived from its logic, because that logic fails to acknowledge the factors necessary for the survival of ecosystems.

UBI thus collides head-on with the concept of success, meritocracy, and wage-labour. Workers fear that their own performance will be devalued compared to the “non-working.” UBI advocates enter into conflict with workers—without seriously engaging with their concerns or placing UBI in a broader, systemic context.

This is a communication disaster—and a central reason for widespread rejection.

UBI wants to be financed by the existing system, while arguing on the basis of factors that play no role whatsoever in secondary economics—such as self-realisation. Yet it lacks a coherent economic theory that would allow these new values to be translated into economic logic.

One of the most serious problems with UBI is that it attempts to formulate an alternative inside a dysfunctional system—capitalism, meritocracy—that many rightly long to escape, without proposing a functioning alternative such as the primary economy. It refers only to hope and fantasy.

That is why the research in this book is important for UBI: because it provides structural know-how for the self-determined organisation of qualitative wealth. And I say this after 20 years of confrontation with corporations and the state, of forcing something like a UBI out of the system—almost destroying myself in the process.

Only after hundreds of pages of correspondence with state authorities, over 20 public prosecutors and judges, countless humiliations, existential threats, and years of poverty, can I finally say with certainty:

I am entitled to this money.

Because it has always been my wealth—just like that of all other poor people—stolen by the structures of the transfer protocol. I am entitled to it unconditionally. No one imposes conditions on me without being refuted by me in full. This labour, this clarity, this integrity—this is what many supporters of UBI lack. That's why they are not taken seriously. They are not prepared to walk the hard path.

The successful don't need a UBI, and the poor can't legitimise it within the logic of the secondary economy, because they would be valorised without achievement. Everything would be turned upside down.

Add to that the inability to understand the logic of diversity as currency, to build trust in its systemic effectiveness.

And so, UBI advocates have manoeuvred themselves into a weakened position. They act like employees, not revolutionaries. Their position remains vague in the negotiations.

### **But which way would be possible?**

In my view, there are only two ways to solve the problem. First, the divide between the ordinary worker and the UBI advocates must be overcome—by

focusing on the kind of work that remains unrewarded everywhere, on the shared experience of devaluation that also affects the worker. Second, by being willing, if necessary, to do the great things hoped for through a UBI even without receiving one—thus placing responsibility squarely back on the state, forcing it to prove its own value.

Because the moment I expect someone else to simply recognise me as valuable, I hand over the power to judge my worth—and that will always result in a discriminatory, devaluing experience. Value that is not seen cannot be made visible from the outside, only from within.

The point is to break the maxim of performance through radical self-valorisation of the poor and unemployed, thereby revealing the structures of expropriation that make the UBI a compensation payment—which even traditional workers can understand. Because they too experience that there is work they are not paid for, and that this is unjust. UBI is therefore no longer a civilisational gift, but a basic right: an act of fair redistribution.

But to achieve this, UBI must be argued from the standpoint of poverty, from the social question itself. And that's too difficult for many, because it means losing status, not being invited to TV programmes, not being allowed to sit on expert panels with executives. It is much easier to argue UBI top-down—but that approach corrupts the discourse and renders it ineffective. It remains an abstract fantasy, endlessly discussed by people with good salaries, who are both dissatisfied and cowardly. While others die in misery.

Showing solidarity with them means walking in their boots. Anything else would be presumptuous.

That's why I sometimes find the path taken by the Swiss UBI advocates around Daniel Häni problematic. They try to make UBI palatable to capitalism without ever questioning capitalism itself—and are therefore tempted to argue with classic meritocratic terms. Häni avoids the perspective of the poor, which is why his UBI cannot be a compensation for market injustice. It often comes across as an arrogant entrepreneurial claim, as if UBI were a gift from entrepreneurs, something they should approve of. In the end, this approach keeps the discourse locked in permanent contradiction, because it makes no sense within neoliberal logic.

