
À la recherche du temps perdu:
Labour, Time and Subjectivity in Tatiana Trouvé's *Bureau of
Implicit Activities* (1997–2003)

Masterarbeit zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades gemäß Curriculum
im Fach Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften

Eingereicht an der
UNIVERSITÄT FÜR ANGEWANDTE KUNST
am Institut für Kunstwissenschaften, Kunstpädagogik und Kunstvermittlung,
Abteilung Kunstgeschichte
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Wien, am 16. September 2024

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Wien, 16. September 2024

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Abstract (English)

In her break-through series and long-term project *Bureau of Implicit Activities* (1997–2003), the Italian-French artist Tatiana Trouvé (*1968) assembled a variety of documents – ranging from unsent correspondences to ID cards to whole piles of job rejection letters – into a complex of installations, reminiscent of office cubicles. Comprising thirteen modules, matrices, cells, and annexes (such as the *Administrative Module*, *Waiting Module Annex*, and *Archives Module*), the *B.I.A.* forms an imaginary and mental enterprise aimed at materialising the artist's so-called implicit activities – articulations of her own subjectivation and processes of artistic labour. Bringing together fragments of her life, reflections, and in particular the manifestations of her unfinished projects, the *B.I.A.* forms a permanent laboratory in which activity is, in short, always yet to come, but never realised.

The *Bureau of Implicit Activities* emerges as a fictional 'office' where labour, time, and subjectivity intersect: a place where work is done but nothing tangible is produced, where time lingers, and where subjectivities are administratively registered. *Part I: Situating the Bureau of Implicit Activities* will explore the project in its entirety, positioning it within a broader art theoretical framework. It will also introduce the notions of unproductive time as the prevailing temporality of the *B.I.A.* *Part II: The Administrative Module* delves into the dual themes of artistic labour and the construction of subjectivity, analysing how unproductivity and precariousness shape the structural framework to which the *B.I.A.* aesthetically responds.

Abstract (Deutsch)

Mit ihrer langjährigen Werkserie *Bureau of Implicit Activities* (1997–2003) gelang der italienisch-französischen Künstlerin Tatiana Trouvé (*1968) der künstlerische Durchbruch. In Anlehnung an ein Großraumbüro versammelt Trouvé in ihrem aus insgesamt dreizehn Modulen, Matrizen und Annexen bestehenden Komplex eine Vielzahl von Dokumenten – von nie abgeschickten Briefen über Personalausweise bis hin zu ganzen Stapeln von Jobabsagen. Im Zusammenspiel der verschiedenen *Module*, wie dem *Administrative Module*, dem *Waiting Module Annex* und dem *Archives Module*, bildet *B.I.A.* ein imaginäres und mentales Unternehmen, das darauf abzielt, die sogenannten impliziten Aktivitäten der Künstlerin zu materialisieren – insbesondere im Hinblick auf die Artikulationen ihrer eigenen Subjektivierung und ihrer künstlerischen Arbeit. Indem das *B.I.A.* Fragmente aus ihrem Leben, Notizen zu nie abgeschlossenen Projekten und Materialisierungen ihrer Gedanken sammelt, wird es zu einem permanenten Arbeitsprozess, in dem die Aktivität immer bevorsteht, aber nie realisiert wird.

Das *Bureau of Implicit Activities* erscheint somit als ein fiktives 'Büro', in dem Arbeit, Zeit und Subjektivität konvergieren: ein Ort, an dem Arbeit ausgeführt wird, aber nichts Greifbares entsteht, an dem Zeit vergeht und Subjektivitäten administriert werden. *Part I: Situating the Bureau of Implicit Activities* wird das Projekt in seiner Gesamtheit untersuchen und in einen breiteren kunsttheoretischen Rahmen stellen. Es wird auch das Konzept der unproduktiven Zeit als die vorherrschende Zeitlichkeit des *B.I.A.* eingeführt. *Part II: The Administrative Module* vertieft die beiden zentralen Themen der künstlerischen Arbeit und der Konstruktion von Subjektivität und analysiert, wie Unproduktivität und Prekarität den strukturellen Rahmen bilden, auf den das *B.I.A.* ästhetisch reagiert.

Acknowledgments

My deepest gratitude goes out to my sister J., who has supported and inspired me in every way imaginable. Not only did she help me through every heartbreak I ever had, the worst precarious job decisions I made (both with indispensable advice as well as financially), and the net of madness that, in truth, is family. Without her, it's questionable whether I would have made it that far. It's hard to put into words just how much I owe to her.

The second person in line surely should be Henry Salfner, with whom I waged coffee against word counts and who endured countless nerve-wracked monologues about this thesis, which often felt like a never-ending, Sisyphean task. Finally, it did end – and I hope when you read this, yours has too!

Thank you, Tatiana Trouvé and her atelier, for providing me with all this invaluable material and for granting me the opportunity to speak to you in person about your work. It was such a pleasure meeting the person about whom I have read so much!

My deepest gratitude goes to my supervisor, Eva Kernbauer, as well as Marina Vishmidt and Stefanie Kitzberger. Their insightful remarks consistently helped me untangle the knots in my thinking, inspiring me to approach my writing with more precision, depth, and critical reflection.

Thank you, Nikolina and Sergej Pristaš, for the inspiring conversations we shared in Brijuni and for introducing me to the work of Mladen Stilinović.

Thank you to all of my friends who celebrated the good life with me. Most importantly, many thanks to Paul Jürgens, who thoughtfully sifted through the many pages and left his sharp remarks and supportive comments while I was indulging in unproductivity in Croatia. Thank you to Selia, whose continuous words of reassurance ('dann schreib das doch einfach!') really helped, to Hauke, Zoe, Jannis, NaughTy, and everyone that would be yet to mention.

I am also very grateful for the financial support I have received throughout my studies from the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes and the University of Applied Arts, who has funded my research trip to France that became an indispensable source of inspiration and material for my thesis.

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1. Introduction

“[M]y *B.I.A.* was born as a project, both melancholy and bold, to give form to a feeling of disappearance or inexistence. The bold move was to build a space at whose heart that disappearance would not only be tangible, but also produce forms almost in spite of itself, against its own grain. *I organize disappearance; I archive this void.* What I invent is a kind of time that escapes our chronological measurements. By naming this work *Bureau* and grouping activities into different *Modules*, I was perhaps simply allowing myself to spend 10 years on it, and to help those years pass by.”¹

In this fragment of a conversation with the philosopher Richard Shusterman, that was published as an interview in her *catalogue raisonné* in 2008, the Italian-French artist Tatiana Trouvé (*1968) characterised her break-through series and long-term project *Bureau of Implicit Activities* – also known as *B.I.A.* in its shortened equivalence – in a particular poignant way. Consisting of thirteen modules, matrices, cells, and annexes, Trouvé assembled a variety of documents – ranging from unsent correspondences to ID cards from her precarious employment history to whole piles of job rejection letters – into a complex of installations, reminiscent of office cubicles. These *Modules* correspond to different activities implicit in the capitalist apparatus, e.g. *Administrative Module*, *Waiting Module Annex*, *Archives Module*, etc.; each in their own way formulating, as art historian Christine Ross wrote, “an aesthetic response to years of unsuccessful effort for professional recognition – an effort that included the accumulation of odd jobs, correspondence with a multitude of galleries, various grant applications, the elaboration of ideas of artworks never realized, and a lot of waiting.”² In a notably poetic introduction to the *B.I.A.*, the curator Gianfranco Maraniello describes Trouvé’s idiosyncratic manifestations of the implicit as “temporary indications of a spiralling time which circles back on itself, gathering up and exhibiting what has not happened and offering it anew in paradoxical non-realization. Tatiana Trouvé’s archives contain non-existent traces, potentials that have not yet emerged [...]”³ This focus on the *not-yet*, the limbo of pure possibility, has the aspect of the liminal at its core, which Tatiana Trouvé explores in relation to time while translating it into space. ‘Space’ and ‘time’ therefore stand at the core of the dichotomies the artist is concerned with throughout her oeuvre: the dichotomy of remembering / forgetting in memory, of inside / outside within her interiors (in her installations as well as her drawings), the slipperiness of being awake / dreaming, the ephemeral and the concrete, the impulse to organise

¹ Tatiana Trouvé, “A Body Without A Face: A Conversation between Tatiana Trouvé and Richard Shusterman,” interview by Richard Shusterman, in: *Tatiana Trouvé*, ed. by Maria Muhle (Cologne: Walther König, 2008), 117. Emphasis added by the author.

² Christine Ross, *The Past is the Present; It's the Future too: The Temporal Turn in Contemporary Art* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., 2014), 53.

³ Gianfranco Maraniello, *Polders* (Paris: Palais de Tokyo, 2002), 12.

and the chaos that is contained. These questions of the *neither-nor*, or *in-between*, are emphasised in her use of windows, doors, tainted glass walls, and other architectural means that only offer a semi-transparent view and reflect on the notion of the threshold, as well as through her sculptural work, that often invokes ghostly presences by encapsulating aspects of the absent, traces, and the intangible. The fleeting moment, the passage of time, and the inconsistency of memory are recurrent themes in her work, while always relating to them through a spatial and materialistic questioning.

In her *B.I.A.*, this questioning takes on varied forms: When stepping closer the *Sand Cell* (1997) (fig. 1), for example, the visitor is greeted with a writing stand-cubicle entirely coated in sand: a dreamlike setting, in which each gesture carried out on the table would essentially perform an ephemerality inherent to the concept of time itself. Being situated quite literally in an hour glass that visually refers to standard office-industry architecture, time is introduced here in all of its fleeting transience, while simultaneously alluding to the “bureaucratic compartmentalization of contemporary life,”⁴ as Richard Shusterman puts it. In the *Administrative Module* (1997–2002) (fig. 2), the first *Module* out of which the *B.I.A.* was consequently conceived of, such reference to unproductive time – time that has no effective outcome and therefore is always on the verge of being *lost* – and a bureaucratic working context with its disciplinary structures is even more apparent: numerous letters of rejection are accumulating inside the walls of the *Module*, office stationary and fictionalised CV’s are positioned on a rubber-band-covered table, whereas on the outside, multiple selves of Tatiana Trouvé adorn the façade via laminated ID-documents. As a common thread within the other architectures of the *B.I.A.*, the *Administrative Module* oscillates on the border between reality and imaginary, as it alludes to a ‘real’ working space, while solely being inhabited mentally.

This ‘mental engagement’ with the works, as many authors have noted,⁵ possibly appears best visible in the *Polders* (1997–ongoing), another work series the *B.I.A.* gave birth to, but which

⁴ Trouvé, “A Body Without a Face”, 117.

⁵ cf. Adam Budak, “Deranged. We are in the Picture(s). Tatiana Trouvé’s Anatomy of a Silent Apocalypse,” in: *Il Grande Ritratto*, ed. by Adam Budak and Peter Pakesch (Cologne: Walther König, 2010), 214, 222; Sylvie Coëllier, “Tatiana Trouvé : Une Poétique de l’Énigme,” 20/27, n°3, 2009: 207; Jean-Pierre Criqui, “Imaginary Memories of the House of Trouvé,” in: *The Great Atlas of Disorientation* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2022), 17. Eli During, “The Strategy of the Implicit,” in: *Aujourd’hui, hier, ou il y a longtemps*, ed. by Maurice Fréchuret and François Poisay (Bordeaux: Capc Musée d’art contemporain, 2003), 67; Jesi Khadivi, “Rites of Passage, Connecting Worlds,” *Fondation d’entreprise de Pernod Ricard*, published August 2020, accessed August 5, 2024, <https://www.fondation-pernod-ricard.com/en/text-work/rites-passage-connecting-worlds>; Francesca Pietropaolo, “Nothing to See, Nothing to Hide. Or *l’expérience du secret*,” in: *Il Grande Ritratto*, 247, 250; Ross, *The Past is the Present; It’s the Future too*, 57f.; Robert Storr, “Somewhere A Place,” in: *Tatiana Trouvé*, ed. by Maria Muhle (Cologne: Walther König, 2008), 36; Tatiana Trouvé, *Djinn* (artist book, 2005), n.p.; Tatiana Trouvé, “In the Studio: Tatiana Trouvé,” interview by Fransceca Pietropaolo, *Art in America*, March 2010: 89, 91f.

consistently developed a life of its own in the concurrent years (fig. 3).⁶ Initially exhibited as part of the *Archives Module*,⁷ these *Polders* are small reconstructions of interiors the artist has once inhabited or visited, fabricated from the residue material of the *B.I.A.*'s *Modules*. Almost in fashion of architectural models, these interiors – despite being filled with miniature lamps, mattresses, cushions, pictures, and tiny disco balls – evoke an uncanny feeling of emptiness; as if everybody that was there just moments ago left abruptly; as if the visitor arrived too late to the party. In a similar manner as her other interiors – either the *Modules* of the *B.I.A.*, her graphic work or later installational oeuvre – Trouvé's pieces seem to negate a bodily presence, only referencing it through its absence. And indeed, as she states herself in an interview: "In front of my sculptures, the body is simply of no use."⁸ As one can neither enter these architectures nor does necessarily feel compelled to touch them, it is "as if the emptiness of these spaces, their alterations and densities, created a recessed body;"⁹ a body that is moved to the background.

Yet, the visitor's bodily presence is far from redundant. Precisely *because* Trouvé's spaces are designed to make the visitor question their presence in the exhibition space, Trouvé installs a hyper-alertness to the viewer's surroundings; a state of mind that is further emphasised through the uncanny atmosphere her *Modules* provoke. When entering her *Bureau*, it is almost like wandering through an empty office, a work place whose workers have left. One doesn't touch and one doesn't enter, but there is a curiosity in the action of looking, of finding the traces Trouvé has installed to discover at a distance. Her *B.I.A.* therefore evokes a relation to its spectator that oscillates between attraction and distancing, of placing them both inside and outside.¹⁰ Taking her *Archives Module* (2003) as a specific example for that notion, one can see how her *B.I.A.* frustrates the viewer with its sealed off envelopes ('Unsent Correspondences') (fig. 4–5), suggestively half-opened doors, and crumbled hand-written papers cast in concrete ('Secrets and Lies') (fig. 6–7). But simultaneously – and even more importantly – these enigmatic gestures trigger the viewer's imagination and their individual flow of memories, therefore weaving together Trouvé's

⁶ cf. Khadivi, "Rites of Passage, Connecting Worlds.,"; Trouvé, "In the Studio," 87. The work series of the *Polders*, too, bears a certain fluidity, as their conceptual framework is not entirely clear-cut. In the interview with Shusterman, Trouvé further elaborates: "The *Polders* ended up leaving the *Modules* and started to colonize the ensemble of the *B.I.A.* to such an extent that they ended up burying it and proliferating in exhibitions. Currently, even I no longer know if, when I do an installation, it's still a *Polder*. It is certainly true, though that I have not realized a *B.I.A. Module* since 2003. In a way, it ended up disappearing into what it had produced" Trouvé, "A Body Without a Face," 138.

⁷ It was only from 2000 onwards that Trouvé 'extracted' the *Polders* from the *Archives Module* as they grew bigger and also conceptually became a work series in their own rights, see Coëllier, "Tatiana Trouvé : Une Poétique de l'Énigme," 201.

⁸ Trouvé quoted in Catherine Millet, "Tatiana Trouvé's Bachelor Machines," in: *Tatiana Trouvé*, ed. by Maria Muhle (Cologne: Walther König, 2008), 65.

⁹ Trouvé, "A Body Without A Face," 136.

¹⁰ cf. Trouvé, "In the Studio," 89, 94.

very personal approach to her work with the visitor's own reflections and reminiscences.¹¹ When moving through the labyrinth of the *B.I.A.*, the viewer is therefore thrown back to their own potentiality as a subject continuously in flux: "In my work, where there is effectively no representation of the subject, space constructs the body of a potential subject."¹²

While a strong emphasis has been made on the relation of time, space and memory in her oeuvre, less has been said about the specific ways Trouvé engages with unproductivity, failure and precariousness as a reflection of postmodern subjectivity. In this context, her *Bureau of Implicit Activities* offers an interesting vantage point, as it is designed to keep the viewer at a distance, while allowing at the same time a portrait-like insight into the artist's professional struggle; a struggle that is archived via a multitude of letters, personal notes, sound recordings, photographs and diverse traces of past activities.¹³ Although these *Modules* contain a variety of objects and claim an autonomous position in space, as Christine Ross notes, "they remain uninhabited, non-accessible, and impractical. [...] In short, the expanding *B.I.A.* provides protective sites for an unproductiveness, but it insists on making these sites unused and unusable, only partly accessible at sight, and never fully visible. Unproductiveness is exactly that: something not represented, something that cannot be represented, something that cannot be made productive by simply representing it."¹⁴ Based on Ross' reading of Trouvé's work, it is my hypothesis that the *B.I.A.* aesthetically moves against the capitalist imperatives of efficiency and productivity, by focusing precisely on moments of failure, doubt and waiting time, which Trouvé dubs *non-time* – time, that is on the verge of 'being lost', but that leaves traces within the construction of subjectivity nonetheless:

"I was interested in working on the recovery of time, and of things that are never really considered constructive, or part of a productive activity. Like when you are waiting for your turn in the line, or for a bus, an appointment, a phone call. All this, which is an enormous amount of time in our lives, is regarded as non-time, as something wasted. This isn't so obvious. I believe these waiting moments are quite productive. In this waiting time there is a construction of the self, of the subject."¹⁵

Thus, her *Bureau* indeed reflects on – and maybe even 'invents', as Trouvé claims – a very specific temporality, one that 'escapes our chronological measurements.' This is because our chronological measurements of time are defined by an idea of progress, acceleration, and novelty that positions unproductive time outside of our historic accounts, therefore undermining the effect such

¹¹ See Storr, "Somewhere A Place," 21–32.

¹² Trouvé, "A Body Without A Face," 136.

¹³ cf. Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 53.

¹⁴ Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 54, 56.

¹⁵ Trouvé, "In the Studio," 88.

non-time has on the formations of subjectivity.¹⁶ It is specifically this notion of unproductive time as constitutive of the self, that will be examined by reference to Tatiana Trouvé's *B.I.A.* in the following chapters of this thesis.

Throughout *Part I: Situating the Bureau of Implicit Activities*, I will demonstrate how Trouvé establishes a 'necessary conceptuality' through her notions of the implicit and combines this with an aesthetic, and therefore ineliminable, material dimension.¹⁷ Peter Osborne's term of the *postconceptual* will, in many ways, offer a useful theoretical framework to such an analysis. There are two key elements to his theory which he discusses at length in his book *Anywhere or Not At All* (2013) and which I would like to anticipate here only in an abridged version: His emphasis on the legacy of Conceptual art¹⁸ for postconceptual art; and his very notion of contemporaneity as an "*operative fiction*,"¹⁹ to which postconceptual art necessarily becomes its critical, reflexive and aesthetic answer.

Just as much a condition as the 'postmodern,'²⁰ the postconceptual is to be understood as a "historical-ontological condition of contemporary art in general."²¹ In proclaiming that "contemporary art is postconceptual art,"²² Osborne identifies the 1960s as a historical watershed, in that it was the art that broke with the previous set of practices and boundaries in an unprecedented way, thus fostering the ontological condition that contemporary art still relies upon. "By postconceptual art, then," Osborne explains, "I understand an art premised on the complex historical experience and critical legacy of conceptual art, broadly construed, which registers its fundamen-

¹⁶ cf. Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 57.

¹⁷ cf. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London, New York: Verso, 2009), 48. In order to define postconceptual art, Osborne identifies six main aspects from conceptual art that contemporary art still draws on: The first two are quoted here – the 'necessary conceptuality' that nonetheless acknowledges its aesthetic, and therefore material, dimension; the third refers to an 'anti-aestheticist use of aesthetic material'; the fourth to the post-medium condition of postconceptual art; the fifth to the relational unity that conceptually binds individual artworks together; and the last to the historical implications that define the limits of this unity.

¹⁸ In his book, *Conceptualism and Materiality: Matters of Art and Politics*, Christian Berger adopts the differentiation of conceptual art ('with a small c') versus Conceptual art ('with a capital C'), in order to navigate through the more general defined term of conceptualism, and the historically defined movement of Conceptual art. See Christian Berger, "Wholly Obsolete or Always a Possibility," in: *Conceptualism and Materiality: Matters of Art and Politics* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019), 25n30. In course of this text I will follow this proposition, which he derived from Lucy Lippard, who in turn referred to Sol Lewitt.

