

DEMONTEZING CONTEMPORARY ART THROUGH ANONYMITY:
EXAMINING THE PRACTICES OF ATELIER POPULAIRE

By

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Abstract

Many western avant-garde movements have outwardly criticized the commercialism of the art market and held disdain for the large role that collectors played. Yet with many modes of resilience, almost all of these movements have been enfolded into collections and museums, even contemporary works which clearly critique the exorbitant prices at auctions and galleries and those who purchase them.

Considering this phenomenon, I explore the reasons so many artistic movements fail in eschewing the commercial sector and use the expertise of economists and historians studying the contemporary art market as to what artistic practices might succeed. I posit that it is a true subversion of authorship, or rather anonymity which is key to subverting commodification. The conception of authorship within the paper is informed by Foucault's *What is an Author?*, looking at the ways in which authorship influences the contextualization of an artist's work and the discord it surrounds.

I use Atelier Populaire, a poster workshop and artistic collective active during the revolts of 1968, as a case study to examine my theories of anonymity as an effective practice to critique and avoid the embrace of the art market. Paris during the 1960s was a wellspring of philosophy, literature, and fine art that questioned the predominant role of authorship within their field. Atelier Populaire expanded on the practices of their predecessors and embraced anonymity within their work. They utilized three crucial tactics which allowed their work to circumvent the monetization. These methods were anonymity through collectivity, anonymity of intellectual labor, and anonymity by lack of proper authentication.

Chapter 1

In December of 2019, Maurizio Cattelan's *Comedian* took the world by storm. His work consisted of a banana purchased from a local grocery store taped to the gallery wall with a standard strip of duct tape placed at a 45-degree angle. Premiering at the Art Basel Miami Beach, *Comedian* sold two iterations for \$120,000, another for \$150,000, as well as two "artist's proofs". Cattelan's viral banana reached a significance in pop culture rarely seen in contemporary art. Think pieces were published by The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Vogue, and the Washington Post including many other media outlets.¹ Debates sprung up in defense or protest of the piece, some questioning whether it could even be qualified as art, as others maintained that the piece rightly critiqued the art market and its wealthy buyers. The Perrotin gallery explained their artist's piece as offering a "wry commentary on society, power, and authority".²

The use of common materials to question the inflated prices of fine art or the status symbols it holds follows the tradition of Arte Povera, an Italian contemporary movement in the 1960s and 1970s in which artists utilized "poor" materials such as garbage and other found objects instead of traditional media. However, I would offer that *Comedian* is closer in practice to *The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Material State of Stabilized Sensibility, The Void*, exhibited in 1958, in which Yves Klein

¹ Jason Farago, "A (Grudging) Defense of the \$120,000 Banana," *New York Times*, Dec. 8, 2019.; Brian P. Kelly, "In Defense of Maurizio Cattelan's Banana," *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 9, 2019.; Elise Taylor, "The \$120,000 Art Basel Banana, Explained," *Vogue*, Dec. 10, 2019.

² Perrotin Gallery (@galerieperrotin), "...this new work is no different than Cattelan's hyper-realistic sculptures lampooning popular culture and offer a wry commentary on society, power, and authority..." Instagram, Dec. 4, 2019.

displayed an empty gallery room, painted white, and removed all objects excluding one glass display case. Like Klein's *Void*, Cattelan's piece was sold as a conceptual work with a certificate of approval. Instead of critiquing the commodification of an art object, Cattelan subscribes to the fetishization of the artist in the purest sense, because the collector isn't purchasing a banana, but rather clout and name recognition alone.

Comedian neither avoids commodification nor punishes those who purchased it, as the buyer now owns one of his most famous pieces. All in all, *Comedian* fails in creating a compelling and effective critique of the art market or the authority of fine art galleries.

Comedian gained a cult recognition very similar to when the anonymous street artist Banksy shredded his work at Sotheby's in 2018. Banksy's famous *Girl with Balloon*, a print iteration depicting a young girl reaching upwards for a heart-shaped balloon, went up for auction at Sotheby's and sold for \$1.4 million. Directly following the auction sale, the print began to shred partway out of the frame much to the shock of the auction attendees. The event gripped headlines and prompted discussions around the art market in public media and private lives. Banksy's instagram video of installing the shredder into the frame, in case the piece was ever put on auction, has been viewed over 15 million times. Although the shredding was in opposition to auction prices and art inflation, it has been hailed as a masterful publicity stunt and predicted to have doubled the value of the original work and increased the prices of his other works as well.³ Even Sotheby's, the supposed victim of the event, defended the act as following in the

³Leon Benrimon **quoted in** Jennifer Calfas, "Banksy Shredded a Piece of Art That Sold for \$1.4 Million. Now It's Worth Double, According to an Art Expert," Money.com, Oct. 8, 2018.

tradition of great artists, “Rauschenberg erased de Kooning’s drawing; Gustav Metzger and Jean Tinguely pioneered auto-destructive art; Michael Landy shredded all his possessions; and what about Banksy himself and his corrupted oils?”.⁴ Speculation as to whether Sotheby’s was in collusion with Banksy points to the fact that the event was entirely lucrative on both sides. Both received limitless publicity and increased hype around their names, which can be easily turned for profit.

In this way, the shredding of the work fails in the same ways as *Comedian*. Both works reward the buyer and fail to remain outside of the trappings of the art market. In fact they show an astute understanding as to how art gains value, in this case through artist hype. Although most artworks never achieve the high profile press of Cattelan or Banksy, they are prime examples of a historical precedent where the artistic movements against commodification end up at auction houses nonetheless. The issue with Banksy or Maurizio Cattelan is not that their works are bad or culturally irrelevant, but that they fail to complete their stated goal. Either through hypocrisy or ignorance, artists play directly into the modes of commodification. **My goal for this thesis is not to judge the monetary success of past movements or artists, but rather to analyze the reasons so many art pieces fall flat in critiquing the art market and to explore what artistic practices might succeed in subverting the commercial sector.**

The tendency for artists to distance themselves from the commercial market can be traced to the tradition of the Renaissance. In the Middle Ages, artists were craftsmen who offered goods and services like a blacksmith or carpenter, charging at a fixed

⁴ Sotheby’s, “Latest Banksy Artwork 'Love is in the Bin' Created Live at Auction,” Oct. 11, 2018.

hourly rate. During the Renaissance, artists' wages shifted from the previous economic practices of the Middle Ages, illustrated by patron Archbishop St. Antonio of Florence's (1389-1459) comment: "Painters claim, more or less reasonably, to be paid for their art not only according to the amount of work involved, but rather according to the degree of their application and experience."⁵ The increased wages and cultural importance created a rise in social class and a shift in public perception holding the artist to a higher moral standard. Their newly dignified position was one of vocation and inspiration, not merely skilled labor. Cennino Cennini, a fifteenth-century painter, advised his colleagues, "There are some who follow the arts from poverty and necessity... but those who pursue them from love of the art and noble-mindedness are to be commended above all others".⁶ During the fifteenth and sixteenth century, artists were not seen as manual laborers but intellectual thinkers; their art became an invocation not a trade. The notion that artists should not work for material gain, but out of pure love of creativity, became an established convention.⁷ This convention that artists should shun the monetary ambitions of their craft persisted into the western avant-garde tradition and the present day.