Häni's many public appearances—mostly alongside entrepreneurs, rarely with unemployed or impoverished people—give the impression of entrepreneurs arguing about the management of a company they've never entered from the inside. He has undoubtedly done much to bring UBI into the public eye—but in my view, it is wrong to argue for UBI solely from the fantasies of the upper middle class. That very class sacrifices itself for nothing and always takes the path of least resistance.

This results in UBI being sold as a kind of gift from the industrious to the idle. One side thinks that's noble, the other thinks it's insulting—and both sides miss the point entirely.

At its core, poverty cannot be solved through cash gifts. And wealth is not an innocent achievement that must always be seen as positive. What's needed is to overcome the internalised contempt for the poor, which the Swiss version of UBI still harbours. In my view, this is the core contradiction of their position.

Let us not forget: those who have money are often the least likely to do what is ethical or creative. And wealthy Switzerland is not known for fighting global poverty. It could only afford a UBI because it has participated in the exploitation of others and is structurally and geographically privileged.

Current UBI efforts often try to overcome workers' fears and elite prejudice through a movement of high-income earners who now want to treat themselves to more freedom thanks to their prosperity—believing that this will somehow lead to more creativity and innovation. It sounds like entrepreneurial spirit, but none of these people have urgency. None take risks. None face the abyss of survival.

To people living in permanent precarity—whether poor or self-employed—this is a slap in the face.

This kind of rhetoric only postpones the social question, turning vital demands into utopias. UBI could be misused to “utopianise” injustice—as if the very idea of UBI proves that a just world is impossible.

This leads, in the end, to a lack of solidarity with the poor and unemployed, because the focus remains stuck on financing. This allows the old pyramid of values—the logic of success—to persist as the basis of structural exploitation.

It hands power over to those at the top. Everything seems to depend on their permission.

It makes for good panel discussions. But it doesn't end poverty.

### **The misunderstanding of unconditionality (Bedingungslosigkeit)**

Another major problem with the UBI, at least in the German-speaking context, lies already in its name. The term “*unconditional*” (Bedingungslosigkeit) equates the UBI with a wage and thus places it in direct competition with employment. (Unlike the more neutral “*basic income*”.) This is the core of many communication breakdowns: People perceive UBI as a wage replacement. That's why it gets judged by the same unfair standards as wages—and why many believe that those who “do less” or “don't work at all” should not receive it.

If one takes the transfer protocol seriously, however, it becomes clear that UBI is not comparable to a wage, but rather a compensation or indemnity payment within a broader diversity equalisation framework—meant to counteract the injustices (*submergence*) built into capitalism and wage labour itself. But this presupposes much more than money: it requires an open culture of work and valuation.

The term *unconditional* does not question the principle of exchange and obligation. The notion of social debt remains unquestioned—and this is precisely what fuels the conflicts. The UBI remains in dialectical conflict with wage labour. Sometimes, I get the impression that parts of the UBI movement don't actually want UBI to happen—how else can such drastic errors in messaging be explained?

That is why I speak of a Universal Care Income: to shift the focus to care work and all other contributions that capitalism marginalises and devalues through its threshold of economic recognition. This applies also to traditional wage labourers—who are then not in competition with a basic income.

If the construct of “debt”—to be paid through structural disadvantage—is actually a form of theft, then there is no need to negotiate a UBI. But by

framing it as *unconditional*, we continue to legitimise the logic of exchange—and set UBI against wage workers, who then understandably insist on their own “achievements” and point to their threatened devaluation.

Workers, who radically and brutally reduce themselves to function in return for wages, demand *conditions* for their revaluation. A UBI then seems naive, ignorant of their struggle. But if we instead explain the UBI not in terms of *unconditionality*—which often sounds like irresponsibility or a refusal of relationality—but rather in terms of a shared experience of non-recognition, everything changes.

UBI is not an “unconditional basic income” but rather compensation for centuries of systemic abuse by a discriminatory economy. But it should be more than that: a building block for the reconstruction of a diverse ecosystem, a new primary economy.

