

My Body, The Capitalist

- initial speculations on how words and art practices could participate in the great act of killing capitalism from within

This text is part of an artistic practice that among other things takes it seriously that one can do things with words. As I am about to make the transition from being an art student of an explorative university degree into being a freelance dancer, an in-between position within an in-between field of labor, I play with the question of which words, which understanding of and relating to things, I need in order to support and to push both me, my practice and the entire situation in which we both exist. This situation is more and more obviously simply called capitalism, and the question of how to be able to exist within it, and how to make art within it, is one of my main problems in life, and will be the main problem of this text.

From my in-between position, reading Lazzarato's text about immaterial labor and Virno's about the multitude (both describing post-fordism as setting the conditions of western workers in the neoliberal age) makes it easy to fall into despair. Descriptions of the worker's soul necessarily being a part of the factory and of over-production and self disciplining (among endless other things) does not only fit too easily – they also stand as old, obvious, and even romanticized part of the life that comes with, or is, being a dancer.

With this text I initiate a process of asking what happens when I claim everything as violently much within capitalism, with a specific focus on which consequences it will have to work as a dancer from the starting point that my body is, above all, capitalist. What I, very subjectively, mean with classifying someone as 'a capitalist' is either 1) the owner of big capital, 2) one who wants to become the owner of big capital, 3) one who agrees with or believes in capitalism as the given or better system, or 4) one who acts in the name of it – of these, I refer mostly to the three last.

The reason why I find the question of the -ism of my body urgent is because I have experienced so many times that the habit of identifying my actions, language, relations, beliefs and preferences as "capitalist" stops me from working. The necessary acts of finding solutions, making a problem into a possibility, over-working, stressing, etc., are often met with the instinct of *stopping* – and I honestly don't know how to act at all if not doing it in capitalist manners.

In her book *Staying with the Trouble*, Donna Haraway claims: “We know both too little and too much, and so we succumb to despair or to hope, and neither is a sensible attitude” (p.4): It’s somewhere in-between or next to the feelings of despair and hope that I wish to find a space for speculating about labor and the position my body takes within it. I will try to see where my arguments lead, because I simply don’t know how to live within, and to be, a system which I hate. Anna Grip once told me, when I was sharing my struggles concerning the dance field and its conditions, that however problematic, what’s important is that I never let it prevent me from working. Then, I was skeptical, as the idea of stopping to work seemed quite a reasonable act. But now, her advice feels quite on point. If I stopped working I would just accept the field as it happens to be, and also, I would just meet other problematic situations wherever I would turn, now without the space given by the format of artistic work which allows me to ask the questions of how to create change. So now I ask how I can live within the complex net of systems and functions of neoliberal reality, and which words and logics I need in order to provoke change.

WORK

When heavily and continuously confronted with the reality of living a system I disagree with, and then having to formulate this text about labor, I first tried to make distinctions between work and non-work in order to keep myself sane, and at one point I thought I succeeded. I decided that if I “happen” to work, then I don’t consider it work. In this way, work is not the content, but rather the form of the content. If I happen to be doing something which is of value for my work is then not the same as if I do work because I need to do work. Also if I plan to do some work, and I happen to do some other work, then it’s still work. In this way, I could just structure my life in a way were there is sometimes a letting go into coincidence and random changes, a structure which made me have momentary feelings of “freedom”.

This thought was based on the idea that work has a conscious goal or a specificity or a centre that I can be closer or further away from, and this led to work being practically everything in my life. It quickly bridged over to my artistic practice where there is THE WORK, which I meet when I am in the studio or on stage. In this case THE WORK is not really anything other than a feeling of artistic importance, that one can grade ones actions against. “Work” is then everything in relation to THE WORK, like a day-job is work because it makes THE WORK possible. In the same way, good contact to family, keeping a healthy life, doing activism and reading is all work which creates a life that is livable enough in order to make THE WORK happen.

And then I was left with the non-work as simply being not in the realm of work. It is in a neighbor universe where work exists, but it is not the most important thing, it is not the crucial point of survival, the meaning of life. These are maybe moments of trust, forgetfulness, stupidity or ecstasy. But after some weeks of trying to think like this, it turned out to more of a comfortable thought than something I could actually feel and direct myself after in my everyday life. It remained hard to know the line between work and non-work. To simplify that struggle, or to try to distance myself from it it totally, I followed my pessimistic gut feeling and removed the line, claiming simply all as the evil: everything is work, everything I do serves the market. This made the blame and guilt on myself for being what I hate more of a given and universal constant, therefore easier to handle. It seemed to hold the potential for me to work actively on defining the market in order to change it instead of actively punishing myself for the times when I serve the system.

Also, I was never really sold to the holiness of the idea of non-work or free time, because my problem is the entire system, and it seems silly that I would not be contributing to it then when I'm "off". Labor is clearly not the only activation of the market. But the question of free time has another importance to it when thinking of taking care of one self, of having a good time while living, of not being ill. But that's not my speciality or interest at this moment and not what this text will deal with.