Avant-garde artistic movements have a rich history of attempting to subvert the art market and commercialism at large. Italian Futurists, obsessed with uplifting the new age of technology of the early 20th century through their work, disowned their

⁵David W. Galenson, "Artists And the Market: from Leonardo and Titian to Andy Warhol and Damien Hirst" (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2007) 4.

⁶Galenson, "Artists and the Market," 5.

⁷Galenson, "Artists and the Market," 5.

contemporaries who were “ensnared by tradition [and] academicism.”⁸ They rose up “against all superficiality and banality- all the slovenly and facile commercialism which makes the work of most of our highly respected artists throughout Italy worthy of our deepest contempt.”⁹ They believed that museums and collectors were too obsessed with their classical past, and thus this new form of painting would defy the market and its critics.

Francis Picabia, a leading New York Dadaist, rallied against the “odious trade: Selling art expensively”¹⁰ in his *DADA Manifesto* and described the auctioning of art as a “Farce, farce, farce, farce, farce, my dear friends”.¹¹ Dadaism, originating from the trauma of World War I, used absurdist ideology that negated the philosophy and classicism of the upper class, yet the movement has now become established within the art historical cannon, and Dada art is widely purchased by museums and collectors. Following the fall of Dada, Surrealism carried on the tradition of condemning Western priority of logic and reason. Leader and author of the *Manifesto of Surrealism* published in 1924, Andre Breton dubbed the movement’s most prominent artist Salvador Dali as Avida Dollars after working on the Hitchcock film *Spellbound*.¹² Salvador Dali stated that he held a “pure, vertical, mystical, gothic love of cash”¹³ and pursued various

⁸ Umberto Boccioni, *Manifesto of the Futurist Painters*, in *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, ed. Mary Ann Caw, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001) 183.

⁹ Boccioni, 183.

¹⁰ Francis Picabia, *DADA Manifesto* in *Dadas on Art: Tzara, Arp, Duchamp and Others*, ed. Lucy R. Lippard (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007) 166.

¹¹ Picabia, 166.

¹² Elliott H. King, “Still Spellbound by Spellbound,” *Space Between: Literature & Culture, 1914-145*, Vol. 14 (2018): 1.

¹³ Stanley Meisler, “The Surreal World of Salvador Dalí,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, April 2005.

commercial endeavors. His self-aggrandizing of fame and fortune as well as his refusal to denounce fascism led to his expulsion from the Surrealist movement in 1939. Even artists who wished to avoid the covetous clasp of art collectors were unable to avoid its inevitability. During the height of Abstract Expressionism, artists such as Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock harbored fears of selling out,¹⁴ yet their work turned into a market phenomenon and continues to sell at auction for record prices.

The rejection of capitalism continued into contemporary European art movements. One example of this is Arte Povera. Germano Celant, an Italian art historian and art critic, coined the term Arte Povera in 1967 and has written prolifically on the subject. In *Notes for a Guerilla War*, he rants against the capitalistic systems to which artists are subjected. He describes contemporary artists as, “the new apprentice jester”¹⁵ who is “called upon to produce fine commercial merchandise, offering satisfaction to sophisticated palates”.¹⁶ To exist outside of the “mass production mentality” and outside of the system is to amount to revolution. He describes the position of Arte Povera and its artists as, “No longer among the ranks of the exploited, the artist becomes a guerrilla fighter, capable of choosing his places of battle and with the advantages conferred by mobility, surprising and striking, rather than the other way around.”¹⁷ Yet Arte Povera followed the same fate as its predecessors and has now been accepted into the art canon.

¹⁴ Carter Ratcliff, “The Marriage of Art and Money,” *Art in America*, July 1988, 77.

¹⁵ Germano Celant, “Notes for a Guerilla War,” *Flash Art*, no. 5 (1967): 1.

¹⁶ Celant, “Guerilla War” 1.

¹⁷ Celant, “Guerilla War” 1.

Whenever the art market merged too closely to their craft, artists would rebel by creating an art form that they believed to be outside of the commercial sector. However, money would always return to haunt their radicalized movement. Discussing this push and pull of reactionaries in Western art, art critic Carter Ratcliff observed, “In the 20th century, whenever art and money threatened to marry, certain avant-gardists militantly refused to hold their peace. Despite their objections, the works of European art movements- including products of the most violently anti-market stances- became valuable commodities”.¹⁸ The list of artistic movements which were enveloped into the fold of monetization is endless, regardless of artistic intent. The art market has long been integral to the history of artistic movements, and if successful, it seems there is no way to avoid the commodification of the work. What is much less common is to see an artistic movement which has reached cultural importance yet still avoids the commercialization of its contemporaries.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Although there is plenty of literature on the economics of contemporary art and even more analyses on its cultural significance, there is a dearth of material that bridges the gap between the two disciplines. My goal is to apply the economic principles of contemporary art to artists that wished to subvert them. By putting these two disciplines in conversation with each other, novel analysis arises and offers insight into the methods that can be utilized to truly subvert commodification

¹⁸Ratcliff, “The Marriage of Art and Money,” 77.

Who are the Greatest Living Artists? The View from the Auction Market, written by David Galenson,¹⁹ attempts to disprove the notion that the art market is a senseless and irrational entity. Released by the National Bureau of Economic Research, the study looked at auction prices of contemporary artists and used that data to identify the most important living-artists today. The study ranks artists in two ways: the first (Table 1, Figure 1.) by the single highest selling price of their work, the second (Table 2, Figure 2.) by the number of times their work sold for more than \$1 million. He concludes that auction prices have a direct correlation to the greatness of the artist and that auction results are neither random nor uninteresting. In his conclusion he states, "auction outcomes can systematically identify today's greatest living artists. The most valuable art is made by the greatest artists, and Jasper Johns, Bruce Nauman, Lucian Freud, Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, Jeff Koons, and Gerhard Richter must figure prominently in any account of those who have made the most important contributions to modern art in the past half century."²⁰ Although these artists are now considered as indisputably influential, none of them received universal praise from art critics during their early periods, demonstrating that in effect the market is a better predictor and even more culturally relevant to the development of an artist's career. These findings then provide an explanation for the persistent commodification of artworks; their purchase is not due to the random appeals of the rich but because of their "greatness." Attempts to

¹⁹David Galenson, "Who Are the Greatest Living Artists? The View from the Auction Market." *NBER Working Paper Series*, 2005, 11644.