Yet as the development of *contributed work* shows, money alone cannot shape meaningful systems. It often reinforces structural impoverishment in how we work, because it encourages consumption rather than contribution. People continue to buy services, not build ecosystems.

UBI is thus only a partial act of liberation. After all, the money granted can only be spent on other people’s labour—often still exploitative. The waitress in the restaurant is only *partially* liberated by a UBI. And if she doesn’t come to work anymore, trade collapses, the market disappears.

UBI fails to question one of the key obstacles to free, self-determined work: the monopoly of money as the only valid means of exchange.

Because UBI reinforces monetary exchange, the initial emancipatory effect quickly fades. No new ecosystem emerges.

The continued reliance on trickle-down myths and old redistribution models also means that the UBI level is always negotiated according to the normative parameters of classical economics. Subject to the blackmail of budget fluctuations. If there’s “less money” in the economy, supposedly due to underperformance, there’s less UBI.

And because no alternative valuation markers (like *diversity index* or *development gaps*) are established, the UBI amount becomes a political football, redefined by each new government.

This is why I believe the UBI must be linked to its own economic theory. Wage labour must be interrogated, refuted—in the interest of workers themselves. The myth of performance and merit must be exposed.

Only then can we ask what basic monetary floor is needed to allow contributed labour to flourish—until the diversity mark is surpassed to such a degree that a UBI becomes unnecessary. In a society where all meaningful activities are valued, no one falls through the cracks, no one can be blackmailed into conformity. That would be a new economy, a new market based on primary economic principles.

But as long as we can't refer to these, UBI remains a utopia: one that avoids naming the problem, and thereby distorts the vision of a just redistribution.

In meritocracies, free space is devalued. As many primary-economy structures have been destroyed—local communities, small flourishing economies, neighbourhood work, barter systems—modern humans often don't know what to do with themselves. They are simply “freed from employment.”

In my case, this freedom unleashed enormous amounts of self-determined work. But without access to any system of valuation, it led to isolation, stagnation, and new forms of poverty. As I said: self-exploitation replaces external exploitation—as seen already in today's freelance sector.

Contributed work still struggles to be recognised. Many essential activities continue to be marginalised as “private”. In the absence of wages, new criteria arise in the fight for self-worth—just as discriminatory as before.

The capitalist economy as it exists today is not prepared for the creative drive of billions of people once freed from wage labour.

Relieving the poor would also destabilise the legitimacy of political leadership. Since the UBI undermines existing power structures without truly cultivating self-empowerment, it risks creating a power vacuum. The authorities would inevitably find other means of marginalising people under UBI—rendering them irrelevant to the shaping of the world. Ultimately, society might become



so truncated that no real challenges appear to remain, because the world is now “good”—thanks to technology and its ideology of simplification. Deviant individuality would seem obsolete. And therefore threatening. In this way, UBI could even exacerbate submergence.

The labour theorist Frithjof Bergmann once described what happened when fixed payments were introduced to Native Americans living on reservations: with their primary economy largely destroyed, many simply fell into alcoholism. Similarly, the many basic income experiments today—including one I co-organised—show mixed results. Many of the hoped-for benefits of UBI do not translate into the secondary economy: the diversity threshold is too high for unconventional business ideas; market conformism turns non-conformists back into unemployed people or obedient employees once the trial period ends.

Still, a UBI would undoubtedly make life easier for many—this can neither be demonised outright nor naively idealised. It requires mindfulness and self-critique, should it ever come to pass.

I believe UBI can help us cross the diversity threshold, thereby stabilising a more holistic economic form during a transitional phase. But in a truly functioning ecosystem, it would no longer be needed. UBI is a band-aid on the deep wound inflicted by the classic economy—day after day.

Philippe Van Parijs & Yannick Vanderborght (*Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy*, 2017) and Guy Standing (*Basic Income: And How We Can Make It Happen*, 2017) define UBI as a right to freedom and dignity—as a basis for authentic work without existential fear.