¹⁹ Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 23. Osborne's notion of the contemporary as an 'operative fiction' acknowledges the multiplicity of diverse, even oftentimes contradictory, temporalities and historical narratives of our globalised present. It is 'operative' because it actively shapes our perception of the present and influences cultural, political, and social practices. It's characterisation as fictional remains necessary, however, to allow for a critical friction in such a conflation of these global experiences into a coherent, if provisional, understanding of what it means to be contemporary.

²⁰ See Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979); Peter Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition: Critical Essays* (London, New York: Verso, 2018).

²¹ Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 51.

²² Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 37.

tal mutation of the ontology of the artwork.”²³ Postconceptual art draws on this legacy – as indicated by the ambiguous prefix ‘*post-*’. But in doing so, it also acknowledges Conceptual art’s pitfall in trying to eliminate art’s aesthetic dimension through its purely analytical programme. Consequently, it recognises both: its necessary conceptuality as well as its ineliminable materialisation, which positions the artwork in a specific spatio-temporal context. “Like conceptual art, postconceptual art refuses to adhere to the idea that the ontology of art rests in the nature of the work’s medium, form, or style.”²⁴ Thus, contemporary art serves its post-medium condition by infinitely expanding “the possible material forms of art” through an “anti-aestheticist use of aesthetic material.”²⁵ This ultimately leads to a malleability of the work’s borders – one key aspect of postconceptual art – that “raises the question of how the work’s conceptuality unifies it, in relation to both its necessarily limiting *actual* spatializations, and the nonetheless *unlimited* spatial possibilities of *future* realizations. In short, where are the borders of the work?”²⁶

This is a crucial point for understanding the aesthetic workings of Trouvé’s *Bureau of Implicit Activities*, since her notion of the implicit can be said to be the unifying, conceptual thread that runs through each of her *Modules*, the content of which Trouvé continues to alter, subtract and add material to, therefore rendering the material as well as the temporal structure of the *B.I.A.* in itself malleable and, in some cases, still ongoing.²⁷ An integral part of this postconceptual use of material that further applies to Trouvé is the conflation of the documentation of the artistic process with the artwork.²⁸

While chapter 2.1. will discuss the *B.I.A.* in terms of its postconceptuality, chapter 2.2. focusses on time as a central motive and, so to speak, material out of which Trouvé constructs her *B.I.A.*; as containers for time that has passed by, that was on the verge of being lost, but that Trouvé has saved from disappearance via the implementation of the implicit. With the exception of the *Waiting Module*, which takes up time as a symbolic material, temporality always appears in the *B.I.A.* against the grain of other discourses: In the *Polders* and the *Reminiscences Module*, for

²³ Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 48.

²⁴ Lisa Trahair, “The ‘CI’ Review: ‘Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art’.” Review of *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, by Peter Osborne, *Critical Inquiry* 42, no. 2 (2016): 415–416.

²⁵ cf. Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 48.

²⁶ Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 143f.

²⁷ cf. Tatiana Trouvé, interview between the artist and the author in her atelier, February 17, 2024. In the same conversation, Trouvé explains how the *Archives Module* – specifically the ‘*Secrets and Lies*’ *Module* as well as the ‘*Drawings*’ *Module* – are still added upon: “[T]here are things that continue. So, for example the *Module* of ‘Drawings and Projects’ is still filled up. All the time that I do a new drawing I make a copy and I send to the *Module*. [...] So, there are parts of the *B.I.A.* that continue their activity. The *Module* of ‘Secrets and Lies’, I still do it and whisper into the balloon and cast [them in concrete], so I have a lot of lies and secrets here, but I haven’t send them yet to the owner.” This goes for other *Modules* as well, such as the *Administrative Module*, which will be exhibited at the Palazzo Grassi in 2025. In this re-staging of the work, Trouvé has collected her ID-documents ever since and will expand the ‘identity section’ on the outside of the sculpture.

²⁸ See Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, 124–130.

example, it is employed by means of remembering; in the *Strike Module* – which uses a slide projector to project images onto a wall at a constant frequency – it takes on the form of steady repetition; in the *Titles Module* and the *Archives Module* it is conveyed through the sense of a progressively advancing accumulation that never results in an autonomous end product. It will be here that the *B.I.A.* can be discussed as a reflexive engagement with questions of contemporaneity, however, not so much in Osborne's sense as a means to unify contradictory experiences of temporality to a coherent narrative of a globalised present. Rather, I will follow Boris Groys's approach in which he focusses on the relationship between the present and the new. In his influential text, "Comrades of Time" (2009), he discusses the notion of unproductivity as a critical element that challenges the paradigms of productivity and efficiency in contemporary societies. Building on this, the central question here is what effects such a recognition of unproductive time has on expressions of subjectivity. Chapter 2.2. will focus on how Trouvé renders unproductive time as formative for the subject, and whether these claims to free such times from the grasp of the capitalist impulse towards efficiency and continuous production, define waiting time as a precarious temporality.

In this context, contemporary art situates itself in a paradoxical relationship with the time in which it exists, being both a product of its era and a critique of the same. Lauren Berlant's book *Cruel Optimism* (2011) offers an important addition to such an understanding, in which she discusses contemporaneity in terms of a suspended present that is conditioned by precarity. This perspective will provide an important framework for understanding how Trouvé's work engages with and defines the concept of time as a guiding theme in her *B.I.A.*

Chapter 2.3. will subsequently bring these two points together – discussing the temporality at stake in her project, and considering the spatiality of the *B.I.A.* in its overall installation. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus specifically on the exhibition, which included every *Module* of the *B.I.A.* that has existed to that date: *Aujourd'hui, hier, ou il y a longtemps*, shown at the Capc Musée d'art contemporain in Bordeaux in 2003. Arguing that her *Bureau* can be understood as an installation – or, as Pamela M. Lee writes, an "administrative *mise-en-scène*"²⁹ – allows for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which the viewer is addressed and how the conceptual implicit that binds each *Module* into its cohesive whole is spatially mediated. This has further implications for the way in which Trouvé aesthetically reflects on unproductivity as a spatio-temporal investigation; one that ultimately disrupts a progress-oriented linearity inherent in the concept of time through a perceptual disruption that takes place on a spatial plane.

²⁹ Pamela M. Lee, "Work Space. Tatiana Trouvé's Bureaucratic Imaginary," in: *Il Grande Ritratto*, ed. by Adam Budak and Peter Pakesch (Cologne: Walther König, 2010), 240.

As will be shown in *Part I: Situating the Bureau of Implicit Activities*, time is thus mobilised in activities deemed unproductive, yet implicit in the two themes that guide the *B.I.A.*: artistic labour and the constitution of subjectivity. By employing the implicit activities of her *Bureau* in their unstable state of unproductivity, Trouvé conceptually engages with time, subjectivity and labour as themes that mirror a certain precariousness, one that is further reflected on a material level in each *Module*. *Part II: The Administrative Module* will trace this line of thought and analyse how the precarious is manifested in her *Administrative Module* in several ways: as an economic situation, as the socio-ontological condition that constitutes subjectivity, and as an inherent aesthetic that runs through the entire project.

That the socio-economic situation of precarity influences these instances of subjectivity and labour in a decisive way, has been theorised as early as the mid-1990s, most prominently by the French sociologists Robert Castel (1995) and Pierre Bourdieu (1997).³⁰ Observing that the objective instability of the job market, the supposed interchangeability of workers, and declining wage levels align with a broader, subjective sense of uncertainty, Bourdieu writes: “Precarity has profound effects on those who suffer it. By leaving the future uncertain, it simultaneously denies those affected any rational anticipation of the future and, above all, that minimum degree of hope and faith in the future that is necessary for a collective revolt against an unbearable present.”³¹ Against the backdrop of unproductivity and precariousness, it becomes evident how the concepts of time, subjectivity, and labour are inextricably intertwined.

Trouvé’s *Administrative Module*, as an integral component of her *Bureau of Implicit Activities*, can be seen as an aesthetic exploration of this matrix. It takes her own economic precarity as a point of departure for a deeper investigation into the dynamics of labour and subjectivity.

Part II will therefore examine the various ways in which Trouvé incorporates questions of subjectivity into her work. In chapter 3.1., I will discern three key aspects on which the *Administrative Module* in particular, and her *B.I.A.* as a whole, reflect on: the artist as a subject shaped by the institution; the viewer as a subject engaged and positioned in relation to the artwork; and the broader societal subject, shaped by the precarious and capitalist landscape of contemporary society. While the latter aspect will be addressed in greater detail in the subsequent chapter, ‘On Labour,’ it will become evident throughout *Part II* how intricately both aspects are intertwined –

³⁰ Robert Castel, *Les métamorphoses de la question sociale : une chronique du salariat* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), re-published in 2000 at Gallimard, Paris; Pierre Bourdieu, “La precarité est aujourd’hui partout,” transcript of a lecture Bourdieu held at the conference *Reconcontres européennes contre la precarité* in Grenoble, 1997, published in German under the title “Prekarität ist Überall,” in: *Gegenfeuer: Wortmeldungen im Dienste des Widerstands gegen die neoliberale Invasion*, ed. by Franz Schultheis and Louis Pinto, translated by Andreas Pfeuffer (Konstanz: UVK, 1998).

³¹ Bourdieu, “Prekarität ist Überall,” 97. Translation by the author.

not only in a broader, theoretical sense, but also in the specific discussion of Trouvé's work.

Chapter 3.2. will then elaborate on the concept of precarity under the neoliberal conditions of the market economy, focusing particularly on its subjective effects. For this, I will primarily draw on the writings of Paolo Virno, Isabell Lorey, and Lauren Berlant. This macro perspective on contemporary capitalism's conceptions of labour allows for a clearer understanding of the socio-economic frame in which Trouvé's *Bureau of Implicit Activities* is situated. Subsequently, Leigh Claire La Berge's concept of 'decommodified labour' will allow me to apply these economic conditions to the logic of the art field. By connecting her theory with Virno's notions of 'hidden labour', that he uses to describe the blurring of boundaries between work and non-work time in his programmatic book, *Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (2004), I will use the term 'implicit labour', as a way to grasp Trouvé's manifestations of artistic labour as seen in her *Administrative Module*. With her focus on work and the conditions of precarious labour, I will argue that Trouvé partakes in a critique which moved from 'institutional' to 'infrastructural', a shift that Marina Vishmidt has described in her essays "'A Self-Relating Negativity' Where Infrastructure and Critique Meet" (2021) and "Beneath the Atelier, the Desert: Critique, Institutional and Infrastructural" (2017). However, it yet remains to critically question whether Trouvé's project can be said to formulate a counter-programme to the capitalist usurpation of time and subjectivity, or whether it represents a continuity from which escape is uncertain, if not impossible.

2. Part I: Situating the *Bureau of Implicit Activities* (1997–2003)

Up until now, the *Bureau of Implicit Activities* amounts to thirteen elements: the *Administrative Module* (1997–2002); the *Sand Cell* (1997); the *Reminiscences Module* (1999); the *Titles Module* (1999–2003); the *Ghost Matrix* (2000); the *Lapsus* or *Slips of the Tongue Module* (2000–2003); the *Strike Module* (2002); the *Archives Module* (2003), which consists of three sub-modules: ‘Secrets and Lies’, ‘Drawings’, and ‘Unsent Correspondences’; and the *Waiting Module* (2003), which is a two-part piece (‘blue’ and ‘green’) plus its corresponding *Annex*.³² Taken together, they form an imaginary and mental enterprise whose ultimate aim is to materialise the artist’s so-called *implicit activities*, articulations of her own subjectivation and processes of artistic labour. Bringing together fragments of her life, reflections, and in particular the formation of her unfinished projects, the *B.I.A.* forms a permanent laboratory in which activity is, in short, always yet to come, but never realised.

As such, the *B.I.A.* articulates an openness; one that further allows for its continuity. And in fact, the temporal dimensions of the *B.I.A.* are not easy to pin down, at least not in a simplistic and obvious way as suggested here, in the brackets following their titles. In a conversation with the artist, Trouvé described how the *B.I.A.* as an ongoing project already began in 1992, namely with the sculpture *Briefcase of Unconcretized Ideas* (1992); the conceptual framework of which relates closely to the later *Modules* of the *B.I.A.*, such as the *Archives Module* or the *Titles Module*. Trouvé was back then artist-in-residency at De Atelier, formerly known as Atelier ’63 in Den Hague, the Netherlands. Working on different sculptures and installations at that time, Trouvé would come up with possible titles and produce preliminary drawings, as she recounts, for artworks that would never be realised:

“At that time I wrote down a lot of titles that would inspire me to build sculptures and installations, [but] as soon as I would start working on [them], I would find that they were terrible, though they in turn would inspire me to new titles for new work. So all of these activities, they couldn’t be combined together, but they were really stimulating for each other. And at this time I was doing a lot of drawings for projects I wanted to do, but in the end everything was just filled up in a small suitcase because I never could give shape to what I wanted to do – the imagination was stronger than the shape.”³³

The interest in what has not been realised (yet) and its suggestive potentiality, its aesthetic engagement in the dialectic of in/visibility, and the strong narrative component, are already apparent in this precursor of what will later evolve into the *Bureau of Implicit Activities*. So is the impulse of

³² cf. Florence Gabriel, *Lapsus* (Paris: MAC/VAL, 2007), n.p.

³³ Trouvé, interview between the artist and the author in her atelier, February 17, 2024.

building an archive of these “incomplete traces of alleged unproductiveness,”³⁴ in an effort to recover implicit activities that otherwise would have been lost. This process leads to what Gianfranco Maraniello metaphorically described as “frames without works.”³⁵ He continues,

“[...] it is the frame itself that becomes a work, that gives time form, that becomes the contents and the container not only of ideas yet to come, but also of those which will have long claimed their own space as ‘potential’ or ‘implicit’ presences. It is not a question of making manifest that which is not yet concrete, but of becoming conscious of that which is pure possibility.”³⁶

While Maraniello captures the artistic concept of the implicit very well in this quote, he tends to downplay the material basis of the *B.I.A.* and thus fails to recognise the visual language that Trouvé uses to unearth these ‘pure possibilities’. Rather, I would propose that it is precisely this idiosyncrasy of her artistic style that deserves careful consideration.

Osborne’s theoretical framework of the postconceptual artwork will provide a useful analytical tool for discussing the connection between the conceptual and its necessary aesthetic dimension. For the key aspect of Trouvé’s *Bureau of Implicit Activities* remains, after all, to find a visual language compatible with the conceptual that foregrounds its structure – or, to put it more simply: to render the implicit *explicit*. The reference to the postconceptual also helps to recognise the implicit as an activity, which is another ontological shift that contemporary art has inherited from the 1960s; one in which artistic activity became its own motive. In what follows, I will pursue these two points, both by illustrating them in Trouvé’s work and by highlighting them through other references. The aim of the following chapter is not to impose the terminology of Conceptual art on Tatiana Trouvé’s oeuvre, but rather to allow her own vocabulary of the implicit to emerge through and against the grain of *B.I.A.*’s ambiguous materiality. Trouvé belongs to a generation of artists who draw heavily on 1960s art, either through direct reference or, on a broader scale, by employing the ontological rupture inherited from Conceptual art, as proposed by Osborne. By juxtaposing Trouvé’s work with that of other artists of the period, however anachronistic these comparisons may seem at first, it is my aim to reveal aspects of her work in greater plasticity, precisely because they produce contradictions as well as similarities.

³⁴ Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 57.

³⁵ Maraniello, *Polders*, 12.

³⁶ Maraniello, *Polders*, 12.

2.1. On (Post-)Conceptualism: The Implicit as an Activity

In his pivotal text “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions” (1990), Benjamin Buchloh recounts recent art history – from Duchamp’s ready-made to Minimalism to Pop Art to Conceptual art – as a continuous contestation of the validity of the art object; one that ultimately resulted in the replacement of “an aesthetic of industrial production and consumption with an aesthetic of administrative and legal organization and institutional validation.”³⁷ Though primarily aiming this observation at the New York centred orbit surrounding Seth Siegelaub and the UK based artist group Art & Language, Buchloh highlights the practiced substitution of linguistic systems and media of information for visual presentation as *the* main aesthetic discourses of Conceptual art.³⁸ The catchphrase ‘Art as Idea as Idea’, employed by prominent Conceptual-art-figure Joseph Kosuth, hereby illustrates the dissolution of the artworks’ objecthood via the radicalised emphasis on the idea as its immaterial basis and art’s sole *raison d’être*.³⁹ While the concomitant discourse on arts’ apparent ‘dematerialisation’ has been an often cited (and contested⁴⁰) proclamation by Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, Conceptual art’s notion of ‘the idea as material’ will be important to grasp the common thread that moves through the different *Modules* of Tatiana Trouvé’s *B.I.A.* It will be specifically important, as many authors who wrote about Trouvé’s work have noted a lineage towards the readymade, while references to Conceptual art were mostly overlooked.⁴¹ Yet, these references will provide the base to understand her work as inherently postconceptual, in a way that she connects the conceptual implicit to a materiality that positions her work in a specific spatio-temporal context.

In their text, “the dematerialization of art” (1968), Lippard and Chandler describe the “ultra-conceptual art” of their time as an art form that “emphasizes the thinking process almost exclusively,” therefore resulting in an aesthetic tendency in which the art object is feared to become “wholly

³⁷ Benjamin Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October* 1990 (1): 119.

³⁸ See Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969,” 105–143; cf. Sabeth Buchmann, *Denken gegen das Denken – Produktion, Technologie, Subjektivität bei Sol LeWitt, Yvonne Rainer und Hélio Oiticica* (Berlin: b_books Verlag, 2007), 13.

³⁹ See Joseph Kosuth and Gabriele Guercio, eds., *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings 1966–1990* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

⁴⁰ For a recent re-visitation of this debate that specifically seeks to challenge the notion of conceptualism as an idea-centred, anti-materialist movement, see Berger, *Conceptualism and Materiality*, 2019; Pamela M. Lee, “Das konzeptuelle Objekt der Kunstgeschichte,” *Texte zur Kunst* 1996 (21): 121–129.

⁴¹ Except for Coëllier, who brings Bruce Nauman, Dan Graham, and Louise Bourgeois into the discussion of Trouvé’s later works (cf. Coëllier, “Une Poétique de l’Énigme,” 214f), or Pamela M. Lee, who argues for traces of 1970s institutional critique within Trouvé’s *B.I.A.* (cf. Lee, “Work Space,” 240f), connections to art of the 1960s and 1970s are almost exclusively drawn in reference to Arte Povera; a reference that appears obvious given that the artist often quotes it as her main source of inspiration. Marcel Duchamp offers another favourable example, that features specifically important in the texts by Millet, “Tatiana Trouvé’s Bachelor Machines,” and Storr, “Somewhere A Place.”

obsolete.”⁴² While the *readymade* has already notoriously challenged the modernist emphasis on authorship and artistic craftsmanship as the defining principles for any art object, artistic movements such as Minimalism, Pop Art, process art, performance art, and Conceptual art have further expanded upon this critique from the 1960s onwards. This post-Duchampian turning point in the definition of art, as Chandler and Lippard observe, led to two essential shifts in the Anglo-American art scene: ‘art as idea’ and ‘art as action’. While ‘art as action’ seems to refer to any performance-based art, that in the text is only vaguely touched upon by an *en passant* mentioning of John Cage, the notion of ‘art as idea’ has been the main landmark for Lippard and Chandler. With the “prioritization of idea over object and thinking over making,”⁴³ the material – at least for prominent figures of the Conceptual art movement such as Joseph Kosuth or representatives of the English artists’ group Art & Language – was de-emphasised as a sole representative of an idea, a carrier of a concept.⁴⁴ The defining principle of art therefore became almost entirely dissociated from its object character. As the art historian Christian Berger further elaborates in his book chapter “Wholly Obsolete or Always A Possibility?” (2019), the interjection ‘almost’ in the previous sentence must not be overread, since many artists working conceptually at the same time as Kosuth and Art & Language did not necessarily share their anti-materialistic position that became epitome with Conceptual art itself.⁴⁵ However, Chandler’s and Lippard’s observations on the changing importance of materiality – and, of course, the artists working under these aesthetic principles, often theorising their own art practices – have inspired an entire discourse on the very nature of art. While authors of the 1970s heavily draw on the terms such as ‘de-objectification’ (Ursula Meyer) or ‘post-object art’ (Donald Karshan), the theoretical canon in the 2000s registers this paradigm change as the prevailing ‘condition’ that still structures contemporary art practices. Rosalind Krauss, for instance, speaks of the ‘post-medium condition’, while Peter Osborne prefers to speak of the ‘*transmedia* condition of postconceptual art’.⁴⁶

⁴² Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, “the dematerialization of art,” in: *conceptual art: a critical anthology*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 46. The text was first published in 1968 in *Art International*, 12 (2): 31–36.