²⁰ Galenson, "Greatest Living Artist," 31.

decommodify artwork are inconsequential, for if the art is influential it will be sold at soaring prices.

*Talking Prices*²¹ by Olav Velthuis takes a deeper examination of not just the monetary trends of famous artists, but explores the type of economic structures underlying the contemporary art market. Velthuis maintains that the buyers, sellers, and distributors of contemporary art are rational actors who strive to maximize their profits, yet the art market does not fit within Neoclassical economics, a theory that uses supply and demand as the basis for production, pricing, and consumption of goods and services. Instead, Velthuis proposes to view art markets as cultural constellations.²² This means that market exchange, like other social interactions, is highly ritualized with symbols that transfer meaning to those exchanging goods. Just as culture influences social settings, so does it influence market settings. Discussing this phenomenon, he argues that the cultural “infusion is to such a degree that it is virtually impossible to separate market and culture analytically”.²³ Prices become cultural entities, one that artists, dealers, and collectors rely on every day.

To understand the pricing mechanisms behind art sales, Velthuis analyses statistics collected from the Dutch primary art market of works sold between 1992 and 1998. He examined characteristics of the artist (age, reputation, sex), of the work of art (technique, size), and of the gallery (affiliation, age) looking for price-determining factors and causes for art fluctuation. He found that oil painting sold for a higher price than

²¹Olav Velthuis, *Talking Prices*. Princeton University Press, 2013.

²² Olav Velthuis, “Introduction” in *Talking Prices*, (Princeton University Press, 2013) 3.

²³ Velthuis, “Introduction,” 3.

other techniques. On average, a watercolor and a print sells for E683 and E1991 less than oil painting, respectively.²⁴ Size also has an effect; for every increase in standard deviation of size, the price of an artwork increases by E630. There is also a positive relationship between the number of works sold and the price of the individual pieces.²⁵ This is to say that exclusivity does not raise prices, in fact it is the opposite. Unlike the laws of supply and demand, the more work the artist sells: the higher the price for each work. The age of the artist also has a positive effect on price. For every year of age difference, the price gap increases E11.²⁶ Museum acquisitions of a certain artist has a strong positive correlation in raising prices, increasing E87 on average.²⁷ The more money the museum paid to acquire the work, the higher the average price level rises on the primary market. However these trends do not act as laws within contemporary art, and his findings show that it is *within* the collective works of one artist these trends have a high correlation, but cannot predict price discrepancy *between* artists.

Although statistical research shows trends and regularities, to find the causal mechanisms of the way prices are set in galleries, Velthuis conducted qualitative research, observing the practices gallerists used in price determination. He noticed that gallerists rarely set prices on a case by case basis, but instead would follow “pricing scripts,” a set of patterns that enables dealers to set prices systematically.²⁸ What

²⁴Olav Velthuis, “Determinants of Prices” in *Talking Prices*, (Princeton University Press, 2013) 103.

²⁵Velthuis, “Determinants of Prices,” 104.

²⁶ Velthuis, “Determinants of Prices,” 107.

²⁷Velthuis, “Determinants of Prices,” 108.

²⁸ Olav Velthuis, “The Art of Pricing” in *Talking Prices*, (Princeton University Press, 2013) 117.

allows pricing scripts to be useful is that they are primarily based on the reputation of an artist and the size of their work as opposed to the much less quantifiable quality of the piece itself. Following such scripts allow for stability and consistency of an artist's work and help ease the confusion and apprehension of investors. Reference points become the law in pricing, where one work in similar size cannot be much more expensive than a similar work from the same artist. Thus the first rule of price scripting is to start as low as reasonably possible. To decrease prices within the same gallery the following year is nearly impossible as it signifies to collectors that they made a poor investment.

Secondly, one looks for the initial pricing of an artist with similar style and comparable age and uses those values as a baseline. When increasing prices the three main guidelines are demand, time, and reputation. Regarding reputation, price increases may happen after museum exhibitions, publications, or other forms of institutional favor. The rules of supply and demand do not generally enter galleries or pricing scripts, and it is common for the highly prolific and hardly prolific artists to sell at a comparative price within the same gallery.

The findings of Velthuis offer incredible insight into the correlative and causal functions of pricing artwork. Of course there are innumerable extraneous factors that can affect something as culturally loaded as pricing artwork, but a common thread that follows both the quantitative and qualitative research is authorship. The main limitation of studying the correlations of different factors such as technique, age, and gallery of the Dutch primary art market, is that these correlations are only found within an artist's oeuvre, but does not explain pricing discrepancies between artists. Although not entirely

surprising, it does show that the artist becomes the most integral factor. This too can be seen in gallerists using pricing scripts. Reference points are the foundation of pricing scripts and come to determine the prices deemed as reasonable and allow for consistency among galleries. These reference points are rarely the quality of the work, but rather the age, reputation, and previous sales of the artist. Like artist is compared to like artist, but a piece lacking such context becomes nearly impossible to price.

This focus on authorship makes it difficult, if not impossible, to price anonymous works of art in galleries. It also makes it difficult to contextualize these works in museum spaces. In *Anonymous art reconsidered: anonymity and the contemporary art institution*, Konstantinos Vassiliou examines a Greek exhibition, the 4th edition of RE-Culture, in which anonymous art is presented, and the benefits and challenges posed to the viewer when grappling with anonymous art. This exhibition serves as a case study in which observations and challenges of the exhibition can be extrapolated to art institutions as a whole. He discusses four works on display, all of which showed a varying degree of modernist tendencies, and demonstrated the limbo in which works exist with an unknown date of creation. Their reception would change dramatically if the viewer knew that the work of art was created in 1910 or 1990, and so works with technical proficiency become nearly indistinguishable from those of an amateur. He says, “Without an identified creator, anonymous art does not seem to provide a clear and standard negotiable foundation to determine its status within or without the artistic institution.”²⁹

²⁹ Konstantinos Vassiliou, “Anonymous Art Reconsidered: Anonymity and the Contemporary Art Institution,” *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, Vol. 9:1, 5.

Anonymous art has a particular knack for bypassing institutional acceptance. The complete obscurity of anonymous art and its lack of ability to gain critical acclaim shows the entrenchment of institutional ideology and its notions of the author.