Evelyn Forget (*The Town with No Poverty*, 2011, MINCOME analysis) and Kari & Olli Kangas (*The Basic Income Experiment in Finland*, 2020) show that UBI improves mental health, autonomy, and motivation. Edward Deci & Richard Ryan’s Self-Determination Theory (2000 ff.)—autonomy + competence + relatedness = intrinsic motivation—proves that UBI lowers fear thresholds and fosters self-determined action. Kathi Weeks (*The Problem with Work*, 2011) and David Graeber (*Bullshit Jobs*, 2018) critique the fetish of wage labour, pointing to UBI as a potential lever against meaningless work and for a new ethics of labour.

Nancy Fraser (*Behind Marx's Hidden Abode*, 2014) and Silvia Federici (*Re-enchanting the World*, 2018) demonstrate that unpaid care work can only be fully recognised through some form of basic income.

Taken together, this body of research shows that UBI is not only economically feasible, but also psychologically transformative: it reduces stress, strengthens autonomy, stimulates creativity, and makes neurodivergent and care-oriented forms of work more viable.

Nonetheless, caution is necessary.

The real focus must lie on the fundamental value of the human being—a value that cannot be measured in money alone, nor fulfilled through greater consumer choice. Sooner or later, the UBI must be reconceptualised more comprehensively—perhaps by a second generation of advocates bold enough to interrogate capitalism itself and ask: *What is basic human value really? And why does it matter?*

A financial base without solidarity, participation, or self-determined inclusion cannot solve poverty. Nor can it halt the erosion of meaningful human contribution. UBI may be a first step—but it requires a second step: a radically different understanding of work, value, and participation, one that can create a larger development gap—in the sense of diversity, not inequality. Only then can UBI lead to long-term transformation.

## Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic research: A UBI creates the material freedom in which artistic practice can become everyday work. Projects can test this: “basic income residencies”, cash transfer performances or long-term labs that show how creativity explodes when fear and time pressure are removed. Art thus becomes a research tool that measures in real time how autonomy, flow and social imagination are expanded through income security.

— Critical Autism Studies: For many autistic people, basic financial security is a basic condition for sensory-appropriate work. UBI reduces the need for masking, allows intermittent engagement and promotes monotropic deep focus phases. The chapter positions UBI as a neurodivergence-appropriate infrastructure: it shifts the assessment of “work ability” away from adaptation and towards authentic, interest-based productivity — a paradigm shift for research and policy.

### ***The Soul of the Banker***

In response to the lies entered into my file by a job placement officer I had criticised—lies portraying me as a violent refuser of work—the German government sent the following statement about me, the complainant, to the public prosecutor’s office:

*“The activities of the responsible integration officer were aimed at reducing, if not eliminating, the complainant’s need for assistance through appropriate measures in accordance with the principle of demanding and supporting under SGB II. The counselling sessions with the complainant were difficult because he sees his livelihood exclusively in his work as a writer and artist, but does not exhaust all possibilities to end his need for assistance by fulfilling his legal obligations (§ 2 SGB II). In this regard, the conduct of the integration officer is not objectionable.”*  
(Letter dated 7 September 2017 / BMAS)

So the government sees it as perfectly legitimate to destroy me by force—after 20 years of research and artistic work.

Although Minister Nahles was extensively informed about the context—such as the issue of the “third group”—across hundreds of pages, the ministry continues to use its inhumane and contemptuous vocabulary.

The public prosecutor eventually drops the case against the dishonest “integration officer,” and, as noted earlier, the court even prohibits access to the very file that proves the government’s defamation.

Anyone who refuses to be “integrated” into the simulation of graduated usefulness is gradually destroyed—psychologically, physically, and

existentially—through administrative harassment. This is all in service of maintaining the illusion of a functioning labour market, the myth of a “social market economy.” (Soziale Marktwirtschaft)

Now I am officially declared an undesirable person by the state. After 23 years of living in Germany, my naturalisation is denied—ultimately because of this book and its contents. The state is convinced that my poverty is my own fault and must be punished with maximum severity. I may face deportation in the coming years.