CAPITALISM-THE-VAMPIRE

Back to the problem, what has kept on bothering me is the upsetting fact that capitalism is feeding, misusing the fact that I work. It takes my labor, my art and my life and makes it nasty. When our labor is overwork and self-destructive, then the life of every try for changing anything, or making anything of importance, of really making something that fucking matters, is simply sucked out by capitalism-the-vampire. In this situation we are left with either accepting capitalism (trying to make ourselves comfortable in its slimy rough couch, passive, except for the active ignoring of all the people we are suffocating), or actively working for its good, for its peak, for its continuous existence while in the more and more blind belief that we are working to destroy it – this can be exemplified by looking at the mis-use of the demonstrations taking place across Europe and north-america during the 1960's – both in the form of romanticizing (creating value through commercial and normative, sellable ideals), and through the political usage of the activist's demands: Corporate Social Responsibility was created as an answer to the demand of the big companies to take responsibility, and is today still used as an empty promise which in practice does more to prevent

workers from demonstrating again than actually taking responsibility for their employees (Boss, 2017).

I need to know which body can work against our neoliberalist society, and before starting to answer the question, I already catch myself in performing post-fordist, that is, neoliberal, over-laboring: I, as an individual is responsible for everything, a thought that quickly falls into the ugly pit of positive-psychology-like logics, where every thought and action is reflected in reality, where I manifest the future world constantly. With this dark view, it seem evident that the vampire's skill for swallowing every act of resistance, or just every act in general, makes capitalism simply a unifying name for (all) things as they are. And then my golden thread, the only positive notion I can find is the speculation; *what else did it swallow?*

Silvia Federici writes in her book, *Caliban and the Witch*, about the bodies needed to be killed in the early stages of capitalism in order to produce labor-power; the witch being one of these resistant bodies. Federici writes that today, witchcraft is again practiced actively, something that could be referred back to the will and need to fight and re-claim woman-hood and pre-capitalist knowledge, but which Federici explains as being possible merely because witchcraft is no longer a threat to the system: "The mechanizations of the body is so constitutive of the individual that, at least in industrialized countries, giving space to the belief in occult forces does not jeopardize the regulation of social behavior" (p.143). Having this view on the world – that even seemingly radical ways of living are simply existing because they are not a threat – becomes both evident and extremely depressing.

This is when flipping the image becomes useful. For if the witch, and in that case, the outsider, the revolutionary, the anti-capitalist ideologies and the bigger and bigger demonstrations – and more evidently, the innovator, the collaborators and the over-working artist – are all part of the capitalist body, then what can these parts accomplish? If the vampire's tool is to swallow, then could we start questioning the potential of the contents of its body? It seems logical that the only thing that's big and strong enough to kill capitalism is capitalism itself.

MY BODY, THE CAPITALIST

The title of this text is a speculation on what it could mean to claim my body, that is, my self, as a capitalist. It is also a good-sounding pun based on the title of a book written by Deborah Hay (*My Body, The Buddhist*, 2000), a pun that makes me play with the question, when practicing "listening"

to my self/body, in the studio: are these directions and impulses that of a wise superior/holy body or is it that of a capitalist? In dealing with political matters I cannot speak from an activist point of view in the sense of knowing which specific political structures should be changed in favor of others, but from the position of the dancer, I ask how it could change my being-in-the-world and my practicing of life/art/labor.

Now, claiming myself capitalist and accepting all my actions as stemming from and feeding back to the market, there needs to be methods for not falling into a positive relation to capitalism.

What seems immediately important is for the capitalist body to always remember it is a failed, an evil body, but also to acknowledge that this evil is everywhere. In my work and life I am a strong defender of remembering everything bad, and indulging in it. If we ever think that we have won, it's hopeless. It is never about being clean or innocent, and there is no such thing as pure "good" and "right", and it's important to carry these facts in mind and in the sense of identity at all times. This text totally asks for the ends to justify the means – but when all means are anyways nasty, it's important not to let every action be stopped before it's even carried out because we can't stand the fact that what needs to be fought keeps on turning up in ourselves and in our very acts of resistance.

Thinking there is an outside of capitalism, that there is something as "free time" and that you can act in the name of something good seems tricky since it gives us a feeling of comfort. Though comfort can be necessary in order to be able to stay happy/sane/healthy, I would much rather find ways of accepting that everything is, at least partly, shitty, and then to find ways of making this activate me towards ----- instead of stopping me from doing anything at all. It seems important to have a self-understanding, not only of my body, the capitalist, but of my body, the suicidal capitalist. To never truly find comfort neither in the illusion of the good body within nor the good body outside of capitalism. And also, in elongation of never feeling "right", to acknowledge both the successful and the failing body of neoliberalism (the hard working, energized business-owner and the depressed, unemployed single mom), claiming both as capitalist *and* as potentially suicidal capitalist.

Without falling into neither despair nor hope I ask what it could mean to follow Haraway's advise, and *stay with the trouble* – to 'become-with' other suicidal capitalist-, angry innovator-, confusingly structured-, care taking sacrifice-, feminist hybrid-, socialist hacker-, and magic witch -bodies.

Could these bodies, these materials, though they, by existing in the vampire's ever-changing and expanding ecosystem, are capitalist bodies themselves, activate a suicide? If I am capitalism, as I am part of its body, can I be a cancer cell? Even an over-working, narcissist, at-one-point-well-

established, already-now-value-producing, and at times both deeply in despair and heartbreakingly hopeful cancer-cell?

I don't know of course and don't intend to be able to know. But I have now an argument for not stopping to work, which is simply that work, in itself, is not more wrong than all the other wrongs. And from here I will indulge in the space opened by art practice, a realm of work that allows me (when allowed by the rest of the circumstances) to alternate: alternate my body, relations, directions, discourses, logics. And though only alternating them from one function within capitalism to another, I will again turn to Anna Grip's guidance and follow up on my manifestation of everything as capitalism with the question: "And then what?" And maybe the actions and situations coming up through practicing will be part of activating the vampire against it self.

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