Chapter 3: What is Anonymity?

The concept of anonymity can have a multitude of understandings, each slightly different than the rest. To have a clear and concise definition of anonymity, it is important to understand the other side of the coin, authorship. For if anonymity is subverting authorship, one must know precisely what they are negating. My conception of authorship is heavily informed by Foucault's essay, *What is an Author?*³⁰

Foucault's essay chooses to focus on what precisely authorship means in contemporary society. He explores how the author was individualized throughout European history, the systems of valorization into which authorship falls, and the relationship between an author and a text. Drawing a historical narrative, Foucault shows that authorship varies wildly between discursive practices. For instance, to be the author of scientific research requires different qualifications than to be the author of a poem. Medieval historian Saint Jerome created four criteria that a text must follow in order to be attributed to a certain author. His four criteria were that the text must uphold the level of quality associated with the author, there cannot be conflicting ideas to those expressed in other works, the text must be in a similar style to the other works, and it cannot refer to events subsequent to the death of the author. Although these criteria

³⁰ Michel Foucault, *What Is an Author?* in *Aesthetics: A Reader in Philosophy of the Arts: Fourth Edition* (Taylor and Francis, 2017) 1-16.

are no longer followed, Foucault argues that they do inform the ways in which Western society conceptualizes the notion of authorship. The contemporary author is still constrained to a unity in style and level of quality. Any deviation of these qualifications is attributed to outside influence, evolution, or maturation. Differing and conflicting ideas are neutralized by the author, following the notion that there needs to be a point of resolution in the mind of the author and thus in the series of works.

Foucault introduces the concept of the author function. This term is used to describe the phenomena in which the author of a work does not refer to the proper name of the writer or creator, but rather to the rational entity constructed by the reader. This construction is informed by the collective consciousness and discourse in which the work operates, as opposed to the text itself. Authorship classifies the existence, circulation, and operation of different categories of discourse. Because the author-function is conceived of by the reader, Foucault then argues that the author does not create a work, but rather the work creates the author. Thus, every text has a writer, but not all texts have an author, for if the text does not exist within a certain discourse, the author-function cannot be served.

The author function reexamines the significance that society places on authorship and the ways in which it can be dismantled. Anonymity is then the true dissolution of the author function. It is the absence of an individualized genius and the inability for a work to be conceptualized as part of a larger collective. An anonymous work is not merely the want of a proper name, but the incapacity to attribute the intellectual labor of an artwork to any entity, even to a pseudonym. This definition differs

from the anonymity attributed to appropriation art or ready-mades in a key way, for true subversion of the author function in art is not the absence of originality or craft, but the absence of reputation and separation from an artist's oeuvre.

Chapter 4: Atelier Populaire

Because the theories of anonymity and purposeful demonetization lie in a hypothetical space, it is important to ground them in the real world. I have chosen the works of Atelier Populaire as a case study to examine the tactics this artistic collective used and their varying degrees of success in embracing anonymity and subverting commodification. The methods used by Atelier Populaire are not meant to be a rigid structure by which one must abide, but rather they set a historical precedence for using anonymity to defy the art market and support the idea that such approaches can be effective.

Atelier Populaire is part of one of a few artistic movements which gained cultural relevance and institutional acclaim, yet their work continues to eschew the heightened commodification of auctions and collectors. The group formed in 1960s France, which had become a wellspring for philosophers, writers, and artists who sought to subvert authorship and bring in the age of poststructuralism. Atelier Populaire drew on the works of their contemporaries. Yet unlike their predecessors, Atelier Populaire not only subverted authorship, but became truly **anonymous**.

On May 2, 1968 the Paris University administration shut down the campus at Nanterre, following protests over dormitory visitation rights. What followed led to the largest general strike in French history. The nation was paralyzed from May to the end

of June. Mass protests, strikes, worker occupations, and battles between protestors and riot police forced French production to a halt. Artists, students, and workers formed collectives to mass produce propaganda posters around Paris, predominantly in the Latin Quarter. Of these, the collective known as Atelier Populaire became the most celebrated, touted for capturing the political rhetoric of the tensions and replacing the heavily censored press with their own compelling visual language.

On May 8th, the students of the École des Beaux-Arts went on strike. They cited complaints with the quality of education provided and showed support to the other students at Nanterre. By May 13th, a collective that would come to be known as the Atelier Populaire had taken over the empty university art studios to be used as the basis for their operations. Many of its members were part of the Salon de la Jeune Peinture, students at the École des Beaux-Arts, or associated with the Maoist group: Union des Jeunesses Communistes marxistes-léninistes. By May 16th, a General Assembly was formed and production of posters began in an assembly-line fashion equipped with ink and paper from the print shops and newspaper presses that were on strike during the summer of '68.³¹ On May 21st Atelier Populaire released their first tract titled, "Atelier Populaire: oui, Atelier Bourgeois: non," meaning "Workshop of the People: Yes, Workshop of the Bourgeoisie, no.". On June 27th, the police raided and shut down the workshop, after it had produced over 300,000 posters in 350 designs.

³¹ Sami Siegelbaum, "Inside-Out: The Atelier Populaire in May '68" in *The Invisible Prison: Art, Collectivity, and Protest in 1960s France* (ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 2011) 180.

In 1968, agitation and political unrest spanned across national borders. Uprisings in Germany, Italy and the United States all preceded the fateful events in Paris.³² In France, tensions rose as De Gaulle expanded his control over visual media. The Gaullist regime introduced advertisements in television in order to siphon ad revenue from the illustrated press,³³ and the Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française, although meant to be independent, was under direct control of the French government.³⁴ During the inflammatory events of May '68 television failed to provide information or visuals of the street battles in Paris. The illustrated press and newspapers were unable to keep up with the escalating violence and protests, while under political pressure to get in line. Radio became the main medium able to report on site as it was happening. Filling the vacuum of visual media instilled by De Gaul, the posters of Atelier Populaire flooded the streets offering defiant, poetic, and humorous messages and images. The propaganda posters created by Atelier Populaire and like groups became the predominant graphic depiction and emblem for the summer of 1968.³⁵ Although the cultural relevance of Atelier Populaire cannot be denied, they were able to circumvent the monetization of their work. During the short lived time of Atelier Populaire, they utilized a couple of crucial tactics which allowed for their work to exist anonymously. These methods were anonymity through

³² Michael Seidman, "Introduction" in *The Imaginary Revolution Parisian Students and Workers in 1968*. (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2004) 1.

³³ Victoria Scott, "Le Carré Blanc, The Posters and Mass Communications" in *Silk-Screens and Television Screens: Maoism and the Posters of May and June 1968 in Paris*, (ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 2010) 49.