⁴³ Berger, “Wholly Obsolete or Always A Possibility?,” 17.

⁴⁴ In a particular elusive footnote on that matter, Berger includes a quote by Lucy R. Lippard from 1968 in response to a letter by Kosuth concerning the ‘Dematerialization’ article: “Yes, ideas are what make great art [sic!] great but so far the idea has been *fused with*, not separated from the object, I don’t share your lack of interest in esthetic object as I trust you know.” Lucy R. Lippard Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, as quoted in Berger, “Wholly Obsolete or Always A Possibility?,” 22.

⁴⁵ cf. Berger “Wholly Obsolete or Always A Possibility?,” 27f. Berger specifically names Sol LeWitt, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner, and Douglas Huebler.

⁴⁶ See Donald Karshan, “The Seventies: *Post-Object Art*,” foreword to *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects* (New York: New York Cultural Center, 1970); Rosalind E. Krauss, ‘*A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*’ (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000); Ursula Meyer, *Conceptual Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1972); Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*.

In that context, one of the most significant contributions of Conceptual art, according to Osborne, was to “demonstrate the ineliminability of the aesthetic as a *necessary*, though *radical insufficient* [...] dimension of the artwork to its status as art [...]”⁴⁷ This disclosed an understanding of the aesthetic as a concept, whose formalist instances of materiality, medium or form were deemed as insufficient as arts’ sole defining principle. Instead, the necessity of the conceptuality of an artwork was newly brought to light, leading to, and depending on, a radically altered understanding of materiality. In opening up to an infinite expansion of its possible materials, the art practices of the 1960s necessarily demanded a “new conception of the unity of the individual work,”⁴⁸ one that became distributive and malleable in character. This *distributive* character signifies that the unity or coherence of a work of art is no longer tied to a distinct, physical entity, but is instead achieved through the interconnectedness of its various manifestations across different media and contexts. By existing simultaneously in potentially infinite forms and places, contemporary artworks challenge traditional notions of the singular, contained artwork. The unity of the artwork is thus found in its overarching concept, which binds its diverse elements into a cohesive whole.⁴⁹

This inheritance of the conceptual as an underlying and unifying principle for the postconceptual artwork, is particularly important in regard to Tatiana Trouvé’s definition of the implicit, which can be said to be the driving force and leitmotif of the *B.I.A.* For Trouvé, the implicit seems at first to elude any materialist manifestation, since the term is only descriptive of an activity that is always yet to come, always on the verge of realisation.⁵⁰ As such, the implicit is intrinsically connected with a mental engagement that highlights the process of thought as its main motor. Joseph Mouton writes about the first comprehensive installation of the *Bureau of Implicit Activities* in 1997 at the Villa Arson in Nice: “everything veers toward the *implicit*, which is to say that nothing manages to unfold its form, nothing reaches the term that describes it. [...] They are gestures, activities or decisions which, because they work on a material that resembles them too closely, fail to come at any outcome.”⁵¹ Mouton’s description points to a general problem, one which especially art of the late 1960s and 1970s was grappling with: the contradiction of formalising non-visual material along formal-aesthetic principles; proposing *objectlessness* via an object.⁵² Already in her early

⁴⁷ Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 49.

⁴⁸ Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 49.

⁴⁹ cf. Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 37–51.

⁵⁰ cf. Tatiana Trouvé, *Récits, rêves et autre histoires* (Paris: Beaux-Arts de Paris éditions, 2023), 17; Eli During, “The Strategy of the Implicit,” 68.

⁵¹ Charles-Arthur Boyer and Joseph Mouton, *Tatiana Trouvé* (Nice: Villa Arson, 1998), 21.

⁵² cf. Lee, “Das konzeptuelle Objekt der Kunstgeschichte,” 121. Lee further elaborates that, especially *because* the idea and conceptual process is highlighted so much, the traditional notion of the artists’ subjectivity is reinstated too. As a consequence, art once more becomes an ‘artwork’, no matter how much effort is put into its ‘dematerialization’, cf. Lee, “Das konzeptuelle Objekt der Kunstgeschichte,” 127.

works, such as the aforementioned *Briefcase of Unconcretized Ideas*, Trouvé is concerned with this contradiction: here, the idea is set forth as the main artistic component, while the briefcase suggests to merely function as its 'frame'. One may think of works such as *Artists' Breath* (1960) by Piero Manzoni that performed a similar gesture.⁵³

In her *Titles Module* (fig. 8–9), one of the *B.I.A.*'s early *Modules* and close successor to the *Briefcase*, Trouvé formalises the *idea* as artistic material in a poignant way. The *Titles Module*'s physical form consists of yellow foam covered walls that are constructed as a maze through which the viewer can wander, spanning 1,50 x 6,50 x 6,50 meters in the exhibition space. On these walls, in small slips of paper, titles of projects – many of which have never seen the light of the day, but perhaps gave rise to new ideas and formulations – are pinned to the foam with needles. What is essentially depicted here are the thought processes of the artist, fugitive as they were not materialised in a final, formalised art object, but nonetheless saved from oblivion in the *Module*'s performed activity. This aesthetic approach is reflected not only in the *Titles Module*, but appears as an underlying theme throughout the other *Modules* of the *B.I.A.*: The *Archive's Module* ('Drawings') preserves copies of drawings as well as project sketches that never reached the level of an autonomous work of art; the *Administrative Module* invents administrative processes that only ended up in piles of standardised 'regrets' ("I regret to inform you..."); the *Reminiscences Module*, *Archives Module* ('Unsent Correspondences' and 'Secrets and Lies') as well as the *Lapsus Module* work on the threshold of memory and the Freudian un/conscious; the *Waiting Module* tries to preserve time on the verge of being lost and unearths it as formative to the subject.

This is the implicit activity that connects all individual parts of the *B.I.A.*: The surfacing of *almost* lost activities – almost, because they are retrieved by the 'frames', the *Modules*. Art-making, so the proposition brought forth by the *Bureau*, must be understood as a continuous process, an activity *always implicit*, though often hidden in the object. It is precisely in this juxtaposition of the discrete object and the fugitive labour required to create it, that the notion of the implicit takes on its meaning in Tatiana Trouvé's project: "implicite = qui est contenu dans un propos, un discours sans y être dit ; qui est la conséquence nécessaire de qqch."⁵⁴ As a *conséquence nécess-*

⁵³ In fact, the *Module* 'Secret and Lies', which is part of the *Archives Module*, can be read as a direct reference to Manzoni: Part of the installation are balloons in which Trouvé breathed her 'secrets and lies', before casting them in concrete. The *Module*, serves as a studio to perform that task, with everything necessary available in its interior; another nudge to the discourses of the 1960s, only that Trouvé overcomes the post-studio condition by bringing it into the exhibition space directly – by affirming the material dimension of contemporary art, so too is the studio a place in which artistic labour is performed and therefore, at least it seems like this is the proposition here, needs to be re-evaluated.

⁵⁴ Dictionary entry for 'implicite adj.', *Larousse*, last accessed: June 23, 2024, <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/implicite/41914>.

aire indeed, the materiality of her *Modules* is essentially a reflection of the implicit activities initiated by her *B.I.A.*

Each *Module*, therefore, functions as an individual vessel to this concept, trying to connect the loose ends that would otherwise run through one's fingers like sand. The conceptual and its material expression, it must be noted, are inextricably intertwined; this is the main aspect that defines the *B.I.A.* as inherently postconceptual. Working out the 'philosophy of the implicit' inherent in Trouvé's work, the curator Eli During observes in that respect:

"The implicit is imperceptible, even where it is spread out in full view. *Hence the need for a device that will expose and formulate it.* Let us make the point once more: what is implicit is not the object, the signification or the purpose of a practice, but the practice itself, *as an activity.*"⁵⁵

In what follows, I will explicate these two points: the necessary aesthetic dimension of the *B.I.A.*, which ultimately collapses with its conceptual dimension; and the articulation of the implicit as an activity whose subject is 'the practice itself', meaning the artistic labour that is contained in the object.

Published in 1967, Sol LeWitt observed in his influential "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art":

"In conceptual art the idea or the concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art."⁵⁶

Now, Trouvé takes on this legacy in an ambiguous way. While it is true that in the *B.I.A.*, 'the idea becomes a machine that makes the art' – after all, it is *ideas* and 'all the planning and decisions made beforehand' that the *B.I.A.* collects and exhibits – its materialised 'execution' is far from being 'perfunctory'. Rather, the *Bureau* is established as a site where *all* these aspects take centre stage.

Considering the structure of the *B.I.A.* as an office, so to speak, it becomes evident that the materials at use not only reference the bureaucratic, *but that they are* administrative, e.g. documentary, in nature: the physical structures of the *Archive's Module*, specifically 'Drawings'

⁵⁵ During, "The Strategy of the Implicit," 68. Emphasis added by the author.

⁵⁶ Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum*, 5:10 (Summer 1967): 79–84; as quoted in James Meyer, "The Second Degree: Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art," in: *Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible 1966–1973*, edited by Richard S. Field (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1995), 102.

and 'Unsent Correspondences', are filing cabinets; the *Administrative Module* inventories job correspondences; the *Titles Module* presents precisely that: titles written on slips of paper. Trouvé therefore not only establishes the vocabulary of the *Bureau* as a conceptual framework, but also reflects on it through its materiality. This becomes even more evident in the *Lapsus Module*, wherein Trouvé applies a visual language reminiscent to advertising billboards and presents them on office partition walls, put together so that they form a maze the viewer can enter (fig. 10). In other cases, enigmatic sentences are written in the blank spaces of type-written administration forms, therefore recoding the bureaucratic language into verse-like poetry (fig. 11). It is precisely here that Buchloh's concept of 'administrative aesthetics' reappears in Trouvé's works, as "an aesthetic of administrative and legal organization and institutional validation."⁵⁷ And it is through its specific materiality that the *B.I.A.* is positioned in its concrete spatio-temporal context: Paris in the 1990s, an environment shaped by French bureaucracy and the emergence of information culture.

In that context, a link can be drawn to Arte Povera – a reference that the artist readily asserts as important to her own work: Except that for Trouvé, the 'poor materials' at hand are no longer to be found in nature, but in an office. It is through her bricolage-use of these readily available materials – e.g. her non-hierarchical use of rubber bands, office stationary, and Plexiglas-covered windows – that Trouvé connects the conceptual and its intellectual engagement with a material dimension.⁵⁸

Importantly, the materials used often mimic, almost tautologically, the implicit activity they are meant to represent. As such, they tend to inflate the document and archive with the artwork.⁵⁹ It serves to quote a longer passage from Osborne's *The Postconceptual Condition* (2018) to highlight this point, as this will prove to be a guiding thread that runs through the *Bureau of Implicit Activities*:

"The first thing to note here is that insofar as the identity of a postconceptual work is not tied to any particular materialization, but rather to the temporally open totality of its materializations, in reflective relation to its idea, it has an immanently constructive and processual character. Each materialization – and the boundaries of what is included in the work

⁵⁷ Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969," 119.

⁵⁸ In an interview with curator Francesca Pietropaolo, Trouvé explains: "I was very sensitive to the vocabulary of Arte Povera when I was a student. It was a good answer to Minimalism – I say this even though I like Minimalism very much – in a sense that the Arte Povera artists were saying: 'Okay, maybe we can reduce everything to the essentials of form and space, to this purity, but there is another aspect that is mental, maybe even "poor," in which there is an endless field of possibilities.' The important contribution of Arte Povera is its ability to draw on the world of the imagination, of fancy – which can never be erased – with a minimum of materials." Trouvé, "In the Studio," 92.

⁵⁹ On that instance, Osborne contests Boris Groys's assertion, that "documentation is *per definitionem* not art," by virtue of only referring to it, thereby marking its absence: "Precisely by merely referring to art, art documentation makes it quite clear that art itself is no longer immediately present, but rather absent and hidden." Boris Groys, "Comrade of Time," *e-flux journal* #11, 2009: 7.

are porous – becomes at once a *documentation of the work* and a *set of materials for a subsequent presentation of the work*. In this respect, the work includes its own documentation and, to the extent that it proliferates and its materializations are collected, its own archive as well.”⁶⁰

Let us transfer these points to Tatiana Trouvé’s *Bureau*: As has been pointed out, the ‘identity’ of the *B.I.A.* – meaning the conceptual idea that brings the individual *Modules* together in its unified conception, the *Bureau of Implicit Activities* – is the implicit. The implicit, that is, all the traces of *activities* that often go unrecognised but are formative to the artistic process, are then contained by the *Modules* that serve as ‘frames’. And it is the sum of all these *Modules* as ‘a reflective relation to the idea’, that make up the *Bureau*. This is a circular motion – which is also why Mouton observes correctly, that the gestures expressed by the *B.I.A.* ‘fail to come at any outcome’ – they only end up confirming themselves. But precisely because the material of each *Module* mimics the activity it seeks to express, the administrative process of collecting the paraphernalia of Trouvé’s life as an artist is never complete, but always in progress. The *B.I.A.* is processual in character wherefore its boundaries remain porous: every letter (‘Unsent Correspondences’), every ID-document (*Administrative Module*), every title (*Titles Module*) is both the *B.I.A.*’s material as well as its documentation. The *B.I.A.*, in every aspect, is therefore its own archive.

Essentially, what the *B.I.A.* wants to achieve – with its display of project drawings, titles without material equivalents and collages of application letters for grants and wage labour jobs – is to upheave the processes of creative labour buried in the idea of an artwork as a closed off, finished product. As it became clear in the passage above: the implicit is not only introduced as a friction between the conceptual and its materialisation, but as an activity and archive that registers the creative process as both the *B.I.A.*’s subject and motor. The *Bureau of Implicit Activities*, I propose, follows a similar intention as Mel Bochner’s exhibition *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art*, realised at the School of Visual Art in New York, in 1966 (fig. 12). It is my argument that, in fact, both projects articulate “a conceptual art of process, a process art located in the development of an idea.”⁶¹

As the story goes, Bochner was back then still a young instructor at the School and got invited to organise the annual ‘Christmas show on drawings’ to run from December 2–23, 1966. Starting off with the idea to show drawings that were ‘not necessarily meant to be viewed as art’ – namely preliminary drawings and project sketches – Bochner collected several sheets of paper

⁶⁰ Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, 128. Emphasis added by the author.

⁶¹ Meyer, “The Second Degree,” 102.

from befriended artists (such as Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Sol LeWitt, Eva Hesse, Dan Graham, Jo Baer, Robert Moskowitz, Robert Smithson, Al Jensen, to name a few). As Bochner faced financial constraints articulated by the gallery (it was too expensive to frame the many drawings, which, effectively, would have communicated their status *as art* via their mode of presentation), Bochner decided to xerox the received works and put them into four identical bound books, which he then placed, in a Duchampian manner, on four white wooden pedestals. But it was not only the working drawings he included in his 'exhibition': he also asked other intellectual workers to contribute project outlines, among them mathematicians, biologists, engineers and architects; therefore not only questioning the object of art *per se*, but also *who* can be considered as 'worthy' to be invited to participate in an exhibition in the first place. In a tongue-in-cheek gesture, he included the user manual of the very Xerox machine he used as the last page of the books.⁶² What is displayed here, effectively, is a contestation of the artwork's aura, its originality status, through the mechanic means of reproduction. As James Meyer points out concisely, speaking in Bochner's name: "To show them in reproduction wouldn't compromise their identity: they weren't 'works' to begin with."⁶³ Similar to Trouvé's *Briefcase of Unconcretized Ideas*, Bochner's *Working Drawings* resembles the work itself just as much as it functions as a container for – as the subtitle of Bochner's exhibition goes – 'other visible things on paper not necessarily meant to be viewed as art'. What was being brought forth, therefore, was a reading of art-as-work: *Working Drawings* was foremost about the *process* of making art.

The implicit activities that link all the *B.I.A.*'s *Modules* point to a similar aim: the (re-)surfacing, inventory and dismantling of the social process of artistic activity. And it is by employing the implicit as its structuring motif, the *Bureau of Implicit Activities* presents itself not as much as 'art' – not unlike Bochner's exhibition title – but as 'work'. The *B.I.A.*'s title, as Pamela M. Lee suggests, needs to be taken literally: "For the implicit activity of any bureau is *work*, after all."⁶⁴

It is specifically through its administrative and archival character that the notion of 'work' appears in a double sense, for "'work' refers to both an object rendered concrete and material and the activity required to produce it – in this case, the labor of an idea imagined off site but materialized as a work space."⁶⁵ In naming her project '*Bureau*', Trouvé highlights the artistic labour required to produce it as both its material and subject matter. The work of an artist, thereby, is rendered close to that of an archivist or white-collar-worker, in that much of artistic labour in a

⁶² cf. Meyer, "The Second Degree," 75–110.

⁶³ Meyer, "The Second Degree," 95.

⁶⁴ Lee, "Work Space," 239.

⁶⁵ Lee, "Work Space," 240.

post-production era has to do with sampling, collecting and redistributing.⁶⁶ In the case of the *B.I.A.*, to make this point once more, it is a kind of work that never ceases to exist, essentially because it registers the processual activities of an artist as the archive's subject: It is 'all the planning and decisions made beforehand', that formalist Modernism once tried to get rid of. It is here that one finds this 'paradoxical non-realization' Maraniello speaks of, because what the archive contains is simultaneously what brings the archive into existence. Its *ongoingness* is therefore inscribed into the *B.I.A.*'s very structure. The activities that Trouvé registers in her archive inflate the categories of 'before' and 'after the work', because she designates the artistic process as fragmentary and incomplete by its very nature. In this instance, Trouvé's *Bureau* can be read as a key example to Hal Foster's observation that "archival art is as much preproduction as it is postproduction: concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces [...], these artists are often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects – in art and in history alike – that might offer points of departure again."⁶⁷ This 'incompleteness' is a vital term for Trouvé: with neither an end nor a strict beginning, the *B.I.A.* is relentlessly open to modifications – open in its temporal as well as spatial structure, "*a living architecture*,"⁶⁸ that defines its borders continuously but never definitely. In that sense, it is the prototype of the postconceptual artwork: precisely because its material and spatial possibilities remain unlimited for future realisations, but continue to relate to the implicit as its unifying concept.⁶⁹

As has been shown in reference to Mel Bochner's *Working Drawings*, Tatiana Trouvé's work aims to foreground the artistic process as an activity always immanent in the art object itself; 'activity' therefore becomes just as central as a term to her *Bureau* as the implicit. Although very different from performance art, happening and Fluxus, Trouvé's work draws on Lippard and Chandler's proclamation of 'art as action' as it describes a shift in emphasis: from the art object as a finished and closed object to the activity of making art. Especially through the practices of scores as introduced to the art field in the 1960s by Fluxus, art realised itself as an 'unfoldment of doing' that not only aimed at de-establishing the notion of the artist as author, but also worked towards a closer integration of art in life and vice versa. In the case of Tatiana Trouvé, as will be elaborated in the following chapter, her *B.I.A.* is concerned with activities whose 'unfoldment of doing' are located in the sphere of unproductivity and how this unproductivity can be revaluated, perhaps even made productive. The questions at the heart of the *B.I.A.*, therefore, concern primarily this quality of the

⁶⁶ cf. Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110, Fall 2004: 4.

⁶⁷ Foster, "An Archival Impulse," 5.

⁶⁸ Maraniello, *Polders*, 13.

⁶⁹ cf. Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All*, 143f.

ecological understanding of *time* as mobilised by an activity – specifically, when such an activity fails to produce a productive outcome and remains unproductive in nature. But it also acknowledges the passage of time as formative to subjectivity and traces its residues. In multiple ways, the *B.I.A.* asks: At which point is an activity deemed unproductive and therefore de-valorised? What traces do these unproductive moments leave in one's formation of subjectivity nonetheless? How can they be uncovered, made visible, perhaps even transformed to a different understanding of productivity?