From the very beginning, like millions of other poor people, I never stood a chance—as the person I truly am. With all my talents and limitations, my perception and injuries, my attempts to do what is right, to act with integrity and stand up for others—I never had a place. This economy has no interest in recognising these values.

People still ask why I don’t just “get a job.” But there is no job that allows me to contribute responsibly, appropriately, and using the full scope of my capacities. That kind of work can only be done outside of standard employment.

The truth is: I get thrown out the moment I take reality seriously—the moment I begin to connect the dots, take responsibility for my knowledge. Because in most cases, employment is a simulation of work. It’s not meant to be meaningful. Real insight would expose the contradictions—and that would threaten the cult of success.

But more than that: this has become my real work—because it is more important, more truthful, more humane. Because it is based on a different economy, one rooted in meaning rather than in metrics. What job in this world could justify stopping this work?

That job does not exist.

And even if it did—I could not do it. Not as an autistic person.

Let me also note: in all these years, not a single actual job offer has been made to me by the Job Centre. Not one. Because none exist that fit my profile—and the world of work is so rigidly structured that people are only evaluated by their profile, never by their substance. The state has no solution to this problem. It

cannot cope with diversity or complexity. Even the lowest-paid positions exclude people like me.

As I've said before: I tried everything. But HR people look at me and immediately panic—it's the reality I carry that terrifies them. It's their own guilt, their internalised shame, that makes them reject me. Because I would do excellent, deeply committed work—and that scares the hell out of them.

After such experiences, it's impossible to believe in normative alternatives. If the normal is abnormal, then the only path is to live the abnormal as the new normal—to flip the script. And there is a certain liberation in this.

At one point, I offered a group of bankers the opportunity to go soul-searching for a million euros. In the face of the absurdity and destructiveness of capitalism, what remains is only to hold up a mirror. I have decided to escalate the grotesque—to make it visible. That is the craft of my revolution.

The idea is simple: If the ultra-rich invest millions in their soul, in their humanity, then the human being itself will acquire stock market value. I am constructing a new world—one in which value follows different laws. This is no more absurd than the belief that a company's stock price is somehow "real." It's all psychology. So the real question is: How do I build a reality in which I can exist as a whole person? Only by radical embodiment. Ruthless truthfulness. Open to new relationships and interactions—whatever they may bring.

If even one manager pays me a million to search for his soul, a market will emerge—just like the real estate market or luxury goods, which only have value because someone says so. Soon, status symbols will shift. You won't just need a yacht, but a personal soul-searcher.

In an open, affluent world, anything can be turned into a market — as my alpacas have already proven. Of course, it's difficult at first to find others who perceive value in the same thing. But if a person dedicates their entire life to it — doesn't that make its value immeasurable? Don't we hold that power in our own hands? Must we really wait for others to assign us value? Isn't it time to hack the market?

Former Deutsche Bank CEO Josef Ackermann, through former *Wirtschaftswoche* editor-in-chief Mr. Baron, informed me that he

unfortunately could not take part in the project — but wished me continued success. The office of Austrian President Heinz Fischer described the project as “highly interesting,” and former German President Horst Köhler, once head of the IMF, also wished me well.

Many people wish me success. Because they know very well what it means. To wish someone success is often a polite form of damnation. “Good luck!” That’s what they say to the ones below.

The oppressed are wished success — and they try. They try everything. And they never realise that this constant trying is precisely what destroys them.

I don’t care about success anymore. It is what it is. It has value in itself. It reflects the world that surrounds it.

My “product” — the search for the soul of Josef Ackermann — apparently has no market. At least not among those who could give me a million euros. But what value does this work have for society?

I’m entirely serious about this. I’d be willing to spend several years genuinely searching for Ackermann’s soul — not necessarily to “find” it, though perhaps I would — but to make visible a dimension that currently has no place: the inner world. The more years I spend in conversation with him, in observation, in discourse and questioning, the more both he and I might change. New ideas might seep into a sealed-off world. Transparency might emerge.