³⁴ Scott, "Le Carré Blanc," 43.

³⁵ Siegelbaum, "Inside Out", 176.

collectivity, anonymity of intellectual labor, and anonymity by lack of proper authentication.

Anonymity in Collectivity

The collective structure of Atelier Populaire and the ideology which guided them was heavily influenced by the pre-existing frameworks of artistic collectives thriving in France such as the Salon de la Jeune Peinture and artists from Live and Let Die. Eduardo Arroyo, a member of the Salon de la Jeune Peinture, Live and Let Die, and Atelier Populaire, commented that, “The Atelier Populaire was virtually a factory where we produced all the iconography of the struggles. All the artists of the [Salon de] la Jeune Peinture were there; and given that we had all known each other for a long time, this new communal work was as effective as all our preceding collective experiences.”³⁶ The communal structure Arroyo alludes to is Atelier Populaire’s General Assembly of Control, which they borrowed from the Salon de la Jeune Peinture their model of collectively workshopping ideas of content, form, and political effectiveness of an in-progress painting.³⁷ The General Assembly repeated this process of collectively discussing the merits of their poster designs and slogans either accepting, rejecting or modifying them. These decisions were rooted in two questions published in their primary tract, “Is the political idea sound?” and “Does this poster put over this idea well?”³⁸

³⁶Jill Carrick, “The Assassination of Marcel Duchamp: Collectivism and Contestation in 1960s France,” *Oxford Art Journal* 31, no. 1, (2008) 22.

³⁷Carrick, “The Assassination of Marcel Duchamp,” 22.

³⁸ Atelier Populaire: Posters from the Revolution (London: Dobson, 1969), np.

Aspects of the manifestos published by Live and Let Die were recycled into the anonymous tracts of Atelier Populaire. One of these aspects is the notion of the “safety valve” found in the 1962 manifesto *How to Get Rid of Him*, stating that, “Culture thus functions as a safety valve inside the general process of integration that governs us”.³⁹ A similar sentiment is found within *Atelier Populaire. Oui. Atelier Bourgeois. Non.* when discussing the role of the artist within culture. “In giving him [the artist] this privileged status, culture puts the artist in a position where he can do no harm and in which he functions as a safety-valve in the mechanism of bourgeois society”.⁴⁰ They argue that the privileged status given to artists stems from the forces of oppression of the ruling class isolating artists, locking them in an “invisible prison” of the individual genius, thus Atelier Populaire hopes to transform society and align themselves with the workers on strike and defy the Gaullist government which they saw as working against the people.

Atelier Populaire’s endeavor to “eliminate the bourgeois practice of individualist creation which consciously or not[,] always arises” can be traced to other artistic and philosophical practices at work earlier in the century.⁴¹ GRAV was one such artistic collective, forming at the beginning of the century in 1960. GRAV’s foundational mission was to break away from the current artistic movements, to reject the emotional sensibilities of their contemporaries, and to instead focus on the “constant

³⁹ Carrick, “The Assassination of Marcel Duchamp,” 22.

⁴⁰ “Posters from the Revolution”, np.

⁴¹ “Posters from the Revolution”, np.

relationship existing between the plastic object and the human eye”.⁴² GRAV produced art that rejected the myth of the artist and rallied against the mystification of expressionistic art which dominated the French art market. They created artworks that demonstrated art’s reliance on the observation of the spectator, negating the notion of artistic autonomy. For example, their work *l’Instabilité- le labyrinthe* consisted of a funhouse with seven rooms, each with a unique environment inviting participation of the spectator. The labyrinth was filled with varying materials holding kinetic, visual, or auditory qualities, relying on activation by the spectator. GRAV’s aesthetic of instability rejected art that was confined to the frame or the pedestal, and instead showed a predilection towards environments which stimulated the full range of sensory perception. The relationship between the eye of the spectator and the plastic object served to undermine the conception of the artist as an autonomous and privileged figure.⁴³ Following *l’Instabilité- le labyrinthe* GRAV published their tract *Assez de Mystification*,⁴⁴ which explicitly rejected the tendencies of art criticism and the art market: “The situation still maintains complacent consideration for the artwork, the unique artist, the myth of creation and of what now seems to be in vogue: groups, considered as super-individuals”. They rejected the overvalued creative act, seeing it

⁴² Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel, *Propositions sur le mouvement*, reprinted in *Strategies de participation : GRAV-Groupe de Recherche d’Art Visuel, 1960–1968* (Grenoble: Le Magasin—Centre national d’art contemporain de Grenoble, 1998) 66.

⁴³ Larry Busbea, *Kineticism-spectacle-environment*. (October, no. 144, 2013) 98.

⁴⁴ GRAV, “Assez de Mystifications in GRAV,” in *1960-1968: Stratégies de participation* (Grenoble: Le Magasin – Centre national d’art contemporain de Grenoble, 1998) 126.

as limiting, and instead arguing that, "It is necessary for an OPENING, to leave the vicious circle of present-day art".⁴⁵

In 1966, BMPT formed. Their name was an amalgamation of the individual artist: Daniel Buren, Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier, and Niele Toroni. Each member painted their motif without variation until the group's dissolution in 1967. Buren painted vertical stripes, Mosset made a singular black circle on a white background, Parmentier created horizontal lines, and Toroni placed uniform daubs on a canvas. On January 3, 1967, BMPT exhibited their work at the Salon de la Jeune Peinture of the Paris Museum of Modern Art. For the duration of the day, BMPT created their respective motifs, demonstrating the simplicity of their techniques and its reproducible quality. During the exhibition, visiting spectators were handed out leaflets which stated:

*Because painting is a game,
Because painting is the application (consciously or otherwise) of the rules of composition,
Because painting is the freezing of movement,
Because painting is the representation (or interpretation or appropriation or disputation or presentation) of objects,
Because painting is a springboard for the imagination, Because painting is spiritual illustration,
Because painting is justification Because painting serves an end,
Because to paint is to give aesthetic value to flowers, women, eroticism, the daily environment, art, dadaism, psychoanalysis and the war in Vietnam,
We are not painters.⁴⁶*

Unlike GRAV, BMPT did not focus on engaging the spectator. Instead, they stripped down the creative act to its basest levels and rendered it obsolete. When

⁴⁵ GRAV, "Assez de Mystifications, 126.

⁴⁶ Michel Claura, "Paris Commentary" in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999) 84.