2.2. On Time: Notions of Unproductivity

In general, when Tatiana Trouvé speaks of her *Bureau of Implicit Activities*, it quickly becomes clear that 'time' is its crucial category: "Time is the theme underlying all my work," she says in an interview with the curator Francesca Pietropaolo. "It's hard to know what time is," she continues, "but I don't think I would work with it so much otherwise. The only thing we know for sure about time is how to calculate it. I like to think of it as material, a formless space with which you can play, do different things."⁷⁰

But it isn't just any notion of time or temporality that Trouvé is interested in. As she points out on many occasions, the *B.I.A.*'s main intention is an "ongoing recovery process – a search for lost times that prevents unproductiveness to turn into wasted time, into *non-time*."⁷¹ What Trouvé is primarily concerned with in such a process is the question of the subject's position in the chronological measurement of time; specifically, if the activities in which the subject is engaged are considered unproductive. And it is in this context that I would like to recall once again Trouvé's statement that has inspired many of the following reflections: "What I invent is a kind of time *that escapes our chronological measurements*. By naming this work *Bureau* and grouping activities into different *Modules*, I was perhaps simply allowing myself to spend 10 years on it, and to help those years pass by."⁷²

With unproductivity as the prevailing temporality of her *B.I.A.*, waiting becomes a vital activity for Trouvé. Subjected to the flows of time and marked by a beginning and an end that are – in most cases – beyond one's direct control, she explores a temporality in which the subject occupies an ambivalent place in a suspended present.

"Perhaps I want to free time by recovering it. But I don't see waiting as unfruitful. On the contrary, it's a moment in which the subject can be constituted. When we're waiting for things, we're simultaneously in the present and outside the present."⁷³

In the very last sentence, Trouvé reveals how in periods of waiting one becomes increasingly aware of a temporal disjunction that subverts the linear narrative of time and its neat division into past, present and future, because it is in fact constituted by a confluence of these temporal dimensions – the subject in question is waiting for a future event that will define the end of this period, acutely aware of its surroundings in the present moment, while at the same time tending to dwell

⁷⁰ Trouvé, "In the Studio," 87.

⁷¹ Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 56.

⁷² Trouvé, "A Body Without A Face," 117. Emphasis added by the author.

⁷³ Trouvé, *Djinn*, n.p.

on memories of the past.⁷⁴ In these moments, the present takes on a primarily affective dimension that corresponds with Lauren Berlant's description of "the present as a mediated affect;" a moment that "makes itself present to us before it becomes anything else [...]."⁷⁵ Berlant's approach to the contemporary is thereby defined by its potentiality, in that she focusses on the production of the present as a "moment from within a moment" before it is historicised.⁷⁶ Accordingly, her book *Cruel Optimism* (2011) is interested in the processes of subjectivation as an "unfolding activity,"⁷⁷ defined by the constant engagement to make sense of that present. Ultimately, this creates an affective relation to the contemporary moment, in which the present is perceived as a "stretched-out present"⁷⁸ that the subject relates to under the conditions of uncertainty. Moments of waiting are specifically characterised by such a suspension, one which Trouvé perceives in a similar vein as a 'moment from within a moment', in which different temporalities may converge from associations and reminiscences of the past. In trying to unearth waiting as something productive, Trouvé reevaluates such time as an affective situation in which the subject engages in Berlant's notion of sense-making as an 'unfolding activity', thereby constituting itself in relation to the world. It is also in that sense that the subject must always be understood in relation to its potentiality.

Thus, when Trouvé speaks of subjectivity in the context of such unproductive periods of waiting, she is not only exploring what traces this enormous amount of time in our lives leaves in the construction of subjectivity, but also what place the subject then occupies in the 'chronological measurements of time'. It is in that sense, Trouvé engages with questions of contemporaneity – not as an 'operative fiction' as it appears in Osborne's framework of postconceptuality, but more in the way Boris Groys asks how contemporary art can be understood both as a product as well as critical reflection of the present, as a 'comrade of time'.

In the sense of a simultaneity that defines the present as a confluence of times, Groys observes, similar to Trouvé's thoughts on time: "to be con-temporary does not necessarily mean to be present, to be in the 'here-and-now'; it means to be 'with time' rather than 'in time' [...]."⁷⁹ In the course of his essay "Comrades of Time" (2007), he introduces the title-giving figure of speech – a derivation of the German word 'Zeitgenosse', a person who lived at the same time as another person – and stretches it to 'Zeit-Genosse': to be time's comrade. It is in this metaphor

⁷⁴ cf. Trouvé, interview between the artist and the author in her atelier, February 17, 2024.

⁷⁵ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 4.

⁷⁶ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 4.

⁷⁷ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 4.

⁷⁸ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 5.

⁷⁹ Groys, "Comrades of Time," 6.

that Groys sees contemporary art's relationship to time, and perhaps even its necessary responsibility as the critical counterpart of contemporaneity. In that context, unproductivity becomes a crucial dynamic of the present:

"to be con-temporary – *zeitgenössisch* – can thus be understood as being a 'comrade of time' – as collaborating with time, helping time when it has problems, when it has difficulties. And under the conditions of our contemporary product-oriented civilization, time does indeed have problems when it is perceived as being unproductive, wasted, meaningless. *Such unproductive time is excluded from historical narratives, endangered by the prospect of complete erasure.*"⁸⁰

Unproductivity, as Groys argues, is positioned outside of historicity: With the proliferation of modernity's grand narratives, in which a certain stability is asserted to the past, and the future is defined as an infinite forward movement, the present was merely perceived as a moment of transition, a point in time that needed to be overcome in order to arrive in the future that bears the fruits of our work. In the postmodern, fragmented and unstable condition that defines our contemporaneity, however, such promises cannot be upheld: with both past and future being subjected to a constant revision, the present becomes a period that is no longer defined as a transitional moment, but a moment in which we are

"stuck [...] as it reproduces itself without leading to the future. We simply lose our time, without being able to invest it securely, to accumulate it, whether utopically or heterotopically. The loss of the infinite historical perspective generates the phenomenon of unproductive, wasted time."⁸¹

On that instance, Trouvé favours the present to the future and in doing so, installs a slowed down, suspended version of it, one that stretches its frame and welcomes everything that has no place in a progress-driven understanding of the future: doubt, hesitation, failure, unproductivity. As a project without a definite beginning or end, conceived of traces of non-realisation, the *B.I.A.*, to paraphrase Groys, reflects and responds to contemporaneity on an aesthetic dimension: for this is "precisely what the contemporary is – a prolonged, even potentially infinite period of delay."⁸² The unproductive, wasted, ahistorical, excessive time thus becomes its substance. "However," as Groys continues, "one can also interpret this wasted time more positively, as excessive time – as time that attests to our life as pure being-in-time, beyond its use within the framework of modern economic and political projects."⁸³

⁸⁰ Groys, "Comrades of Time," 6f.

⁸¹ Groys, "Comrades of Time," 4.

⁸² Groys, "Comrades of Time," 3.

⁸³ Groys, "Comrades of Time," 4.

As has been shown in reference to the *Briefcase of Unconcretized Ideas* or the *Modules* of the *B.I.A.*, Trouvé creates containers that harbour exactly these temporalities of unproductivity: All her documents of failed efforts and wasted time capture activities that took place in a moment of the present, which then became the past, but that never resulted in a definite outcome or an autonomous product that would live on in the future. They may build the archive of the *B.I.A.*, but they remain residues of the actions they account for, that have no place in the economic narrative of progress because they seem to have led nowhere. In the *B.I.A.*, there are no fruits that can be harvested. Even as constitutive parts of the *Modules*, their unproductive character cannot be fully absorbed, because they mainly build the frames that contain these activities and traces and position them in space. They do, however, give a certain value to this unproductivity by documenting it and thus saving it from being erased from historical time. It is here, that “unproductiveness [becomes] a driving force,”⁸⁴ that aims to liberate the activities articulated by the *Bureau* from a commodified understanding of time, caught in economic capture. In recourse to the unproductive, Trouvé thus taps into an idea of time, that is strongly linked to work and production. As Deirdre M. Smith points out:

“Organized labour disputes often focus on negotiations over hours, weeks, and periods of pause from work. Work is an investment of time and resources in the present for a later result (an object, a wage, a rest). Idleness and leisure can be understood as breaks that punctuate work time.”⁸⁵

Waiting, with all of its encompassing notions of unproductivity, becomes a vital temporality for Trouvé: for her, it is one of the few moments in which time, and thus subjectivity, is supposedly freed from its appropriation by the productive paradigm under capitalism, from the compulsion to *produce anything*.

With the *B.I.A.* as an ongoing process of recovering the temporality of unproductivity, Trouvé formulates an aesthetic response to Groys’s call for art to be the comrade of time. Almost as if speaking directly of Trouvé’s project, Groys writes of contemporary art:

“It captures and demonstrates activities that take place in time, but do not lead to the creation of any definite product. Even if these activities do lead to such a product, they are presented as being separated from their result, as not completely invested in the product,

⁸⁴ Tatiana Trouvé, interview by François Poisay, in: *Aujourd’hui, hier, ou il y a longtemps*, ed. by Maurice Fréchuret and François Poisay (Bordeaux: Capc Musée d’art contemporain, 2003), 61.

⁸⁵ Deirdre M. Smith, “The Artist Works: An Imperfective Reading of Mladen Stilinović’s *Artist at Work*,” *Art History* 44 no. 5 (November 2021): 910.

absorbed by it. We find exemplifications of excessive time, that has not been completely absorbed by the historical process.”⁸⁶

Although Trouvé’s interest in the problem of unproductivity and how it informs her probing questions of labour and subjectivity can be said to be present in each of the *B.I.A. Modules*, she has devoted one *Module* in particular to such ‘exemplifications of excess time’, that aims to conceptualise waiting as an activity and questions its alleged unproductiveness.

Consisting of two parts plus its corresponding *Annex*, the implicit activity the *Waiting Module* (fig. 13–15) is concerned with, as the name suggests, is “time spent waiting in its straightforward sense: waiting for someone somewhere, waiting in a queue, in a supermarket or an airport. That time is always considered useless and fruitless, unproductive...”⁸⁷ Time, therefore, becomes a material itself of which Trouvé uses its residue, so to speak – *wasted time*. With the application of unproductive time as a motive that structures the *B.I.A.*, the aim of the following section is to comprehend the ways in which time is thought of as a material and how the *Waiting Module*, in particular, establishes a connection between the precarious, time and unproductivity on an aesthetic level.

Unlike the other *Modules* of the *Bureau*, the *Waiting Module* is installed in the exhibition space to create an open and accessible space whose boundaries are defined by black, upright boxes connected by steel wire, reminiscent of boxing rinks, depending on the layout of the exhibition. Curiously, the *Waiting Module* – although it is decidedly concerned with passivity as its theme – is the only *Module* of the *B.I.A.* that activates the viewer in a directly affective way, allowing them to either sit on, lean against or slouch into the furniture-like objects while listening to the soundtrack of the artist’s time spent waiting. Edited by a musician commissioned by Trouvé,⁸⁸ these collected sound recordings play with the perceptual relationship evoked by waiting: Beginning with an almost musical prelude, the main soundtrack slowly becomes recognisable as the standardised (female) voice of metro announcements, slowed down to the point where it dissolves into intangible bits stripped of their informational value. Gradually, other sounds overlap and begin to build up a simultaneous layering, moving from left and right over the stereo, becoming increasingly high-pitched and dystopian, so that the once spherical incidental sound creates a sense of unease and

⁸⁶ Groys, “Comrades of Time,” 6.

⁸⁷ Trouvé, *Djinn*, n.p.

⁸⁸ “The tape recordings that I’ve produced as part of that aren’t interesting in themselves. On the other hand, you can rework them in such a way that you *recreate a certain time*. I asked musicians to use them while imposing the following constraint: never bring an instrument in, work only with the sounds. They were, however, allowed to cut them up, stretch them out, mix them.” Trouvé, *Djinn*, n.p. Emphasis added by the author.

restlessness. Only the noises of an approaching train and its squeaking breaks overshadow the record's sensory overload, signalling that the waiting has come to an end, however, offering only a fleeting relief. The audio track, played in a loop, immediately begins again. Waiting time, here, is not experienced as a singular event, but as a blur of undecipherable sounds from indiscernible locations, in which the seven and a half minute tape echoes through the exhibition halls in endless repetition.

Through the affective nature of auditory perception, the visitor's position oscillates between active and passive: Active, as they engage in a temporality initially experienced by another person and now brought into a shared present in the form of a fictionalised soundscape; passive, as the real-time of their own existence passes without action other than the aesthetic experience, similar to the waiting time reflected by the *Module*. Trouvé thus succeeds in detaching the space from a chronological perception of time – the *Waiting Module* situates time in an uncertain but multi-dimensional duration, creating an a-synchronous perception of time in which the visitor becomes a participant. In this sense, the visitor experiences time in a compressed, slowed down, fragmented and mechanised way, which precarizes the visitor's ability to connect with the audio components at play and evokes an excruciating emotional response that contrasts with the furniture's invitation to rest and relaxation. Rather than portraying the temporality of waiting as a continuation of uneventful inactivity, which might cast the viewer in the role of Estragon or Vladimir from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, the audio instead creates a blur of indistinguishable sounds from indiscernible locations, with the seven-and-a-half-minute tape echoing endlessly through the exhibition halls. In this way, the visitor's position is far closer to that of Sisyphus, whose “non-productive practice” reflects an “excess of time that is caught in the non-historical pattern of eternal repetition.”⁸⁹ The use of repetition can therefore be said to contribute to Trouvé's aim of liberating the futile activity of waiting from the ‘chronological’ – that is to say, ‘historical’ – ‘measurements’ of time; but interestingly enough, not in a way that would equate waiting with pleasure. There is an interesting disjuncture between the romanticised way in which Trouvé speaks of waiting and the dissonant soundtrack that is played in her *Module*.

Using sound as both highly affective and immaterial, Trouvé works with a medium that is fundamentally temporal, revealing “the multiple ways of being with, in and out of time.”⁹⁰ The stretching, delaying and suspension of the audio can be read analogous to a prolongment of the

⁸⁹ Boris Groys, “How to Do Time With Art,” in: *Francis Alÿs: A Story of Deception*, ed. by Mark Godfrey, Klaus Biesenbach, and Kerry Greenberg (London: Tate Publishing, 2010), 190.

⁹⁰ Terry Smith, “Creating Dangerously, then and now,” in *The Unhomely: Phantom Scenes in Global Society* (2nd International Biennial of Contemporary Art of Seville), edited by Okwui Enwezor, 114–129. Fundación Biacs, Sevilla: 2006: 120.

present which is always on the verge of being sublimated, as it were, by the modernist narrative of time's acceleration: if the present moment is only defined as a transitional state between the past and the future, as Groys has argued, then it is precisely here when unproductive time, if not intercepted in any way, is deemed lost and turned to *non-time*.⁹¹ It is through the suspension and layering of these records – her assemblage of different sounds of waiting – that Trouvé disrupts such linear narrative of time and exposes its neat categorisations in past, present and future as fictive. Her implementation of the sound piece serves as an aesthetic investigation of time's discontinuous and inconsistent qualities, therefore conceptualising the perception of time as precarious.

Both Groys and Berlant describe the present as a moment in time structured by doubt and uncertainty, in which we are 'stuck', because the future loses its utopian potential. The present, in that sense, can be said to be precarious *per se*, because its main condition is constituted by an unresolvable instability.⁹² Berlant's book *Cruel Optimism* connects these observations to a probing investigation on how subjectivity is conditioned under these circumstances of a contingent crisis. In such an understanding, the present posits a problem, because it constitutes the moment in time in which the promise of a better future remains perpetually out of reach.⁹³ In the *Waiting Module* specifically, Trouvé explores a temporality that is in itself characterised by liminality; a suspension of the present that, on the one hand, is constantly mobilised by an activity and, on the other, has unproductiveness and indecision as its prevailing condition. It is here that Trouvé's project can be read as an aesthetic engagement with Berlant's notion of an *impasse*

“as a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things, maintain one's sea legs, and coordinate the standard melodramatic crises with those processes that have not yet found their genre of event.”⁹⁴

The *B.I.A.* as an archive connects to this conflicted perception of the present; its activity responds to the desire to make sense of 'those processes that have not yet found their genre of event'. With the hypervigilance of a *bricoleur*,⁹⁵ she collects the materials that constitute the traces of her activities, bound to disappear into 'almost nothing'. So when Trouvé says that working on her *B.I.A.*

⁹¹ Boris Groys, "How to Do Time with Art," 190.

⁹² cf. Groys, "Comrades of Time," 4; Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 6, 54; see also Bourdieu, "Prekarität ist Überall," 97.

⁹³ cf. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 194–196.

⁹⁴ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 4.

⁹⁵ Reflecting on the human condition, Claude Lévi-Strauss introduces *bricolage* as a creative act that aims to draw on existing 'bits and pieces' of cultural symbols and materials, in order to navigate through symbolic environments by reinterpreting and recombining them. The *bricoleur* is therefore characterised by an intuitive approach that communicates through and with the object – the materials used are perceived as socially organised, but recontextualised as an answer to a problem posed. Positioning the *bricoleur* in contrast to the scientist, Lévi-Strauss "illuminates the distinction

simply allowed her to 'to spend 10 years on it, and to help those years pass by,' she, in fact, is not just letting time pass; rather, she is *giving herself time* to consciously engage with her surroundings, and to trace the transitory state of her actions in this precarious present. In the compilation of all her relentless activities, which ultimately shape the *Bureau of Implicit Activities* as an ongoing project, Trouvé performs the 'cruel optimism' that Berlant describes as the motor of our actions in pursuit of 'a good life': her *B.I.A.* is optimistic because it strives to maintain its ongoing process of recovering time that is deemed lost; but it is cruel, because this activity is precisely what keeps the project at the intersection of an impasse – it is never completed, forever in a transitory state itself. Perhaps it is exactly this dualism that Trouvé is trying to describe when she calls her *B.I.A.* 'a project both melancholy and bold'. With the suspended present of unproductivity as the temporality Trouvé primarily is concerned with, she dialectically works with precariousness as a filter that condemns her 'implicit activities' as unproductive to begin with.

By focusing on unproductive time, characterised as inherently unstable because it is neither contained by a product nor caught in the chronological measurement of time, Trouvé explores multiple ways to address this precarity within the temporal disjunction that constitutes contemporaneity – materially, affectively, and spatially. The following chapter argues that Trouvé's *Bureau* asserts itself as an affective environment, encompassing the viewer on both a spatial and narrative level, and in both instances disrupts the temporal linearity associated with our progress-driven times. Therefore, the space-object-viewer relationship is the main focus of the following investigations. I will concentrate on the last exhibition that showcased the *Bureau of Implicit Activities* in its entirety, with all of its *Modules* present: *Aujourd'hui, hier, ou il y a longtemps*, exhibited at the Capc Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux in 2003. This exhibition will further reveal how deeply rooted the *B.I.A.* is in the postconceptual framework Osborne sets out. With a focus on how the temporal dimension of unproductivity is played out on a spatial level, I will rely on Christine Ross's reading of the *B.I.A.* as "protective sites for unproductivity"⁹⁶ and examine how the employed spatiality serves to cause a rupture in the linear understanding of time.

between a 'concrete' and an abstract attitude to the world. Whereas the scientist develops concepts with which to 'tear' meaning from the world that he or she is interrogating, the bricoleur tries to find 'possible answers' in what is already there, by 'asking' the objects what they can offer." Anna Dezeuze, *Almost Nothing: Observations on Precarious Practices in Contemporary Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 56.

⁹⁶ Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 67.

2.3. On Spatiality: The *Bureau* as a *mise-en-scène*

Especially when exhibited in its totality, the *Bureau* constitutes a maze of its own, which is penetrable by the viewer. Assembled in the dimly lit exhibition hall at Capc Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, the *Modules* infiltrate the space with an ambiguous, perhaps even uncanny presence (fig. 16). Through the suggestive half-open doors, the work materials left on the table, or the small chairs that are tempting to sit on, the viewer is placed in an ambivalent position, oscillating between the aesthetic of absence that the *B.I.A.* evokes and the visitor's bodily awareness:

"The *B.I.A.* is an architectural ensemble consisting of *Modules* on the scale of the human body. When it was exhibited, the viewer found him- or herself in the position of an intruder visiting a work site that had been abandoned by its user or users. [...] The viewer is therefore a passive witness to an operative, but absent, body. The visitor is not a third wheel since he or she occupies the privileged place of the voyeur. But his or her body is not directly engaged. [...] I could reverse your proposal that 'the body is the point that defines the subject's space.' In my work, where there is effectively no representation of the subject, space constructs the body of a potential subject."⁹⁷

The claim that the viewer is 'not directly engaged' and only a 'passive witness' to her sculptures will be challenged throughout this chapter, with particular emphasis on how the *B.I.A.* constructs a space in which subjectivity is articulated by means of its potentiality. It is therefore important to note that Trouvé does not speak of an eradication of the subject, as proposed by the Anglo-American Conceptual artists of the 1960s and 1970s, but of a recovery of subjectivity through space. As has been shown in the previous chapters, the *B.I.A.*'s conceptual and material dimensions are inextricably intertwined, with Trouvé drawing on both Minimalism and Arte Povera in her approach to the interplay of materiality and space. In an interview with Pietropaolo, Trouvé explains:

"I was very sensitive to the vocabulary of Arte Povera when I was a student. It was a good answer to Minimalism – I say this even though I like Minimalism very much – in a sense that the Arte Povera artists were saying: 'Okay, maybe we can reduce everything to the essentials of form and space, to this purity, but there is another aspect that is mental, maybe even "poor," in which there is an endless field of possibilities.' The important contribution of Arte Povera is its ability to draw on the world of the imagination, of fancy – which can never be erased – with a minimum of materials."⁹⁸

While the link to Arte Povera is one Trouvé herself readily draws when speaking of her artistic practice, her affinity towards Minimalism may come as a surprise: especially if one were to think of Robert Morris' *Untitled (L-Beams)* (1965), constructed from plywood and painted in light grey,

⁹⁷ Trouvé, "A Body Without A Face," 136.