At the very least, it would make the question of the soul more acceptable in public discourse — and by “soul” I don’t mean the spiritual, but the whole of the person.

Even after the rejection, my endeavour still carries the power to dissolve these structures — because I don’t yield. I continue. I confront industry, economy, capital, with other contexts. Gradually, this process will take effect.

One day, more people may begin to ask: Why are they not responding? Why not? What right do they have to withhold participation in shaping the world? Does the question of Ackermann’s soul have no economic relevance? Were the great financial and banking crises not born of greed and a lack of holistic vision? And I don’t mean Ackermann specifically — I mean all of us.

Do these crises stem only from rational errors, from poor economic theories or educational failures — or is something more essential missing? Participation? Presence?

Of course, it's somewhat humiliating when someone searches for your soul — it implies that you've lost it, or never had it. That's not flattering. It takes humility to not take that personally. It takes reflection. And the courage to enter into open, even playful processes.

But if this work is also *work* — and if it creates change, opens spaces for new forms of awareness and relieves suffering — how do we make that tangible?

Why doesn't the World Bank pick up the phone when I call? Why don't they start working with me tomorrow to reshape behaviour along the lines of a new economic theory? Or are they constantly receiving calls from people who've devoted their lives to ideas like these?

I don't think so. Nobody calls to offer *that*.

We must redefine relevance.

Yes, I have no official status. No degree. No title.

And yet I carry an experience that informs my action — and this action is in relation to the world.

Even the most hardened cynic must begin to recognise that. So: what are *you* working on? What is working *within* you?

The biggest challenge in the question of how this economic system could be changed — or rather expanded — is not that it's too difficult to imagine alternatives. That's simply not true. The real challenge is that it's extremely difficult for most people to accept that they've been lied to their whole lives, that they have been complicit, that much of what they've done has been in vain, and that they were exploited to maintain a lie — one that continues to cause others to suffer.

Many will agree with the individual points I raise in this book. But they'll fear the consequences. They'll try to relativise, minimise, or marginalise the whole thing. In the end, the radical critique of success will be reduced to a harmless

insight: “Maybe we shouldn’t focus *only* on success, but think more broadly.” We’ll be allowed to propose projects to manage the symptoms, but never to shut down the stock exchanges, or to fundamentally reform schools so that children learn in a self-directed way and emerge into an entirely different reality. No, no — we must continue to adapt to the necessities of life. That is, to the legitimacy of the pyramid.

Many people also believe that what I propose wouldn’t work in their company — that they would cease to be “successful.” The snake bites its own tail. I can talk forever about diversity indices or development gaps. But people are simply afraid of this vast social risk.

Perhaps, over time, the need will become more urgent, curiosity will grow, and people will follow similar paths — rejecting the rules of wage labour in order to create a new market. That remains my hope, and my intent. I have no power to enforce it. I just want to stop being punished, persecuted, and driven into poverty for my work.

My striving for change is ultimately a striving for improvement, isn’t it? Yes — and no. I am not claiming that my improvement must be everyone’s. For some wealthy people, my work is deeply unpleasant. But there are many ways to make form possible. And truthfully, I don’t even want to “improve” myself — I want to be allowed to exist as I am. Only with that stance can I allow others to be as *they* are. And now we must negotiate.

A young entrepreneur once asked me why I even bother with economics or social issues. “There’s no problem,” he said. “People just need to go to work.”

He genuinely believes — because he’s never thought about it — that *everyone* could be as successful as he is, with just a little effort. And simultaneously, he doesn’t believe anyone but himself capable of that effort.

When I criticise the miserable working conditions of people in precarious jobs, I’m often accused of showing disrespect toward those who endure hardship to improve the world for very little money. And I — as someone unemployed — am seen as doing “nothing.” That’s partly true. My criticism sometimes devalues others. But I, too, have been devalued — hurt — and it’s not always easy to generate self-worth without diminishing others. We are all shaped by violence.