Georges Boudaille asked Buren if he wanted to force the spectator to acknowledge only what is visible on the canvas, Buren responded, "I don't want to force the spectator to do anything. I present a thing that distracts in no way from this thing: this thing is this thing. You look at it, examine it, the expression 'you contemplate it' can no longer be used".⁴⁷ BMPT's statement that they "are not painters" demotes themselves from inspired artists to mere creators.

In 1967 Barthes published *The Death of the Author*. He argues that authorial intention should be kept away from literary critique where objective meaning is rendered ever-changing and variable for it does not lie within the text but within the reader. In fact, he disposes of the author entirely, believing that imposing an author to a text limited the text and closed the writing: "To give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the writing".

⁴⁸ Barthes' main thesis reflects on how one must deny authorship in order to empower the reader, a notion heavily explored by the aforementioned artistic collectives. He ended his essay famously with "the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author".⁴⁹ To Barthes, authorship inhibits the reader from their full power to create meaning and analysis, and it is within reading that the true locus of writing lies. He writes,

⁴⁷ Georges Boudaille, "Interview with Daniel Buren: art is no longer justifiable or setting the record straight" in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999) 71.

⁴⁸ Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*. (Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.) 5.

⁴⁹ Barthes, *Death of the Author*, 6.

The reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination; but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted.⁵⁰

It is the reader who combines strings of text together and places them in dialogue with each other, giving the text meaning. Barthes rejects the mystification of the author, declaring it the “the result of capitalist ideology, which has accorded the greatest importance to the author's ‘person’ and reexamines the role that society places on authorship and the ways in which it can be dismantled.”⁵¹

A similar sentiment to Barthes’ rejection of the mystification of the author and its role in upholding the bourgeois structure can be seen in the tracts of Atelier Populaire. Yet unlike the works of GRAV and Barthes which championed the audience, Atelier Populaire sought to use collectivity to voice the unheard and anonymous working populace of France. Their devotion to workers’ issues is evident, for in Gasquet’s *500 affiches de mai 68*, 123 poster designs discussed workers’ issues while only 23 focused on students.⁵² Atelier Populaire’s members churned out propaganda posters in an assembly line fashion, and so even their mode of production exemplified the mass workers they wished to represent. The simple and crude aesthetic of their posters not only allowed for easier production, but also contrasted against the slick and professional aesthetic of advertising or Gaullist propaganda. In their tract, Atelier

⁵⁰ Barthes, 6.

⁵¹ Barthes, 1.

⁵² Michael Seidman, “Incendiary Occupations” in *The Imaginary Revolution Parisian Students and Workers in 1968*. (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2004) 133.

Populaire strove to “oppose the role which society expects intellectuals to play, along with the technocrats, as the watch-dogs in a system of bourgeois economic production.”⁵³ and so their anonymity and collectivity was not only a sign of solidarity to the lower class which they hoped to represent, but an artistic decision to subvert authorship due to its capitalistic connotations.⁵⁴

Atelier Populaire’s name translates to “workshop of the people”, indicative of their adoption of workerist policies. Workerism, or operaismo in Italian, refers to a political and cultural tradition stemming from the political practices emerging in Italy during the early 1960s. Workerism noted the sociological transition from the skilled worker to the mass worker because of automation’s great effect on production, and introduced the theory and practice of refusal to work, abandoning the preconceived idea of the pride the working class felt for their labor and instead highlighting the disdain people held for their work and the conditions they faced within factories.⁵⁵ Workerism used dissent and conflict as crucial elements of enacting and interpreting political and social transformation.⁵⁶ Atelier Populaire formed at the pinnacle of political and social revolution, with worker strikes crippling the nation and student protests in the streets of Paris.

While the Groupe de Recherche d’Art and BMPT showed a tendency to reject the bourgeois structures that confined artists, Atelier Populaire went further in direct intervention to the cultural context at hand. Historians argue that Atelier Populaire

⁵³ “Posters from the Revolution”, np.

⁵⁴ “Posters from the Revolution”, np.

⁵⁵ Roberto Nigro, “Workerism,” *Krisis*, no. 2 (2018): *Krisis*, 2018, Issue 2, 172.

⁵⁶ Nigro, “Workersim,” 171.

didn't only take art into the street but rather helped the revolution of '68 take an aesthetic turn.⁵⁷ Jean-Jacques Lebel called May '86 the greatest happening to ever exist saying, "The most beautiful sculpture I know is a paving stone hurled at a cop's head".⁵⁸ Art critic Raymonde Moulin further elaborates on this notion:

To elevate the paving stone into a work of art, as nobody missed out on doing, is to situate oneself far more in the tradition of Marcel Duchamp than in the tradition of Lenin. To conceive of the revolution as a liberating festival, as a sort of gigantic happening, soliciting the participation of all and tearing the actors away from the passivity and moroseness of everyday life, instills the artist with the art to change the world by changing their life, which takes a considerable distance from the classical Marxist model.⁵⁹

The discourse around Atelier Populaire and their contributions demonstrates an incredible jump from the GRAV empowering the spectator to forming a militant artist. Atelier Populaire shows a more intense disavowal of the bourgeois galleries and the artist's place within it.

Anonymity of Intellectual Labor:

By 1968, collectivity had become an established means to thwart the mystification of the artist. However, Atelier Populaire expanded upon the practice by breaking down the division of labor within the collective itself. In the workshop there were plenty of roles a member could fulfill, and the obvious allocations did not always apply. The general assembly was rigorous in evaluating poster designs, and each

⁵⁷ Siegelbaum, "Inside Out", 168.

⁵⁸ Siegelbaum, "Inside Out", 171.

⁵⁹ Raymonde Moulin, "Vivre sans vendre," in *Art et Contestation* (Brussels: La connaissance, 1968), 133.

proposal underwent collective critique and was altered according to group criticism.

One participant suggested that for every design that was accepted, ten were rejected.

⁶⁰ In fact, there were many professional artists who never made original poster designs or were repeatedly rejected by the general assembly. For example, the French Pop artist Marcel Raysse proposed a design but it was rejected and he never tried again. Ipoustéguy, a French sculptor, also tried several times, but none of his designs were accepted.⁶¹ However, for all the professional artists whose posters were rejected, a notable exception existed for the poster designs of workers, as they were the true voice Atelier Populaire wished to express.⁶²

The role of artists in Atelier Populaire wasn't as directly visual as their predecessors. Because so few of its members ever designed posters that were fully realized, their role was rather participatory in nature. Famous artists did not just design posters, but also created and plastered them on the streets of the Latin Quarter. The workshop printed twenty-four hours a day and depending on the needs of the day, teams ranging from two to ten worked at their stations churning out silk screen prints at an incredible pace. The posters were produced in print runs of 100, 300 and up to 3,000 for the more popular renditions. The simplistic designs and limited color palette, using only one or two colors for each poster, allowed for the silk screen process to become an effective assembly line in which anyone was welcome

⁶⁰ Victoria Scott, "Brisez le cadre qietouf l'image: The Poster Workshops and Photography" in *Silk-Screens and Television Screens: Maoism and the Posters of may and June 1968 in Paris*, (ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 2010) 130.