⁹⁸ Trouvé, "In the Studio," 92.

or Carl Andre's *144 Lead Square* (1969), who claimed that his works were "not the embodiments of ideas or conceptions,"⁹⁹ but rather followed the minimalist assertion of a total refusal to meaning. These works are, on purely aesthetic grounds, hardly comparable with the *B.I.A.*'s often idiosyncratic visual language. However, Tatiana Trouvé shows an interest in space, and specifically in the relation between scale and the aesthetic experience, that is decisively influenced by Minimalism.

Without wanting to recount the entire discourse on Minimalism and especially the asserted (and, yet again, frequently contested¹⁰⁰) critique by Michael Fried in his 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood", one central claim, however, proves to be important for several post-minimalist artistic positions: namely the intervention in the space-viewer-object sphere. The work of Minimalist artists is experienced in and as a *situation* – one that, by definition, *includes the viewer*. Such 'theatricality', Fried famously argued, simultaneously includes and excludes the subject from the object, as the viewer may be positioned at a distance from the object, but the scale and physicality of the object reconfigures space as a shared situation.¹⁰¹

In what follows, I will argue that this 'theatricality' plays a crucial role in the aforementioned exhibition at Capc Bordeaux, where Trouvé presents the *B.I.A.* as an 'architectural ensemble' that involves the viewer by creating a shared space. A key element in the emergence of this 'shared situation' is the specific positioning of the *Modules* that creates passages through which the viewer can wander and examine each sculpture. And it is through these passages that the *Modules* can be seen both as individual works and as part of the larger framework that defines the *Bureau of Implicit Activities* as a conceptual unit. With all of its *Modules* measuring five feet – the standard size of cubicles used in open-plan offices – the *B.I.A.* thus becomes a fictional workplace in and of itself, in which the viewer is assumed to be complicit. Depending on one's position – either by asserting an authoritative gaze into the *Modules* from the outside, or through a mental engagement that positions oneself within the work's structure – the viewer's relationship to the object is reciprocally altered:

"From the very outset of the *B.I.A.*, the issue of scale has thus been a central one, the same way that the issue of the projection and shift of the viewpoint from the outside to-

⁹⁹ Carl Andre quoted in The Museum of Modern Art, *MoMA Highlights* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004 [1999]), 283.

¹⁰⁰ One outstanding answer to Fried's essay is Christa Noel Robbins' response "The Sensibility of Michael Fried," in which she analyses how deeply interwoven Fried's homophobia is with his term of 'theatricality', see Christa Noel, "The Sensibility of Michael Fried," *Criticism* 60, no. 4 (2018): 429–454.

¹⁰¹ cf. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967): 15. <https://www.artforum.com/features/art-and-objecthood-211317/>.

wards the inside has impacts on a reading of the work (depending on whether you take the place of the project manager or the worker).”¹⁰²

It can already be seen at this point that the passivity of the subject initially claimed is by no means unambiguous. Through the relation established between space, object and subject, the viewer is assigned a role that operates in line with the *B.I.A.*’s double logic of worker / manager, material / immaterial labour and, by extension, objecthood / concept. In this sense, the architecture of the *B.I.A.* can also be understood as *performative*, in that it creates a staged presence that mediates between these concepts. Rather than eradicating traces of subjectivity, Trouvé draws on minimalist vocabulary to reintroduce the viewer’s subjectivity into the space activated by the artwork, thus incorporating it into the *B.I.A.*’s narrative. What is being provoked here is a constant shift in perspective, oscillating between the *B.I.A.* as an object and its surroundings, its mode of production and exhibition. One may, for example, draw up a comparison between Robert Morris’ *Untitled (Mirror Cubes)* from 1965 (fig. 17) and the *Reminiscences Module*, the only *Module* that has an always fixed place at the centre of the *B.I.A.* (fig. 18). In the same way that Morris uses the grid of mirrors to conjure up an image that escapes the void, the *Reminiscences Module* not only reflects the *Modules* that surround it, but also the viewer that enters this space. The mirror transforms its three-dimensional surroundings into a flat image, at once referring these images to an outside world and annexing them. The way Trouvé activates the space, therefore, is characterised by an interesting dialectic: the mirrors that she uses not only reflect back the single parts of the *B.I.A.* but also the institution itself, while simultaneously absorbing its bearing structures.

But what exactly is at stake in staging such a surrounding, when turning the exhibition space into a *bureau paysage*? An office, above all things, whose single employee is collecting and archiving the multitude of paraphernalia of her artistic production process – which in turn is presented as constitutive to her own life? The theatricality Trouvé employs, after all, works not only to question the viewer’s presence and role in this office-like setting – it is also used to stage her own probing articulations of subjectivity. *The Bureau of Implicit Activities* therefore functions, as I would propose, as an “administrative *mise-en-scène*”¹⁰³ of Trouvé’s biographic details that are informed by the pressures asserted from the creative industries. As such, Trouvé positions herself not only as the artist and author of these works, but also as their content and subject, their production manager, and in fact, their curator. While Trouvé’s solo-show at Capc Bordeaux may be read as a monographic exhibition, it is also installed in a way that treats “the exhibition as an artistic me-

¹⁰² Trouvé, interview by François Poisay, 61.

¹⁰³ Lee, “Work Space,” 240.

dium in its own right, *an articulation of form*.”¹⁰⁴ By linking each *Module* to the sum of its parts, Trouvé applies the logic of the *Bureau* to the exhibition space in an all-encompassing way; the *Bureau* as an ensemble thus takes the form suggested by its name. Through Trouvé’s activity of assembling, archiving, collecting, and displaying as an artistic practice, she mimics the role of the curator – not of individual works of art, but of fragments of her own life – thus identifying the artistic work as congruent with that of other art workers, with the office becoming the culmination point of both forms of labour. In this respect, a different reference to Mel Bochner can be made: In her comprehensive setup of the *Bureau of Implicit Activities*, Trouvé – much like Bochner – understands the exhibition “as a means of interrogation, a tool by which to critically question the limits of both the (art) object and its institutions [...]”¹⁰⁵

Related to this observation, my argument remains that, at least in the case of the exhibition at Capc, Trouvé stages her *B.I.A.* as installation art, rather than merely presenting her *Modules* as autonomous works. Right in the second paragraph of the introduction to her seminal book *Installation Art: A Critical History* (2005), Claire Bishop points to the ambiguity inherent in the differentiation between ‘installation art’ and ‘installation of art,’ a misleading blurring that had its origins in the photographic ‘installation shot,’ which has become increasingly widespread since the 1960s. What both terms have in common is that they emphasise the specific way in which artworks are placed (installed) in space and thus highlight our bodily response to this relation. “However,” as Bishop elaborates,

“there are also important differences. An installation of art is secondary in importance to the individual works it contains, while in a work of installation art, *the space, and the ensemble of elements within it, are regarded in their entirety as a singular entity*. Installation art creates a situation into which the viewer physically enters, and insists that you regard this as a singular totality.”¹⁰⁶

While Trouvé describes herself as a sculptor and the elements of her *B.I.A.* as sculptural objects,¹⁰⁷ it is the premise of my argument in this chapter that the specific installation of the *B.I.A.* at Capc can and should be regarded in these terms of installation art, because it fundamentally changes the way in which the viewer is addressed. Even though her individual pieces certainly hold an autonomy that sets them apart from Bishop’s definition, I strongly argue that the *Bureau* as a conceptual entity is in its strongest form when perceived as an ensemble.

¹⁰⁴ Elena Filipovic: “Introduction: When Exhibitions Become Form,” in: *The Artist as Curator: An Anthology*, ed. by Elena Filipovic (London, Milan: Koenig Books, Mousse Publishing, 2017), 8.

¹⁰⁵ Filipovic, “Introduction: When Exhibitions Become Form,” 9.

¹⁰⁶ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Routledge, 2005), 6. Emphasis added by the author.

¹⁰⁷ Millet, “Tatiana Trouvé’s Bachelor Machines,” 66.

In order to resolve the conflict of unity versus autonomy, Trouvé applied an interesting measure to the exhibition space that enhanced the perception of the *B.I.A.* as an installation, without negating the autonomy each *Module* holds individually. For the exhibition at Capc, she installed a grid of wires and neon lights that float over the *B.I.A.* much like a second ceiling. This grid cuts the exhibition space into a network or ‘map’, transforming the site into a cube that encompasses the viewer as well as the passageways between the *Modules*. While the *Modules* are designed to be at an adult’s eye level, their inaccessible interiors create a mental engagement. The ceiling, on the other hand, provokes a vertical shift in perception. It further creates a complex of meaning that can be said to serve as the material extension to what Osborne described as the relational unity that conceptually binds the individual artworks together. As Trouvé explains, this not only marks the installation of the *B.I.A.* as a *mise-en-scène* to which certain codes of behaviour are applied, but also reflects the position of the viewer in terms of their agency:

“From the passages, this exhibition is totally re-enacted. Through the mesh of the metal surface that weaves the ceiling, you can actually discover it like a plan, which restricts the exhibition to the dimensions of a project, a diagram or a map, retracing both its primary intention and its mental representation. Two identical things are then perceived or made visible in a completely different way. I should add that these three different positions of the eye and the subject in space likewise correspond to three metaphors of knowledge and of the authority you have, or think you have, over things, and which I’m interested in challenging, contradicting and shifting.”¹⁰⁸

Trouvé’s dissection of space in this exhibition, as the artist rightly demonstrates, results in a destabilisation of the visual regime of central perspective, which primarily serves to question the viewer’s relation to the work. The passages created by the *B.I.A.* thus not only position the viewer in a mediated relationship to the objects that is specifically characterised by the notion of the threshold (being both included in the installation and excluded from the *Modules*’ interior), they also assert an authoritative control over the viewer’s movement, through which the experience of the *B.I.A.* as installation art becomes one of performative participation. It is here that Trouvé’s installation of the *B.I.A.* evokes, to speak with Bishop, “both an assertion and a decentering of subjectivity.”¹⁰⁹ Precisely because the installation addresses the viewer as an affective subject and “valorizes the viewer’s first-hand presence,” it “ultimately reinstates the subject (as a unified entity).”¹¹⁰ But because the viewing subject can never see everything at once – both in terms of the partiality of vision asserted by the individual *Modules* and the fragmentation provoked by the in-

¹⁰⁸ Trouvé, interview by François Poisay, 61.

¹⁰⁹ Bishop, *Installation Art*, 130.

¹¹⁰ Bishop, *Installation Art*, 130.

stallation as a whole – the vanishing point that defines the viewer-object-relation is ultimately dispersed.

It is precisely at this point of partiality and spatial mediation that Christine Ross links the viewer's situatedness evoked by the *B.I.A.* to the issues of unproductivity, temporality and precariousness as introduced in the previous chapter. In connecting these points, I will demonstrate how the specific spatiality of her project serves to undermine the temporal linearity associated with our efficiency led and progress-driven times.

The general premise of Ross's book, *The Past is the Present; It's the Future Too*, can be summarised as an examination of the temporal turn in contemporary art through various artistic positions. The book identifies different ways in which these artists "explore suspension to connect temporality and historicity,"¹¹¹ essentially questioning the forward movement of futurity inherent in a linear understanding of time. Ross's main argument lies in the critique of linearity associated with the modernist rhetoric of progress, a critique that many artists have explored through various perceptual means, most notably by dismantling linear perspective as a model for temporal investigation.¹¹² With the foregrounding of artistic labour and the question of productivity as an underlying theme of the *B.I.A.*, Ross argues that Trouvé's implementation of multiple visual axes, as well as the continuous expansion of the *B.I.A.* as an ongoing project, serves to weaken this very linearity, thus establishing unproductivity as its foregrounding temporality. According to Ross, this shift occurs primarily in terms of spatiality:

"In Trouvé's *Bureau of Implicit Activities*, this weakening corresponds first and foremost to the construction of an ongoing architectural unit that: (1) never fully makes visible the archives of unproductiveness it nevertheless stores and shelters; (2) partially excludes the spectator from the shelters (destabilizing, in that very process, the perspectival connection between the vanishing point and the viewpoint); and (3) expands into space cumulatively without progression."¹¹³

By connecting the *Modules* to their surroundings – by creating a *mise-en-scène* – the *B.I.A.* engages the viewer in a complex relationship with the work, thereby disrupting an easily discernible reading in which the viewer's position is defined by a detached distancing. Excluded from the *Modules* interiors that are only partially visible, while simultaneously being affected by this 'office' as an environment, the spectator's position never reaches a safe stabilisation. The *Bureau* as an

¹¹¹ Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 15.

¹¹² cf. Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 60.

¹¹³ Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 64.

installation becomes an end in itself, which the viewer enters without ever gaining absolute control over. Through these perspectival processes, Trouvé aims to generate a shift in the perception of time, specifically in its forward-directed, process-oriented ongoingness, only deemed valuable when manifested in a product, a project, a productive outcome.

As has been shown in the previous chapter, the *B.I.A.* installs a moment of suspension that is situated in the present moment, therefore “extracting the temporal category of the future from its role of initiator of historicity.”¹¹⁴ This *presentification*, as Ross describes it – its suspension of forwardness and the present’s becoming past – presupposes a destabilised spectator, one who is acutely aware of their partiality of vision: No longer at the centre of visuality and at the fixed point of linear perspective, as was the modern understanding of subjectivity and progress in humanism, the disruption of linear perspective further serves to expose the unstable conditions of postmodern subjectivity. It is here that Ross links the unfolding of perspective as a *spatial* condition to a *temporal* transformation and the destabilisation of the vanishing point / viewpoint adherence of the spectator position to a devaluation of the ideal of forward-oriented progress, which is sustained by that perspectival system.¹¹⁵ This disruption, as Ross concludes in her analysis of the *B.I.A.*, is essential for Trouvé’s transformation of the historical conditioning of unproductive time, preventing it from becoming *non-time*: “To transform unproductiveness into productivity is to weaken the perspectival system by inverting it; lateralizing it; fissuring or excessively extending the connection between viewpoint and vanishing point. The vanishing point ceases to work as an external authority that guarantees progressive subjectivity and history.”¹¹⁶ To read the *Bureau of Implicit Activities* as an installation becomes crucial at this point, because it defines the space-object-viewer-relation as the culmination point at which this disjunction becomes tangible. It is here that Berlant’s notion of the impasse is mediated spatially, both in terms of the physical structure the *B.I.A.* creates, and in the sense of the destabilised subject it presupposes. It is in that sense that Trouvé speaks of a ‘potential subject’ constructed by space.

¹¹⁴ Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 12.

¹¹⁵ cf. Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 11–16.

¹¹⁶ Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 110.

2.4. Interim Conclusion

“The *Bureau d’Activités Implicites* is a starting point for Tatiana Trouvé’s artwork, a sort of matrix that opens up a range of possibilities for it whilst examining the structuring of the social being through work. ‘Bureau’, as in a research department; ‘activities’ that are formalized in drawings, sculptures, photographs or simple linguistic utterances; ‘implicit’, since these productions are immanent to the nature of the work involved.”¹¹⁷

Similar to Florence Gabriel’s reflections on each component of Trouvé’s work title – the *Bureau*, the *implicit*, and *activity* – *Part I: Situating the Bureau of Implicit Activities* has taken each part as a point of departure to situate Trouvé’s project both in and through theory as well as art history.

The first chapter established two points as necessary gateways to define Trouvé’s notions of the implicit, how she engages with it conceptually, and to understand the specific materiality at stake in her *B.I.A.*: first, to define the *B.I.A.* in terms of its postconceptuality according to Peter Osborne; and, in a second but closely related step, to understand the legacy of 1960s art upon which the *B.I.A.* draws. The aim of the chapter was to reconstruct the ontological rupture that 1960s art set in motion – especially in the context of its supposed dematerialisation – that ultimately resulted in the dominant condition to which postconceptual art still connects to. Recognising the *B.I.A.* as a postconceptual artwork has allowed for a better understanding of how the implicit must be understood in terms of artistic labour, and how this idea of the implicit as an activity provides the necessary conceptual framework that binds the individual *Modules* into a cohesive whole – the *Bureau of Implicit Activities*. It is through the interplay of these two aspects that the *B.I.A.* can be understood as a metaphorical ‘office’ that records and makes visible the various instances of artistic labour that would normally go unnoticed. Trouvé turns these gestures into art, but also highlights their underlying labour. This can be said to be the main intention of the *B.I.A.* The materials that the *B.I.A.* collects are therefore always documentary in character, because they aim to record an activity that would otherwise be lost or invisible. The *B.I.A.* becomes both a work of art and its own archive in its ongoing efforts to manifest these instances of implicit labour.

The second chapter introduced temporality as a discourse to which Trouvé aesthetically answers. Time, it has been noted, becomes the underlying theme that structures her *B.I.A.* as ‘protective sites for unproductivity’, for unproductivity is feared to turn into *non-time* when solely perceived through the lens of effectivity, but also its historization. The temporal order that the *B.I.A.* aims to materialise in its ongoing ‘recovery process’ of residues of doubt, uncertainty, failure and wasted time, is therefore a suspended present, an infinite delay. Her project is positioned at the

¹¹⁷ Gabriel, *Lapsus*, n.p.

intersection of what Lauren Berlant describes as an impasse: a temporary housing in which the subject is defined by and subjected to a potentiality; a potentiality that is precarious, because it is always constituted in relation to the world in flux. Waiting time, in Trouvé's understanding, recovers time as a necessary non-instrumental capacity for the subject to engage in, to make sense of the world as one goes along. Though it remains to critically question if this utopian potential to 'free time' from capitalist usurpation actually can be accounted for. With precarity being the contemporary's prevailing socio-ontological condition, such discourse on the ecological measurement of time is what makes labour and subjectivity visible in the first place: because labour is only recognised as such once it is perceived as productive; and because "the enduring present that is at once overpresent and enigmatic requires finding one's footing in new manners of *being in it*."¹¹⁸

The third chapter consequently analyses how Trouvé establishes her *Bureau of Implicit Activities* as a *mise-en-scène*, i.e. a spatio-temporal scenography continuously activated through the spectator's presence. In exploring how Trouvé mobilises space to envelop the viewer within the fictive setting of a *bureau paysage*, it becomes evident that the temporal disruption of the present is further manifested through spatial disruption. This duality reinforces the oscillation between productivity and unproductivity, serving as the *B.I.A.*'s central dynamic.

With the pervasiveness of productivity permeating the notions of time, subjectivity and labour, unproductivity therefore becomes a necessary counterpart in Tatiana Trouvé's *Bureau of Implicit Activities* – not in terms of a refusal of work, but as a continuous reiteration of activities that fail to come at any exploitable outcome. This dichotomy of un/productivity is decidedly embedded in the workplace of an office, where "people work [...], of course, but nothing is produced."¹¹⁹ In establishing a fictional *Bureau*, as it were, whose sole aim is to administer all her artistic efforts to gain professional recognition – to receive access to the art sphere – Trouvé indeed shows how the labour that takes place in an office is not that different from the labour of an artist. And it is on that instance that her art becomes a critical reflection of the infrastructural conditions of labour that infiltrate the institution of art, "to the extent that the futility of artistic and non-artistic labour is rendered common in both."¹²⁰ *Part II: The Administrative Module* will consequently delve into Trouvé's engagement with subjectivity and labour as the central themes of her *B.I.A.*, exploring how precariousness serves as the structural framework to which the *B.I.A.* aesthetically responds.