Still, it's revealing that to criticise exploitative labour conditions is so often seen as ungrateful, even immoral.

Federal Minister Andrea Nahles repeatedly claimed that she wanted to “protect the value of work,” which, in her logic, required that the poor be paid less than low-wage workers — allegedly to keep the latter “motivated.” But one might ask — as she and her successors *should* — why then do so many poor people fall ill?

The government advocates grotesque and cruel ideologies — never seriously challenged in the press — that result in the systematic degradation of the lower classes. These ideas remain embedded in politics. Many politicians have no idea that such considerations make them monsters — complicit in the destruction of lives through long-term poverty, some never escaping the stigma.

Even if wage labour is nothing but suffering, it is still cited as proof that the system “works” — that it “improves the world.”

People are promised everything — if only they surrender everything. If they hand over responsibility to those who are supposedly better — more capable — who, through their “healthy egoism” and the “invisible hand” of the market, will make everything right in the end.

After years of work, research, and civic engagement, after everything I've recorded in my books, a manager at the Job Centre writes to me:

“Familiarity with the content and substance of your work is not necessary for placement strategy.”

The state refuses to engage with my skills. It devalues them entirely, while still expecting me to get jobs based on the assumption that someone somewhere might find me useful. But the state itself has made me worthless. It has actively prevented me from building value in a self-determined way. It has even gone so far as to criminalise me and destroy my health to maintain this lie.

Even today (2019), the state keeps thousands trapped in poverty, denies them recognition, and reduces their resources so brutally that many must simply perish in passivity. As the *Transfer Protocol* makes clear, this is all based on a grotesque lie — the terror of isolated value — which produces the value threshold and is publicly presented as a success story.

The victims remain largely silenced. Anyone who has not personally experienced the German Job Centres knows little to nothing about capitalism. It is only in the dark cave of bureaucratic neglect that the fake marketing of modern economics begins to disintegrate.

What remains are real human beings — people who've tried to do the right thing their entire lives and are discarded, bankrupted, or devalued for the most absurd reasons.

I have told the public prosecutor's office — it feels like hundreds of times — that *jobs*, as a principle, represent the greatest fraud in human history. But no one dares to prosecute that fraud. Instead, we're told to wait — wait for the next supposed economic upswing — so that politicians can declare everything solved, the system vindicated. Because we do not understand growth, and we refuse to make distinctions.

In the bad times, however, when all this is forgotten again, all the promises of civilisation made by capitalism and socialism are regularly reversed. I therefore conclude and perhaps summarise by stating that the “better”, i.e. the “good” in capitalism exists completely detached from real conditions. For it is not a reality, but a function. It is the function with the help of which the devaluation of human beings continues to progress.

Only the individual, who becomes a whole person, a whole world, through labour, can enable a truly strong economy in the interests of people and nature. It is time for this to happen, and it is also time for entrepreneurs to open up to allowing a different path that reconciles the old conflict between socialism and capitalism and enables the third way, an economy that is not geared towards one-sided profit, but towards the preservation of diversity, the true basis of life.

### Research Relevance | Artistic Research × Critical Autism Studies

— Artistic Research: The portrait of a top financial manager as a mental wasteland opens up an artistic terrain in which the aesthetics of power and inner impoverishment are exhibited in parallel. Artistic Research can work here with documentary fictions, data dramaturgies and psychogeographical

montages in order to make the invisible (risk shifting, blame shifting, emotion management) visible. The figure of Ackermann becomes a “negative capability” that challenges the audience to re-imagine business ethics.

— Critical Autism Studies: Analysing the 'Soul of the CEO' contrasts autistic values — coherence, clarity of rules, empathy beyond small talk — with the performative emotional labour of financial capitalism. The chapter demonstrates how neurodivergent perception systems capture the discrepancy between public narrative (success) and subcutaneous reality (destruction) particularly sharply. It thus serves as a case study for CAS research on moral dissonance and the autistic ability to decode social facades.