⁶¹ Scott, "The Poster Workshops and Photography," 130.

⁶² Seidman, "Incendiary Occupations," 131.

to participate. Bands of high school students, workers, and sympathetic citizens would wait in the stairwell for a new batch to post all over the city,⁶³ while factory workers were often handed posters supporting strikes to distribute in their factories.⁶⁴ On May 27th, the Grenelle Accords were signed which ordered strikers back to work. As repeated police violence broke out at striking factories, Atelier Populaire increased production and focused their message to support the strikers. Workers who were once distributors for Atelier Populaire would end up staying for the day and become vocal members of the general assembly.⁶⁵

The New York Times speculated that over 500 people were involved in the workshops active during the summer of '68. This number has been rejected as too conservative, considering the manpower needed to fabricate 500,000 posters in the span of a few months.⁶⁶ Gerard Fromanger, a former member of Atelier Populaire, stated that there were at least 10,000 people who passed through the workshops, including the 300 who were artists.⁶⁷ Because of job rotation and the blurred lines of division of labor within Atelier Populaire, the distinction between those who were artists and those who weren't becomes almost meaningless. The distinction to qualify as an artist most likely lies in who provided intellectual labor, yet the intermingling of intellectual and physical labor has rendered any categorization toothless. As discussed, most artists never received approval for their designs from the general

⁶³Scott, "The Poster Workshops and Photography," 136.

⁶⁴ Michael Seidman, "REVOLUTIONARY COLLECTIVISM: PARISIAN POSTER ART IN 1968." *Contemporary French Civilization* 20, no. 1 (1996): 148.

⁶⁵Scott, "The Poster Workshops and Photography," 137.

⁶⁶Scott, "The Poster Workshops and Photography," 143.

⁶⁷Scott, "The Poster Workshops and Photography," 143.

assembly, which means they were most likely providing manual labor by creating and distributing posters. Even those who received approval for their designs were sure to provide manual labor as well. Those who started out as merely distributors became active members, participating in collective critique and modifying the proposals offered to them. Many artists have been cited as members of Atelier Populaire, but because the majority of the members never created designs and the names of those who did are guarded secrets, any work by Atelier Populaire cannot be applied to a singular artist's reputation or body of work and is effectively anonymous.

Atelier Populaire followed in the tradition of GRAV, the Salon de la Jeune Peinture, and BMPT by discouraging individualist expression. The general assembly was one such method aimed to control personal style, with one historian going so far as to call it a form of censorship.⁶⁸ Although borrowing the practice of group critique and a disavowal of individual aesthetics from the Salon de la Jeune Peinture, Atelier Populaire pushed the position further by refusing to sell their work and refusing to attribute authorship, a practice to which none of the aforementioned collectives had been fully able to commit. To Atelier Populaire, anonymity was explicitly political and ingrained into the ideas of collectivity and rejecting the position artists hold as a safety valve to bourgeois society. They insisted on keeping their production anonymous, privileging instead the faceless mass. This insistence also served as a way to protect all of the members within Atelier Populaire and cementing the manual laborers as just as vital as the designers. Had they divulged information as to who

⁶⁸ Seidman, "Incendiary Occupations," 131.

was part of the general assembly or where most of the aesthetic decisions were made withre were, however, limits to Atelier Populaire's anonymity as their principles were tested by the realities of existing in a public space. One such example is the rivalry between Atelier Populaire and the École des Arts Décoratifs, another poster workshop active at the time. The posters of Atelier Populaire remained unsigned by individual artists, and the dissension prompted the two of them to stamp their posters with a collective signature.⁶⁹ Following the popularity of Atelier Populaire, individual authorship has been attributed to a handful of artists, much to the chagrin of former members. Particularly, historian Francis Parent has ascribed poster designs to Francis Biras and Eduardo Arroyo along with a few others.⁷⁰ In 1988, Jacques Carlemann claimed exclusive reproduction rights for a poster he designed, and was subsequently given rights and royalties by the Association des auteurs graphiques et plastiques.⁷¹ This is the only case of official attribution for any of the May '68 posters. In Atelier Populaire, conclusions would be drawn as to who should be credited for the intellectual labor. By keeping their production anonymous, Atelier Populaire protected all of its members and declared them equal.

Anonymity by Lack of Proper Authentication

Atelier Populaire was one of many poster workshops active in Paris during the revolts of 1968, including workshops from the Comité d'Action des Étudiants en Médecine, the Faculté des Sciences, the Institut d'Art et Archéologie, the École des

⁶⁹ Siegelbaum, "Inside Out", 183.

⁷⁰ Carrick, "The Assassination of Marcel Duchamp," 22.

⁷¹ Siegelbaum, "Inside Out", 183.

arts appliqués, and the École Nationale d'Arts et Métiers. Over the course of May and June an estimated 500,000 posters were produced, 300,000 of which were created by Atelier Populaire.⁷²

As mentioned above, due to the rivalry between Atelier Populaire and the École des Arts Décoratifs, they both began to stamp their works with a collective signature. The contention supposedly originated from political differences as the École des Arts Décoratifs was more sympathetic to the French communist party whereas Atelier Populaire aligned with an anarchistic and Maoist tendency.⁷³ The workshops at the École des Arts Décoratifs began production on May 29th, which postdates the first day of production at Atelier Populaire by at least thirteen days. This distinction is important, because this means that Atelier Populaire was posting unsigned works around Paris for at least two weeks. The stamps themselves also evolved throughout production, so there is no one consistent stamp that proves the source of the poster's origin. The stamp can belie its true origin. For instance, after the police raided the workshop at the École des Beaux-Arts and arrested over one hundred students, those who managed to escape to the Socialist Party headquarters created the poster, "La police s'affiche aux Beaux Arts, les Beaux-Arts s'affiche dans la rue". This poster curiously featured the stamp from Atelier Populaire even though it was made at party headquarters.⁷⁴

⁷²Victoria Scott, "Not for Sale! (Sort of): The Reception of the Posters" in *Silk-Screens and Television Screens: Maoism and the Posters of May and June 1968 in Paris*, (ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 2010) 143.

⁷³ Siegelbaum, "Inside Out", 182.

⁷⁴ Scott, "The Poster Workshops and Photography," 142.