¹¹⁸ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 196. Emphasis added by author.

¹¹⁹ During, "The Strategy of the Implicit," 67.

¹²⁰ Marina Vishmidt, "Situation Wanted: Something about Labour," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, vol. 19 (2008): 29.

Plates 1–30



Figure 1. Tatiana Trouvé, *Sand Cell*, 1997. Wood, sand, suede, 100 x 140 x 131 cm. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Laurent Édeline). In: *Tatiana Trouvé*, ed. by Maria Muhle (Cologne: Walther König, 2008), 51.



Figure 2. Tatiana Trouvé, *Administrative Module*, 1997–2003. Wood, paint, identity cards, rubber bands, photographs, paper, plastic, metal, tools, felt, Plexiglas, 150 x 350 x 180 cm. Exhibition view, *Polders*, Palais de Tokyo, 2002. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Marc Damage).



Figure 3. Tatiana Trouvé, *Polder*, 2000. Wood, plastic foam, felt, fabric, plastic, 35 x 105 x 73 cm. Collection Bob Calle, Paris, France. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Lauren Édeline). In: *Tatiana Trouvé*, ed. by Maria Muhle (Cologne: Walther König, 2008), 120.



Figure 4. Tatiana Trouvé, *Archives Module ('Unsent Correspondence')*, 2003. Wood, Formica, Plexiglas, heat gun, letters (1999–2006), 163 x 220 x 220 cm. Dépôt MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Marc Damage).



Figure 5. Tatiana Trouvé, 'Unsent Correspondence', 1999–2006. Detail of *Bureau of Implicit Activities, Archives Module*, 2003. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Jean Brasille). In: *Tatiana Trouvé*, ed. by Maria Muhle (Cologne: Walther König, 2008), 44.



Figure 6. Tatiana Trouvé, *Archives Module* ('*Secrets and Lies*'), 2003. Wood, Formica, cement, freezers, water, rope, metal, 163 x 220 x 220 cm. Dépôt MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Marc Domage).



Figure 7. Tatiana Trouvé, '*Secrets and Lies*', 1997–2003. Detail of *Bureau of Implicit Activities, Archives Module*, 2003. Jumex Collection, Mexico. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Laurent Édeline). In: *Tatiana Trouvé*, ed. by Maria Muhle (Cologne: Walther König, 2008), 37.



Figure 8. Tatiana Trouvé, *Titles Module*, 1999–2003. Wood, foam, fabric, mirror, Plexiglas, labels for titles, 150 x 650 x 650 cm. Exhibition view, *Aujourd'hui, hier, ou il y a longtemps*, Capc Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 2003. Work Courtesy: the artist (photo: Marc Damage). In: *Tatiana Trouvé*, ed. by Maria Muhle (Cologne: Walther König, 2008), 75.



Figure 9. Tatiana Trouvé, *Titles Module*, 1997 (early version, details). Exhibition view, *Tatiana Trouvé*, Villa Arson, 1997. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Jean Brasille). Retrieved from: <https://villa-arson.fr/programmation/expositions/tatiana-trouve-tatiana-trouve-2/>.



Figure 10. Tatiana Trouvé, *Lapsus or Slips of the Tongue Module*, 2000. Wood, ink-jet printing, paper, plastic, imitation leather, photographs, 150 x 600 x 400 cm. Collection Frac Poitou-Charantes, Angoulême, France. Exhibition view, *Aujourd'hui, hier, ou il y a longtemps*, Capc Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 2003. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Marc Damage).

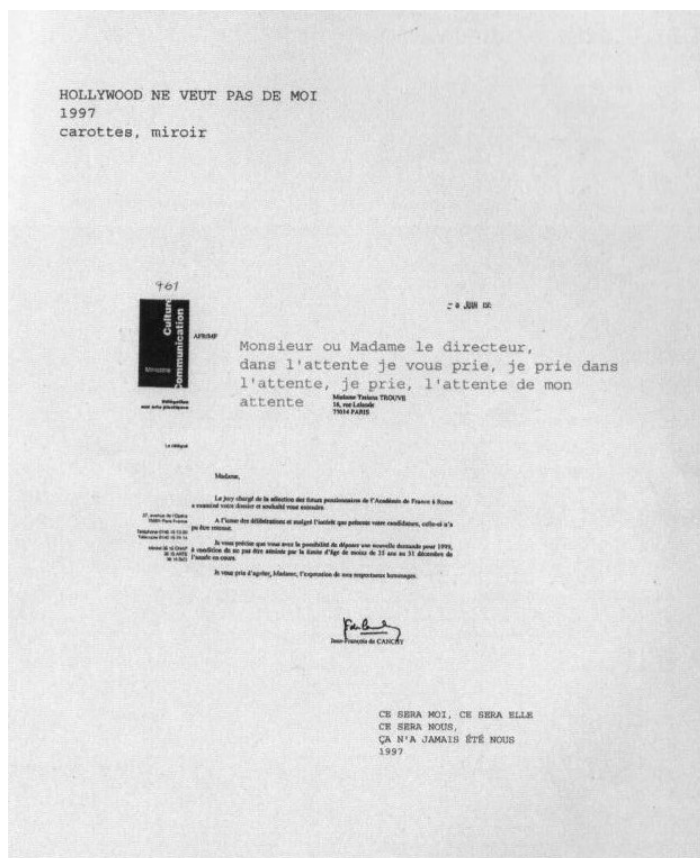


Figure 11. Tatiana Trouvé, *Lapsus et Titre* écrits sur *Lettres de refus*, 1999. In: *Récits, rêves et autre histoires*, ed. by Tatiana Trouvé (Paris: Beaux-Arts de Paris éditions, 2023), 45.

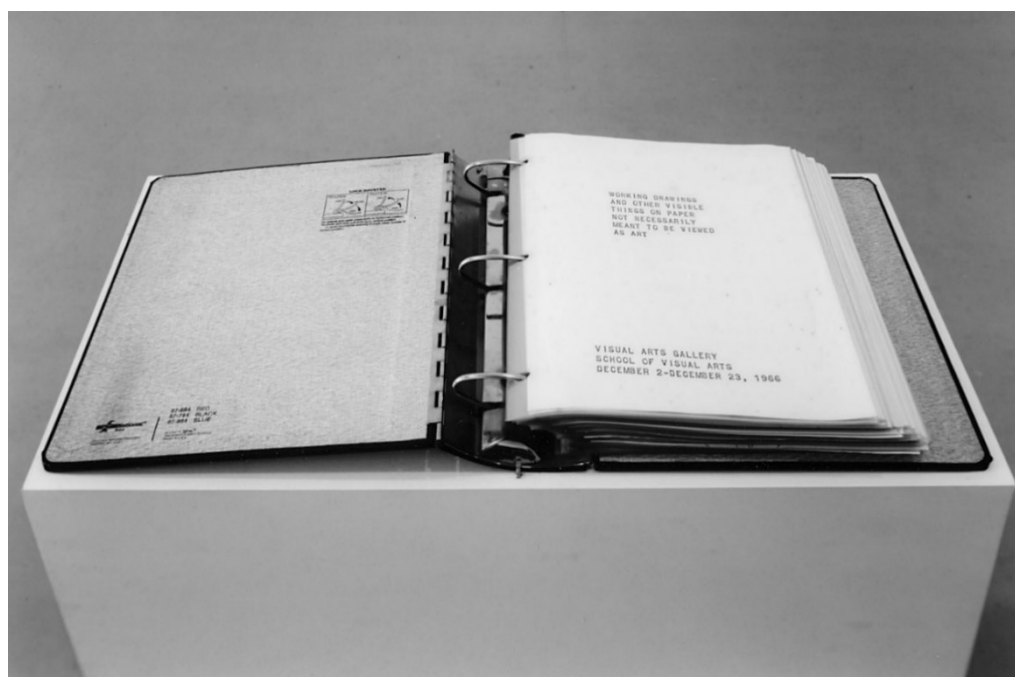


Figure 12. Mel Bochner, *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art*, 1966. One of four identical 3-ring binders each with 100 photocopies of studio notes, working drawings, and diagrams collected by the artist, 29.8 x 29.2 x 7.9 cm. Exhibition view, Visual Arts Gallery, School of Visual Arts New York, 1966. © 2024 Mel Bochner. Image retrieved from https://book-as-exhibition.org/Mel-Bochner_Working-Drawings.



Figure 13. Tatiana Trouvé, *Waiting Module ('Annex')*, 2003. Wood, Plexiglas, paper, sound archives, 160 x 180 x 185 cm. Exhibition view, *Tatiana Trouvé*, Kunstverein Freiburg, 2003. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Bernhard Strauss).



Figure 14. Tatiana Trouvé, *Waiting Module ('green')*, 2003, and *Strike Module*, 2003. Plexiglas, imitation leather, iron, wood, HI-FI, music CD, 186 x 165 x 80 cm; wood, metal, rubber, slides, slide projector, stereo system, imitation leather, Walkman, 160 x 220 x 150 cm. Exhibition view, *Polders*, Palais de Tokyo, 2002. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Marc Domage).

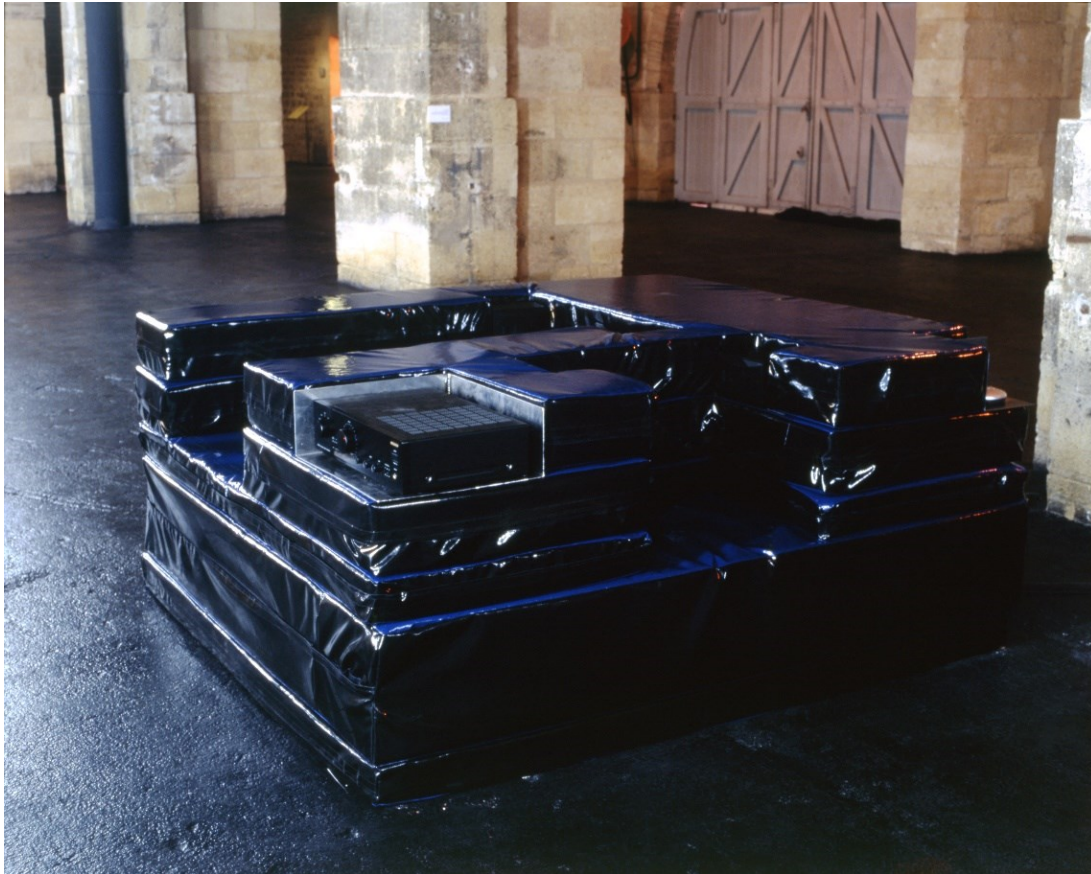


Figure 15. Tatiana Trouvé, *Waiting Module ('blue')*, 2003. Exhibition view, *Aujourd'hui, hier, ou il y a longtemps*, Capc Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 2003. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Marc Domage).



Figure 16. Exhibition view, *Aujourd'hui, hier, ou il y a longtemps*, Capc Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 2003. Work Courtesy: the artist (photo: Marc Domage).



Figure 17. Robert Morris, *Untitled (Mirrored Cubes)*, 1965, reconstructed 1971. Mirror glass, wood, 91.4 x 91.4 x 91.4 cm. Work courtesy: © ARS, NY and DACS, London 2024 (photo: Tate images). Retrieved from <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/morris-untitled-t01532>.



Figure 18. Tatiana Trouvé, *Reminiscences Module*, 1999–2003. Wood, plastic foam, metal, Plexiglas, mirror, silicone, Formica, cardboard, paper, 135 x 135 x 135 cm. Exhibition view, *Aujourd'hui, hier, ou il y a longtemps*, Capc Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 2003. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Marc Damage).

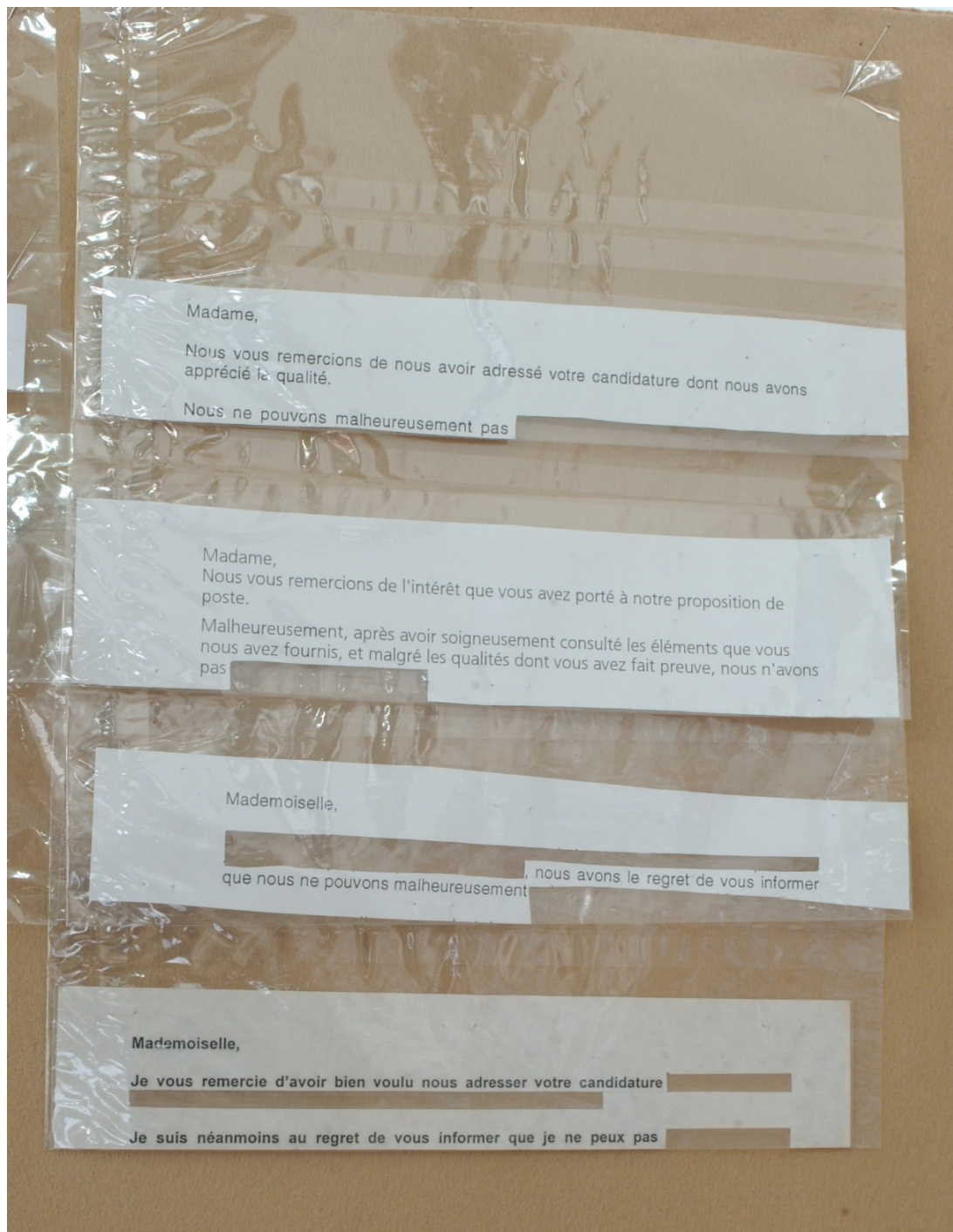


Figure 19. Tatiana Trouvé, *Administrative Module* (detail), 1997–2003. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Jean Brasille).



Figure 20. Tatiana Trouvé, *Administrative Module* (detail), 1997–2003. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Marc Damage).





Figure 22. Tatiana Trouvé, *Administrative Module* (detail). Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Marc Domage).



Figure 23. Exhibition view, *Andrea Fraser: Ohne Titel*, Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne, 1990 (photo: Andrea Stappert). Image retrieved from <https://nagel-draxler.de/exhibition/ohne-titel-21/>.

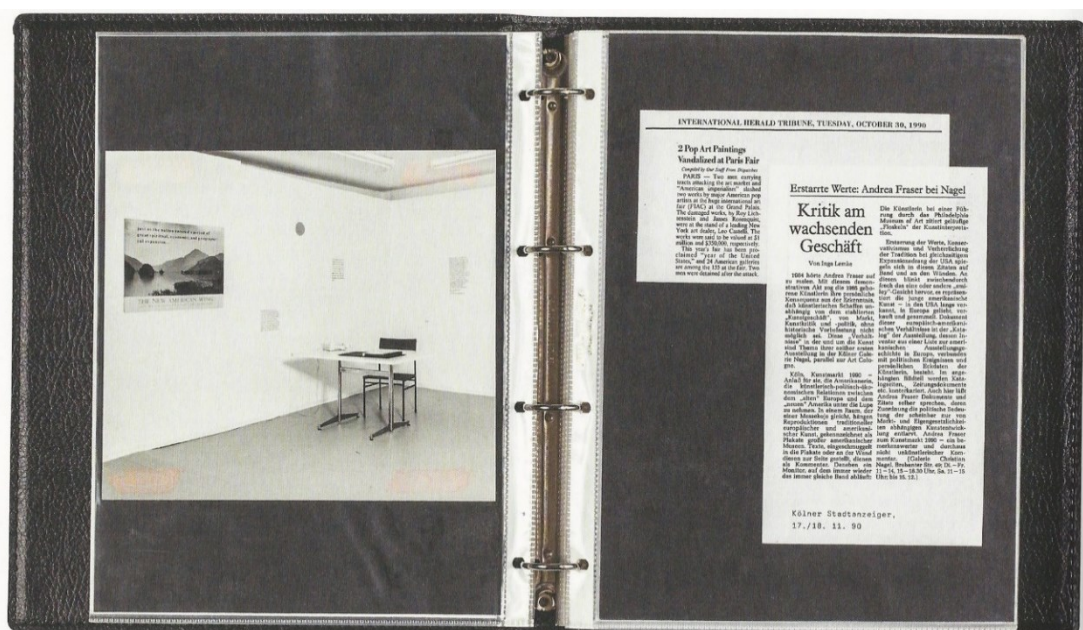


Figure 24. Andrea Fraser, *Presentation Book*, 1990. Photocopies and folder, 27,1 x 32,2 x 4,4 cm. Collection of the artist. © Andrea Fraser (photo: Andrea Stappert). Image retrieved from <https://nagel-draxler.de/exhibition/ohne-titel-21/>.



Figure 25. Giulio Paolini, *Ut-Op*, 1966. Three prepared canvases, 160 x 230 x 230 cm. Collection Massimo De Carlo, Milano. © Giulio Paolini (photo: Fondazione Paolini).

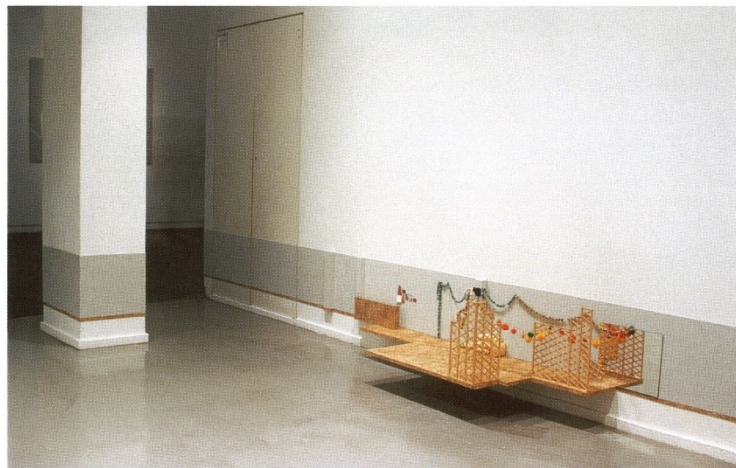


Figure 26. Tatiana Trouvé, *Polder*, 2000. Plastic foam, paper, plastic, wood, 26 x 185 x 50 cm. Work courtesy: the artist (photo: Marc Damage). In: *Tatiana Trouvé*, ed. by Maria Muhle (Cologne: Walther König, 2008), 123.



Figure 27. Hélio Oiticica, *Tropicália, Penetrables PN 2 'Purity is a myth' and PN 3 'Imagetical'*, 1966-67. Sand, plastic, television sets, fabric, potted plants, cheap plywood and living parrots in a cage, dimensions variable. © Projeto Hélio Oiticica (photo: Projeto Hélio Oiticica). Image retrieved from <https://projeto-toho.com.br/pt/projeto-ho/>.

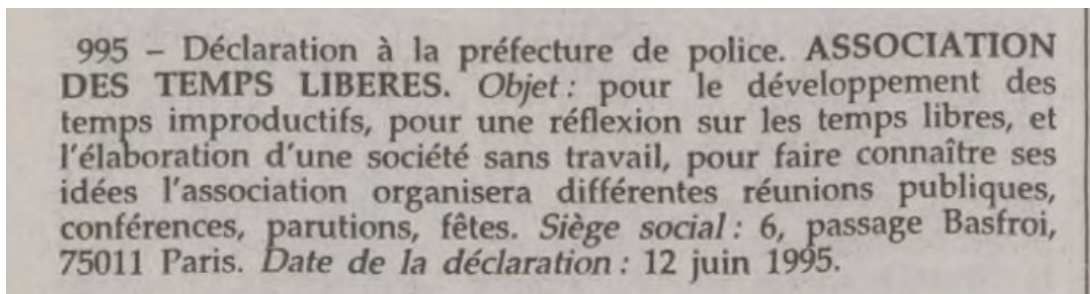


Figure 28. View from the declaration in the *Journal Officiel*, June 12, *Association des temps libérés*, 1995. Image retrieved from <https://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/pages/associations-recherche/?disjunctive.source&sort=cronosort&q=association%20des%20temps%20liberes&q.titre=>.

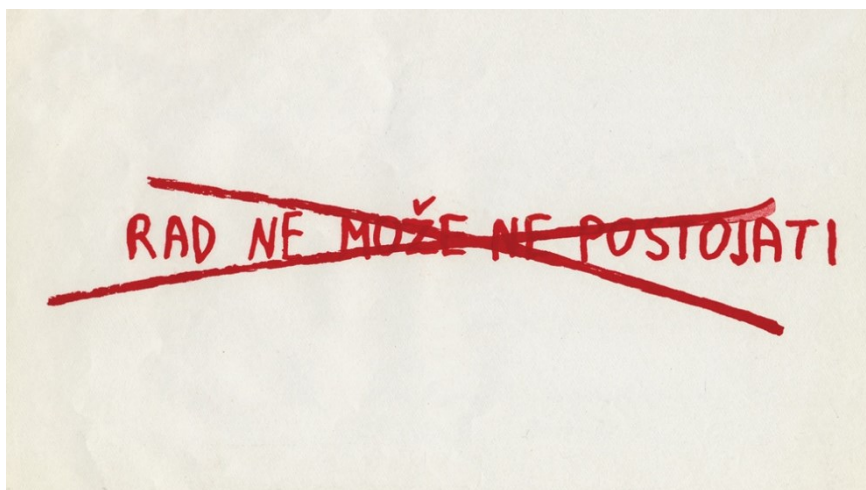
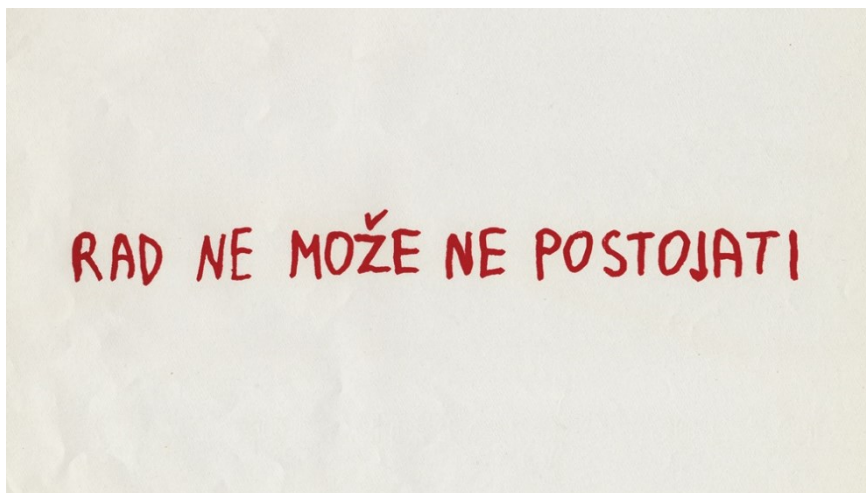


Figure 29. Mladen Stilinović, *Work Cannot Not Exist*, 1976. Red paint on paper. © Mladen Stilinović. Image retrieved from: <https://mladenstilinovic.com/works/10-2/>.



Figure 30. Mladen Stilinović, *Artist at Work*, 1978. Silver-gelatine print. © Mladen Stilinović. Image retrieved from: <https://mladenstilinovic.com/works/10-2/artist-at-work-06/>.

3. Part II: *The Administrative Module*

“I think the *Bureau d'Activité Implicites* springs from a project that is basically literary. The basis is very autobiographical. I had just arrived in Paris and was beginning to look for work, as many young artists do when they arrive in a large city and can't just settle in straight away. I wondered whether not showing my work, not producing anything, still made me an artist. Is an artist someone with a certain status, someone who lives through a social representation, or is having ideas and projects enough to make you an artist? I then began to imagine that my life, what was happening to me, the little jobs, the galleries, could be seen as a piece of fiction. That was the starting point of my work, from which I could construct my entire work. *The Bureau d'Activité Implicites* was born.”¹²¹

When telling the story of how the *Bureau of Implicit Activities* came to life, Trouvé puts a specific emphasis on how intrinsically interwoven the idea of the project was with her personal economic situation at that time. After having moved to Paris in 1992, when Trouvé was in her mid-twenties, she was lacking the economic means to pursue her career as an artist, since she was not able to afford a studio that would have been the prerequisite to develop her work. Sooner or later, the process of finding a job became a full-time job in itself, as she recalls in the interview with Pietro-paolo:

“My job search took all my time, and that took time away from my work as an artist. I asked myself if an artist could be an artist when he/she has neither a studio nor works of art. From what moment is an artist an artist?”¹²²

In Trouvé's statement, it becomes evident that her inquiry into the identity of an artist is closely tied to the question of what an artist does – specifically, the artistic labour they undertake and how that labour is recognised.

As Helen Molesworth points out in her book *Work Ethic*, the theme of (artistic) labour was one of the key concerns that unified the heterogeneous field of post-war avant-garde art. These artistic engagements took on different approaches: While the discourse on the dematerialization of the artwork has been argued to reflect the rise of the managerial class in post-industrial conditions, in which the ‘immateriality’ of the artwork was seen to respond to the increasing work force of immaterial labour, a vast number of feminist artists or groups such as the Art Workers Coalition critically questioned issues of valuation and the visibility of ‘unproductive’ forms of labour. Process art, on the other hand, highlighted the obsolescence of the professionalised artist through the inventions of machines that functioned to produce artworks, through the performance of scores

¹²¹ Trouvé, *Djinn*, n.p.

¹²² Trouvé, “In the Studio,” 88.

that often described simple or redundant activities, or through the subjection of the artwork to outside influences, all of which rendered the process of art-making more important than the actual object produced. Furthermore, with the rise of performance and participatory art, the relationship between the artist and the audience underwent a significant shift, suggesting a new understanding of how a work of art emerges – one where the artist's labour is no longer exclusive but rather shared with, or influenced by, the audience's participation.¹²³ In response to the various ways artistic labour is assessed under the evolving dynamics of late capitalism, Molesworth introduces the concept of 're-skilling' as opposed to the frequently cited focus on 'de-skilling.' This shift reflects the changes not only in the values and skills demanded by labour but also in the way artistic labour is understood and critiqued.¹²⁴ This implication can already be found in Benjamin Buchloh's notion of 'administrative aesthetics', whose central observations was a shift in the definition of artistic production – one that moved "beyond the traditional thresholds of visibility."¹²⁵

What is important to note, though already implied in the very notion of immateriality, is that many of the artistic investigations mentioned so far hinge on the threshold of in/visibility: whether through a refusal to produce a material commodity; the conceptual parallels that are drawn between the invisibility of artistic labour and that of reproductive labour; or a staged 'uselessness' and futility of a work, that aims to subvert the impetus of productivity and effectivity that has increasingly infiltrated every aspect of life. Ultimately, the point of these interrogations was to make visible the labour that went into making art, to highlight the value of the process, or to articulate a critique in the gesture of refusal. Although I have only offered a brief outline of these different approaches to the subject of labour, one can see already that the implications to a broader socio-political structure differ greatly. In that context, many artists have remained within the confines of the art sphere, where artistic labour is analysed solely in terms of what is valued and recognised as art in relation to the shifting ontology of the artwork. Taking this a step further, the broad movement of feminist art from the 1960s onwards used their artistic practices as a tool to raise issues of labour to a broader political scope. While Buchloh downplayed the importance of gender and feminist theory in his essay on the 'Aesthetics of Administration', Molesworth takes this as the key argument of her critical reflections on the art of Judy Chicago, Mary Kelley, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and Martha Rosler.¹²⁶ In her essay "House Work and Art Work", Molesworth argues that the artistic practices of Chicago, Kelley, Ukeles and Rosler can be described as 'laboratory exper-

¹²³ See Molesworth, *Work Ethic* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003).

¹²⁴ cf. Molesworth, *Work Ethic*, 25; 31.

¹²⁵ Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969," 134.

¹²⁶ cf. Alexander Alberro, "Introduction: The Way Out is the Way In," in: *Art After Conceptual Art*, ed. by Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2006), 17. Helen Molesworth, "House Work and Art Work," published in the same volume, 76–86.

iments' – borrowing a term from Frederic Jameson – and analyses how their work interrogates the symbolic divide between public and private as a means of addressing the socio-political structures that serve to maintain the oppression of women.¹²⁷ By positioning issues of the distribution and valuation of labour at the heart of their works, they decisively “have used art as a form of legitimated public discourse, a conduit through which to enter ideas into public discussion.”¹²⁸ In effect, their works aim to transform forms of unrecognised labour – in these cases domestic, maintenance and reproductive labour – into artistic labour, thus provoking a revaluation of the former under the guise of the latter. Feminist art of the 1960s, although rarely acknowledged in the canon of Conceptual art, was instrumental in countering the ‘administrative sobriety’ of conceptualism with the dimension of the social.¹²⁹

The *Bureau of Implicit Activities* reacts to some of the above mentioned approaches, but certainly not to all. Specifically a feminist critique that evaluates the gendered perspectives on labour does not seem to be of primary concern for Trouvé. Even in those artefacts in which Trouvé plays with gendered notions, they are first and foremost used as a prop to free herself from any socially assigned roles: be it in the invention of a stamp that addresses her as ‘Monsieur, Madame, Mademoiselle Trouvé’, which she slips into her professional correspondence, or in her fictional CVs, in which she performatively adopts any gender, nationality, job, or age, in order to invent “a thousand possible existences” of herself.¹³⁰ This application of fiction as a means of self-invention is acutely apparent in Trouvé’s work. Every aspect of her subjectivity – her unconscious desires, her secrets and lies, her doubts and failures, her correspondences and multiple versions of her administered self – are ‘recycled’ into her *B.I.A.* in an attempt to counter their invisibility, to help them to recognition as *artistic labour*.

In that sense, her probing questions about the legitimacy of when to claim oneself an artist, point to an underlying understanding of subjectivity that is determined by an internalisation of productivity: whether or not that subject produces a commodity or provides a service that is valuable to and exploitable by the market. As Ketj Chukhrov explains in her reading of Paolo Virno’s programmatic book *Grammar of the Multitude*, the post-Fordist structuring of immaterial labour has extended its exploitative powers from the working hours to every aspect of life, absorbing “all of the worker’s time, as well as his or her existence, thoughts, and creative desires.”¹³¹ And as

¹²⁷ cf. Molesworth, “House Work and Art Work,” 82.

¹²⁸ Molesworth, “House Work and Art Work,” 83.

¹²⁹ cf. Alberro, “Introduction: The Way Out is the Way In,” 16.

¹³⁰ Trouvé, “In the Studio,” 88.

¹³¹ Ketj Chukhrov, “Towards the Space of the General: On Labour Beyond Materiality and Immateriality,” *e-flux journal* #20, November 2010: 1–8, here: 1. Last accessed July 12, 2024, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/20/67638/towards-the-space-of-the-general-on-labor-beyond-materiality-and-immateriality/>.

Trouvé suggests in her statement, it is not only her time that is consumed by the necessity of finding a job, but also her very identity as an artist. Paradoxically, her relentless efforts to find a job leave her with no time to pursue her artistic work, and no time free of work at all.

Trouvé takes these questions about the validity and visibility of labour quite literal: On both a material as well as conceptual level, the *Administrative Module* insist on the labour of Trouvé and formulates an aesthetic answer to the questions posed above.

Already in its title, the *Administrative Module* alludes to the bureaucratic apparatus, in which the administrative functions as a disciplinary to behold the chaos, to structure and classify information, to compartmentalise and categorise. Like most of the other *Modules* of the *B.I.A.*, the *Administrative Module* is not accessible to the viewer; in fact, the Plexiglas-covered windows evoke a certain frustration, as the cut-outs only offer a glimpse of its interior while the majority of details remain inaccessible to the eye. Composed of a very simple but fragile structure, its architecture consists of wooden panels put together in a rectangular shape, similar to a container. As such, the viewer is quite deliberately supposed to find “him- or herself in the position of an intruder visiting a work site that had been abandoned by its user or users,”¹³² without actually gaining access to it. Yet again, all that there is left are traces of previous use, remainders of an action that already took place. On the walls, job application correspondences are neatly conserved in plastic sleeves, each of them reading standardised phrases that express their ‘regret’ to reject the application, in a way negating their sympathetic intentions in course of their infinite doublings (fig. 19). This effect of repetition is an important strategy in the *Module* to amplify the instances of failure that force the individual to ‘keep going’, no matter how desperate the situation, no matter how out of reach the future may seem. In cutting out the personified sections of each letter – address header, company name, position concerning the application, etc. – Trouvé highlights the arbitrary nature of these bureaucratised processes that end up producing very concrete socio-economic realities for individuals. Aesthetically, Trouvé visualises precariousness in the true sense of the word: as a state of dependency on the mercy of others.¹³³ On the walls of the *Module*, the figure of the artist is thus positioned at an inextricable intersection with the institution, emphasising the unavoidable entanglement between the artist’s identity and the institutional frameworks that shape, define, and often constrain it.

In the centre of the *Module*, a long table is staged – similar to a work bench but fully covered in blue and beige elastic bands. Amidst other office supplies – pins, staples, and file jackets

¹³² Trouvé, “A Body Without A Face,” 136.

¹³³ cf. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 192.

– several photo booth formatted portraits of Trouvé wearing wigs and a fake moustache are arranged on the table, evoking an uncanny seriality similar to the multiple selves of a Cindy Sherman exhibit (fig. 20). There is a feeling of unease when viewing these pictures, as some of them are punctuated by staples that only cover her eyes, while others are alienated by metallic eyelets that erase even more defining features of her face. Through this, the installation brings a certain ambivalence to this performative inscription of the self: serving as a playground for the invention of numerous identities of the artist, however impossible they may be, these pictures also point towards an aggressive negation of the subject through the administrative, leaving holes and blank spaces.

At the foot of these panels, ID-cards are assembled next to each other, prolonged in continuation through perpendicular stripes in matching colours (fig. 21). Whereas the other *Modules* of the *B.I.A.* only refer implicitly to the bodily presence of the artist, the *Administrative Module* includes quite prominently these multiple images of Trouvé; one could even say, that the *Module* itself may be read as a self-portrait in a broader sense. Travel documents, membership cards, student IDs – Tatiana Trouvé's image and personal information over various years are positioned next to each other at the base of the *Module*, its serial collocation referring to a multiplication of the self through and for the bureaucratic apparatus. They also include a certain temporality in visualising the slow passage of time, noticeable only in the small changes of her features, a different haircut, the hard to grasp traces of her aging; all accumulated in these administrative gestures that need to be performed over and over again. The adjacent arrangement of the several documents open a fissure between their sameness and multiplicity: As the stripe's colours, thickness and – from a case to case basis – ornaments are derived from the documents at their base, continuities become apparent in the repetition of their pattern. The portrayal of the artists' identity therefore becomes at once at flux, as fragments of Trouvé's life are displayed here in a variety of changing contexts, each of the documents marked with an expiration date. But it is precisely their serial alignment as an assembly of ever repeating information, that reduces that identity to a reiteration of the same key credentials: name, birthday, nationality, and – even though more interchangeable – address, affiliation, and self-portrait. This performance of identity showcased here, essentially, is of a doubled nature: whereas one can certainly read these portraits as an assertive inscription of the self into the exhibition space, where the explicit presence of the artist is otherwise omitted, the nature of these documents must not be forgotten. As identification documents, they are used for classification, rendered visible for an outside verification; not an individuation, but an abstraction.

In her *Bureau of Implicit Activities*, Trouvé shows that the relation of the administrative with the dimension of the social is answered to not as an opposition, but as a conflation. And specifically her *Administrative Module* pays tribute to the assertion that the social is traversed by the administrative, that there is no factual escape from the bureaucratic. As Trouvé makes clear when speaking about the *Administrative Module* in particular, the *Module* was very much a figuration of resistance and self-assertion: a struggle against invisibility.¹³⁴ Engaging in what Michel de Certeau has described in his 1980 book *The Practice of Everyday Life* as ‘making do’, Trouvé installs the *Module* “both as a fatalistic acceptance of the status quo and as a set of ruses to defeat it.”¹³⁵ In creating a *Module* out of all the documents that testify to her multiple exclusions from the institution of art, she turns them into her admission ticket. The materials that give this struggle shape are connected to de Certeau’s practice of everyday life, in a way that Trouvé collects, displays and exposes “the remaining relicts of meaning, and sometimes [...] their waste products, the inverted remainders of great ambitions. Things that amount to nothing, or almost nothing [...]”¹³⁶ It is here that Trouvé locates the ‘void’ and the risk of ‘disappearance’, that she tries to archive. In claiming her *B.I.A.* a ‘piece of fiction’, Trouvé therefore “metaphorizes the dominant order [and makes] it function in another register.”¹³⁷ Her *B.I.A.* is necessarily a project that engages with constraints and possibilities as an opposing pair, whose resolution is not found in an utopia, but in the reflection of the precarious that runs through her work.

Part II: The Administrative Module, therefore, will analyse the many ways in which Trouvé doesn’t point so much to an ‘outside’ – through the envisioning of an utopian otherwise or the articulation of a critique – but tries to claim an autonomous space from within, using the set-backs, doubts and apparent failures as a base for her self-assertions. The *Bureau* therein appears as a metaphorical work place where all these notions of time, subjectivity, and labour converge: a place where work is done but nothing tangible is produced, where time passes, and where subjectivities are administratively registered. While it is true that her *Bureau of Implicit Activities* can be said to reside in introspection, since it does not propose an articulation of a subjectivity outside these constraints, it necessarily refers to precarity as the prevailing structural relationship to the here-and-now. The *Bureau* reflects how these notions of everyday life, artistic labour and the bureaucratisation of contemporary existence coincide. It is here that Trouvé is searching for those traces the *B.I.A.* seeks to discover, to save from oblivion.

¹³⁴ Trouvé, interview between the artist and the author in her atelier, February 17, 2024.