Before the dissolution of Atelier Populaire, the collective refused to sell their work, in spite of the large public looking to gain access to their work. Originally, the plan was to sell the posters to sympathetic galleries, but students and other volunteers suddenly decided to paste them to public street corners instead, sparking the evolution of Atelier Populaire into the collective we now know. At the height of the revolts, Atelier Populaire refused an offer of \$70,000 from two European museums for a collection of posters.⁷⁵ However, Atelier Populaire's refusal of sale only inspired others to find different ways of acquiring their posters. Those tasked with distributing posters along the streets would hoard them in hopes of monetary gain.⁷⁶ Others would peel them off the streets as soon as they were posted. There have been several accounts of dealers and collectors visiting the workshop of Atelier Populaire and quietly absconding with stacks of posters in hand.⁷⁷ Shortly after the events of '68, pirated versions of protest posters appeared. Atelier Populaire didn't have a strong mode to authenticate their works to begin with, and since they refused to satiate the market's demand, others began to fill the role. The lack of reputable vendors and no access to the gallery channels to which collectors have grown accustomed, means that purchasing the posters of '68 holds a high chance for fraud, most likely discouraging buyers from investing large sums of money into a fake.

Following the uprisings in Paris, there were a couple of instances in which members of Atelier Populaire sold their reputedly work through the Museum of Modern

⁷⁵ Scott, "Not for Sale," 187.

⁷⁶ Seidman, "Incendiary Occupations," 133.

⁷⁷ Siegelbaum, "Inside Out", 188.

Art (MoMA) and the Jewish Museum in New York. On August 2, the MoMA received a letter from Danielle Creff notifying them that her fiance, Philippe Vermès, had been active and designing posters during May and that his organization was interested in selling an entire set in the United States.⁷⁸ Following a phone call from the MoMA curator Emilio Ambasz, Vermès wrote a letter to the museum with Usine Université Union letterhead (the text of Atelier Populaire's very first poster), confirming a shipment of posters and specifying that all profits would go to the French workshops and French movements. A handwritten note to MoMA inquires as to the monetary compensation for 150 posters, with \$150 written as a small notation on the left hand corner of the page.⁷⁹ In 2020, this assumed proposal price would total \$1,105 after factoring in inflation. MoMA then became the first museum to exhibit the revolutionary posters of Paris. The exhibition, titled *Paris: May 1968- Posters of the Student Revolt*, lasted from November 23 to December 31, 1968.

Shortly following the exhibition in MoMA, the Jewish Museum displayed a larger collection of both Parisian and Czech protest posters.⁸⁰ The exhibition was titled *Up Against the Wall: Protest Posters* and ran from December 10, 1968 to February 23, 1969. Unlike the MoMA, which displayed the poster with a modernist aesthetic, the Jewish Museum evoked the revolt within the museum, with posters crammed on the walls and audio clips taken from the time of the protests. In addition, a part-time student at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and representative for the workshops of Paris,

⁷⁸ Scott, "Not for Sale," 171.

⁷⁹ Scott, "Not for Sale," 173.

⁸⁰ Scott, "Not for Sale," 184.

was selling posters to museum visitors. The New York Times reported that posters were available from \$55 to \$300 to benefit the workshops of Paris.⁸¹ Although a student of the Ecole des Beaux Arts, the headquarters of Atelier Populaire, he is described as a representative of the workshops of Paris, not solely a representative of Atelier Populaire. This most likely means that the posters for sale were a collection from a variety of workshops, not merely the posters of Atelier Populaire. Because of the numerous ways in which posters were sold after the revolts in Paris and no clear way to authorize the posters as genuine, the works of Atelier Populaire still remain effectively anonymous. It becomes incredibly difficult to discern the author of the poster and if it truly originated from the workshop of Atelier Populaire during the uprisings.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Understanding the ways in which the art market and museums function is vital in the demonetization of artwork. Anonymity is a useful technique as it subverts the appraisal of art objects in numerous ways. Velthuis offers that reference points exist as a guideline when assessing the value of a gallery piece, yet if a work exists anonymously it cannot be compared to the main characteristics of reference. When determining the value of an artist's work, galleries focus on the demand of the artist's pieces, how long they have been active within the gallery, and reputation. Anonymity complicates all of these reference points, but it significantly impairs reputation, which can be one of the most influential price determinants within a gallery. Often reputation is

⁸¹ Scott, "Not for Sale," 187.

based off of museum exhibitions, publications, or other forms of institutional favor. Anonymity further subverts monetization as museums face great difficulty when collecting anonymous works as discussed by Vassiliou. Authorship is so entrenched within institutional ideology and provides a foundation to determine status that without it, anonymous art displays a keen knack for bypassing critical acclaim. As displayed by the exhibition of posters from Atelier Populaire at MoMA, this does not mean that anonymous art never appears within the walls of museums, but rather their institutional acclaim could have little effect on the artists who created them in raising the value of their later work within galleries, as authorship was not attributed directly to them.

Demonetization is not necessarily a good in and of itself, but as Atelier Populaire demonstrated, it can be a useful tool for protest. Activist art continues in popularity, yet as artists hold a position of privilege in society, or exist as a safety valve as expressed by Atelier Populaire and the Salon de la Jeune Peinture, it is important to look at the works critically and carefully. The theory of anonymity to subvert commodification can be a lens used by art historians and critics alike to make an informed analysis of art that attempts to critique the art market or the fetishization of the art object. Understanding the structures that dictate the pricing and acceptance of art pieces within an institution can give greater insight and allow for a more thorough understanding and critique of such stunts by Banksy and Cattelan that work in the direct opposite of their supposed goal.

Anonymity can also be wielded as a way for artists to talk about politics or human rights without using the exploitation of others as a form of garnering recognition or

prestige. For example, Christoph Büchel's exhibition at the 2019 Venice Biennale *Barca Nostra*, a display of a shipping vessel which sank while carrying 700 migrants on its way from Libya to Italy in 2015, received considerable backlash. Büchel was accused of distasteful exploitation of those who lost their lives in order to function as his art piece. The criticism received shows the complexity artists face when creating an art object while discussing important or tragic events in the world. It is within the tension of creating a commodifiable art object and the severity of its topic that exploitation can often lie, for even if the work is not sold it can still monetarily benefit the artist through increased reputation. It is here that anonymity could be used as a way for an artist to still have the power to discuss contentious ideas and events, without using the suffering of their subjects to directly benefit themselves. Of course, the tactic of anonymity does not nullify all forms of exploitation and may not answer all of the problems Büchel's work faced, yet it can be one tool of many if an artist decides to voice their concerns and direct attention to the politics of today.

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