¹³⁵ Anna Dezeuze, “Assemblage, Bricolage, and the Practice of Everyday Life,” *Art Journal*, vol. 67 (1) (Spring 2008): 33.

¹³⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: The University of California Press, 1984), 105.

¹³⁷ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 32.

3.1. On Subjectivity: *Monsieur, Madame, Mademoiselle Trouvé*

In the context of labour, time and subjectivity, it is the subject as a figure of thought in which Trouvé embeds and dissolves the two previous concepts. Thus, Trouvé's central question is the extent to which ideas of temporality and labour influence the subject in the first place. Her main focus remains on unproductivity, where temporality and labour are considered 'unrecognised' and therefore reside on the verge of disappearance or non-visibility. In visualising and engaging with both forms of 'unproductive' time and labour, new questions can be formulated as to how identity and subjectivation need to be answered in light of a precarious present. The axes that Trouvé maps out in her *B.I.A.* in order to investigate subjectivity connect to various points in the art historical discourse. Questions of self-representation and identity in the context of the self-portrait have been at the centre of artistic concern since the Renaissance. The artistic self-portrait stands at an interesting juncture, combining aspects of biographical individuation and social subjectivation, fiction, criticism and abstraction, and linking them back to the figure of the artist.¹³⁸ Doris Krystof describes how the self-portrait occupies an unusual position in art history in this respect, as its reflexive structure not only articulates an artistic self-conception, but also reflects this against the backdrop of a historically changing understanding of the subject.¹³⁹

Krystof goes on to explain how in recent art history, the traditional representation of the self, including the centrality of the artist's eccentric self-image, has largely disappeared or at least taken on other forms. Parallel to the development of social theories in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which decidedly examined the individual as a product of its social circumstances, the subject was increasingly psychologised, classified and categorised in the context of proliferating systems of science and rationalisation. As a consequence, "artistic forms of self-representation were also updated, taking into account this renewed understanding of the subject and, at the same time, employed new means and materials to such an expression. Thus, [...] transformations and metamorphoses of the self, its dissolution into doppelgangers, fragmentation and heterogenization"¹⁴⁰ were common tropes to grasp these changing concepts. On the other hand, the use of new artistic media also reflected revised approaches to the self. Documentary material of various kinds appeared as both a means of surveillance and expression of the self. Take, for example, Francis Alÿs's work *Narcotourismo* (1996), in which the artist subjected himself to the influence of a different drug every day for a week, documenting its effects in diary entries. Instead of concentrating on the sites he visited during his hour long *dérives* through the city of Copenhagen, it was

¹³⁸ cf. Doris Krystof, "Identität und Selbstinszenierung," in: *DuMonts Begriffslexikon zur zeitgenössischen Kunst*, ed. by Hubertus Butin (Cologne: DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, 2002), 114.

¹³⁹ cf. Krystof, "Identität und Selbstinszenierung," 114.

¹⁴⁰ Krystof, "Identität und Selbstinszenierung," 117. Translation by the author.

his changing inner states that he reflected upon in his notes.¹⁴¹ Ultimately, what is being negotiated in this work is the fine line between precipitated loss of the self and a conscious, albeit fragile, recourse to it: It was only in retrospect, when the effects of the drugs had worn off, that Alÿs put the experience down on paper in a few sentences, the gaps and omissions of detail as telling as they are evasive. In this work, as in others from this period, identity and subjectivation are explored as shifting and fluid concepts, often expanded to include a social perspective. Examples of this are feminist positions such as VALIE EXPORT, Cindy Sherman, Lynn Hershman Leeson, Andrea Fraser, or Vanessa Beecroft, whose artistic self-stagings leave behind the personalised self in order to highlight the socialised view of 'woman' as a typology and to oppose such a standardised image of femininity. The adoption of certain (stereotyped) 'types of society' and the exchange of the professional title 'artist' in the context of a performative appropriation of other professional identities were also common artistic practices in order to show the social framing of the subject on the basis of different socio-economic realities.¹⁴²

The list of artistic standpoints in this debate could be extended indefinitely, such is the importance of the discourse on the self with its various possibilities of interrogation. However, in more recent debates this subject-centred perspective is increasingly countered by posthuman or more-than-human positions. What became clear as early as the late nineteenth century was the realisation that the subject could no longer be thought of as a single unit, that instead it was subject to fragmentation and continuous becoming, and that 'the subject' could no longer be grasped unambiguously. Authors such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan or post-structuralist thinkers therefore often refer to a 'death of the subject'.¹⁴³

In her *Bureau of Implicit Activities*, Trouvé takes up several of these points of interrogation of the subject, which have only been mentioned here by way of example. As has been shown in the previous chapter, one vantage point was in her appropriation of various other professional identities, such as the collector, the archivist, the white-collar worker, the curator, etc. This is both part of a general tendency that can be accounted for by the postconceptual ontology of contemporary art, as much as it is a continuation of her probing questions about the identity and legitimacy of when to call oneself an artist. As her quote at the outset of *Part II* implied, this instance seems to be linked exclusively to what an artist does, rather than to what is effectively produced. Subjectivity and activity are brought into close proximity here, whose interplay Trouvé registers and traces in the different documents her *B.I.A.* comprises. But in reflecting on an activity in terms of

¹⁴¹ cf. Godfrey et. al., *Francis Alÿs: A Story of Deception*, 21.

¹⁴² cf. Krystof, "Identität und Selbstinszenierung," 117.

¹⁴³ cf. Krystof, "Identität und Selbstinszenierung," 117.

its supposed unproductiveness, the frame of reference for the subject's agency becomes even more porous than before. Trouvé's thoughts on the construction of subjectivity and how she aestheticizes them in her project, therein parallel with some prominent standpoints in French theory.

Specifically important for Trouvé's work is the deconstruction of the subject as theorised by Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as well as Michel Foucault or Judith Butler, who "understand power as *forming* the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire [...]. Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency."¹⁴⁴ The art historian Nizan Shaked offers a particular valuable understanding on how to navigate between these different conceptions of subjectivity, that both acknowledges its systemic dependence as much as it asserts a certain agency to the individual. Coming from Foucault and specifically his discursive analysis of history as 'subjugated knowledge', she writes:

"Following this perspective, I consider identity not as a property of subjects, but through a set of relations which take place in a field, where subjects have a certain level of agency, but so does the undergirding socio-economic system, thus that the agency of subjects is influenced by how they are positioned within this matrix."¹⁴⁵

It is precisely this question of agency that stands at the heart of the *Administrative Module*, that Trouvé discusses at the crossroads of bureaucratisation, institutionalisation and self-affirmation.

Trouvé's probing articulations of identity are further informed by recent socio-psychological concepts that became prominent in the late twentieth century. As Krystof points out, "the modelling of one's identity therein lies in the exemplary formulation of a biography and the self. The 'I' becomes an empty concept, a blank space in the semantic and social space to be filled according to one's own priorities, so that identity appears as a self-produced and variable construct."¹⁴⁶ By designing fictitious CVs and staging posed application photos in photo booths, Trouvé inscribes herself with an identity that promotes these ideas of autonomous self-production. Instead of enumerating the professional experiences that have in fact informed her 'real' life, Trouvé uses the formal language of the CV as an aesthetic of administration that serves to create multiple versions of herself. In doing so, she proposes to free herself from the constraints of her own life and social attributions: in her various drafts, she discards categorisations along the lines of gender, age, profession, etc. in order to incorporate other realities of life through fiction. These attempts of undermining and repositioning the self are juxtaposed with cut outs from letters written by friends

¹⁴⁴ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories on Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 2.

¹⁴⁵ Nizan Shaked, *The synthetic proposition: Conceptualism and the political referent in contemporary art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 7.

¹⁴⁶ Krystof, "Identität und Selbstinszenierung," 118f. Translation by the author.

and relatives, which, in their address '*Chers Tati*', reveal a close personal relationship to the artist that calls her desire for continuous self-construction into question (fig. 22). The personal is hereby contrasted with a fictional self-staging and the administrative relativization of identity. Generally, this can be said to be the underlying dynamic the *Administrative Module* negotiates on an aesthetic level.

What is perhaps not so obvious at first glance, or which at least requires more attention and space to develop, are the different figurations of subjectivity to which Trouvé alludes when she speaks of 'the subject' – and how she positions them in the context of unproductivity and precariousness, which are the starting points for my interpretation. Here I would like to suggest that Trouvé is concerned with three different notions of subjectivity, which she adheres to particularly in her *Administrative Module*, but which are echoed in the *B.I.A.* as a whole: the identity of an artist that is institutionalised and framed through the disciplinary structures of administration and the institution of art; the viewer as a subject that is addressed in the spatially mediated relation to the artwork; the agency of the subject in a society structured under neoliberal terms of efficiency and productivity.

The first point takes up the question of the artist's subjectivity relative to her position in the art sphere, but also connects it to issues of artistic labour and productivity. In the words of Trouvé: "I wondered whether not showing my work, not producing anything, still made me an artist. Is an artist someone with a certain status, someone who lives through a social representation, or is having ideas and projects enough to make you an artist?"¹⁴⁷ Her questions inherently rest on the dynamics of institutional recognition and legitimisation, that are partly uncoupled from her actual work as an artist. In her *Administrative Module*, Trouvé dissects her own subjectivity under these parameters, as if she wanted to see what is left of her at the end. The art institution, along with the pervasive bureaucratic capture of the subject by administrative processes, is questioned here in terms of its dual role in both documenting and simultaneously erasing the subject. Personal documents serve as a counterweight, yet they remain just as fragmentary. Ultimately, the question of the constraints imposed on the subject and gestures of a seemingly autonomous appropriation remain unresolved.

While the figure of the artist is the central subject in this respect, chapter 2.3 has shown that the subjectivity of the viewer is just as important. The *B.I.A.* engages the viewer through its scenography, subtly assigning them a 'role' within its narrative of labour, temporality, and unproductivity. The viewer's body is always implicitly taken into account – whether through the scale of

¹⁴⁷ Trouvé, *Djinn*, n.p.

the objects, the passages created by the *Modules*, or the installation of a 'second ceiling' that guides the viewer's focus. At this point, Trouvé claims to install a "space [that] constructs the body of a potential subject."¹⁴⁸ What will be examined further on is the extent to which this potentiality is embedded conceptually and which implications this might have for the *B.I.A.*'s aesthetic of reception. As a point of comparison, I will discuss the work of the Brazilian avant-garde artist Hélio Oiticica (1937–1980). His work *Tropocália* (1967) (fig. 27) and Trouvé's *Administrative Module* bear a striking aesthetic resemblance. Beyond this similarity, however, their political conceptions of art in relation to the engagement of the viewer reveal differences in how the space-viewer-object sphere is perceived, and thus relate differently to the viewer's subjectivity.

The last point that considers subjectivity as acutely effected by the precarious circumstances the post-Fordist condition of contemporary life perpetuates, will be elaborated in the subsequent chapter. Subjectivation will be here discussed in light of theories of labour and precarity that came to evolve in the 1990s, parallel to Trouvé's project. As it will become clear throughout *Part II*, a clear-cut separation between the processes of subjectivation and theories of labour in such a precarious present is no longer maintainable, whereby these two chapters only shift their focus respectively, but need to be read in convergence.

3.1.1. *The artist's subjectivity: institutionalised*

As noted earlier, there are at least three ways in which Trouvé engages with her own subjectivation as an artist: its formation by means of the administrative apparatus as a disciplinary structure; its appropriation and erosion through fiction that provides the chance for multiplication; and its biographic, personalised component that reflects identity through affective relationships, archived in the slips of handwritten letters. The mere fact that these different aspects of subjectivity are included in equal measure in the *Module* displays a certain postmodern understanding of the subject that acknowledges its Janus-faced definition: as being "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience and self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that which subjugates and makes subjects to."¹⁴⁹ Subjectivation is understood here in its processual dimension and oscillates between a subjugation from 'outside', visualised by the *Administrative Module* in terms of bureaucracy and the institution of art, and an agency to act from within these very structures, to formulate an identity along one's own terms or to rely on the affective relationships that anchor oneself in the world. This dichotomy is emphasised

¹⁴⁸ Trouvé, "A Body Without A Face," 136.

¹⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, "Afterword: The Subject and Power," in: *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubertus L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983 [1982]), 212.

visually along the same terms: the outside referencing her ID documents from various stages in her life, breaking down her identity in fractions of information, while the inside displays a more personalised approach.

When considering these processes of subjectivation, particularly in relation to the figure of the artist, it becomes evident that the institutions within the art sphere function as disciplinary structures that shape the artist as a subject. As biographies and affective relations are increasingly capitalised upon, these power structures become ever more intertwined with aspects of professionalisation. In light of this dynamic, the art historian Rhea Anastas introduces a round table discussion with the title “The Artist Is a Currency” in 2006 with the following questions: “How can the question – or is it a crisis – of the subject be located in contemporary art today? How does the art field represent and make use of its subjects? [...] One way to ask whether subjectivization is a problematic in art today is to assert that it’s one effect of professionalization.”¹⁵⁰ In the subsequent discussion, the artists invited – Gregg Bordowitz, Andrea Fraser, Jutta Koether, and Glenn Ligon – observe how the ‘affective turn’ in the late 1990s and the early 2000s has largely influenced the way how subjectivity has been approached by artists; not so much anymore as an expression of identity politics as was prevailing in the seventies and eighties, but more in a way that understands subjectivity as a processual becoming that fosters into a collective sense of belonging. Andrea Fraser, particularly, is sceptical in how far these alternating expressions of subjectivity and artistic practice were consumed by the institution of art nonetheless. Even though the rest of the roundtable discussion is not quite interested in such a trajectory of subjectivity in the art sphere and prefers to reflect exclusively on the tendencies that can be perceived from the standpoint of the present, the movement Fraser describes strikes me as relevant precisely because of the dimension of the institutional that Fraser brings to the table. To say that the figure of the artist as a political advocate for identity politics has changed towards the artist as an art-worker, whose labour is in turn subsumed by the institution under the vanguard of the spectacle and participatory viewer engagement, paints an important picture about the discourse of subjectivity in contemporary art. While in both situations art was used as political inflection point to address the multiple ways subjectivities are constituted, the way ‘authenticity’ increasingly serves as an assessment criteria puts the address of the discursive power structures that make the subject at risk: “In the art context, especially, the discourse of affect tends to have as its referent some kind of authentic experience and to evoke as its aim, as the promise of that authentic experience, the integration or reintegration of an authentic subject as a whole subject, a nonconflictual subject. [...] [How]

¹⁵⁰ Rhea Anastas, Gregg Bordowitz, Andrea Fraser, Jutta Koether, and Glenn Ligon, “The Artist Is a Currency,” *Grey Room* 24, no. 24 (2006): 111.

do we maintain the social, the historical, and the fundamentally conflictual within the framework of affect? How do we avoid reverting to the monad, to what they call a 'one-body psychology'?"¹⁵¹ Glenn Ligon adds to this another important observation: "Identity was initially related to social identity, and now identity is about performance, and everyone can perform it."¹⁵² The individual and the social are positioned here in a conflictual relation to the way art can address and evoke subjectivity; a conflict that, as far as Fraser goes, tips in favour of a "universalize[d] subjectivity that goes beyond identity [...]."¹⁵³ That the claim of authenticity in that context is misleading, is proven by the fact that the art market has adapted very swiftly to these changing articulations of artistic subjectivity, incorporating affect very well into the globalised economic logic of the art sphere. In short, the cat-and-mouse game between the artist and the institution persists, precisely because the pursuit of success through novelty in the art world is deeply intertwined with market dynamics; inevitably, the artist ends up commodifying themselves in the process.¹⁵⁴

An exhibition that took place in the same year as the panel discussion and that focusses on a similar set of question surrounding the role and self-understanding of the artist amidst the institution of art, was presented at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Pennsylvania, curiously focussing on the art scene in Cologne during the 1990s: *Make Your Own Life: Artists In & Out of Cologne* (2006).¹⁵⁵ In his essay, "The Non-Productive Attitude" published in the corresponding catalogue of the exhibition, Josef Strau describes how Cologne provided the ideal setting for a trend he observed in the art scene of the late 1980s and early 1990s: an increased self-reflexivity among artists regarding their self-presentation *as artists*, with Martin Kippenberger figuring a particularly notorious example of this throughout the catalogue. Resulting in a "popularity of anti-productive attitudes in Cologne, [...] the non-productive artist got great recognition if he substituted his work for a good personal narrative."¹⁵⁶ Both tendencies – the heightened emphasis on an artist's self-staging and the diminished importance of artistic production – must be understood in

¹⁵¹ Anastas et. al., "The Artist Is a Currency," 112.

¹⁵² Anastas et. al., "The Artist Is a Currency," 115.

¹⁵³ Anastas et. al., "The Artist Is a Currency," 113.

¹⁵⁴ Fraser observes in that respect: "For me, the next question is, what is this subjectivity that's immediately branded, even before it can be performed? [...] And here it goes: while the speed of that process of branding may be new (and certainly banks on "newness"), isn't the privileged subject of that 'complex' based on a model of artistic subjectivity that's been around since at least the nineteenth century? That is, the dynamic, ever generative, ever 'new' subject of creative omnipotence now promised by the digital world? The subject with access to the immediate instinctual satisfaction and affective expression and release now promised by the drug industry? What's the difference today?" Anastas et. al., "The Artist Is a Currency," 118.

¹⁵⁵ Both Jutta Koether and Andrea Fraser were participants of the panel discussion "The Artist as Currency" as well as of the exhibition *Make Your Own Life: Artists In & Out of Cologne*, September 21–December 2nd, 2006, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

¹⁵⁶ Josef Strau, "The Non-Productive Attitude," in: *Make Your Own Life: Artists In & Out of Cologne*, ed. by Bennett Simpson (Pennsylvania: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2006), 28. While the gendered language Strau employs – using the generic masculine to refer to the artist – can be seen as symptomatic of the time in which the text was produced, it also prompts an intriguing reflection on whether the self-staging and 'attitude' Strau discusses is inherently masculine-coded. Andrea Fraser explores this very notion in her performance *Official Welcome* (2001/2003), where she shifts

close relation to one another. The 'non-productive attitude' primarily referred to "a lack of interest in the procedures of production, with more emphasis on positioning oneself as an artist within the social fabric."¹⁵⁷ Networking and social gatherings began to take precedence over the act of creation itself. The concept of social gatherings as an artistic practice – exemplified by works like *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends Is the Highest Form of Art* (1970–ongoing) by Tom Marioni – was embraced and continuously reinterpreted by various artists.

These two texts discuss the question of the subject projected and absorbed by the figure of the artist in remarkably different ways. In Strau's text, it seems like being an artist is broken down to the performance of specific traits: an extrovert personality paired with a nudge of self-opinionated attitude that makes good for networking. To claim yourself an artist is not defined anymore by the artistic labour that produces a specific end product – art. It virtually suffices now to let everybody know that you are an artist, that, effectively, you are recognised as an artist. How substantial that claim is actually when you are not featured in any exhibitions is one thing, but what seems relevant also from today's perspective is that knowing the right people and frequently circulating as a conversation's topic is half the rent for making it in the art world. Being an artist is thereby reduced to a kind of celebrity culture, that is echoed by the formal and informal network of the art sphere. Being known is a currency whose value is said to succeed over what is effectively produced as art; or at least it becomes an entry ticket to the institution itself. As a consequence, the artists' professional, public and private identity become close to indistinguishable in many cases, which makes this performance of subjectivity as much evasive as vulnerable. The display of a coherence in one's narrative of oneself is vital in that sense, but becomes increasingly hard to sustain the more fluid the borders of these professional relationships become. Martin Kippenberger made a whole performance out of his notorious artistic identity, which Andrea Fraser imitated in her performance *Kunst Muss Hängen* (2001), recounting a drunken speech Kippenberger gave at a vernissage in 1995. Through the performance, one becomes increasingly aware of certain disjunctions: "between Kippenberger the artist and Kippenberger the person, and by extension, a similar separation between 'Fraser' and herself."¹⁵⁸ It becomes apparent how the subjectivity of the artist can be said to become institutionalised in this kind of network culture, with thin separation lines between one's identity as an artist and 'the Self'.

between the roles of artist and patron, sometimes impersonating real individuals. Her work introduces a distinctly gendered critique that intersects with an institutional critique of the patronage system.

¹⁵⁷ Strau, "The Non-Productive Attitude," 29.

¹⁵⁸ Bennett Simpson, "Make Your Own Life," in: *Make Your Own Life Make Your Own Life: Artists In & Out of Cologne*, ed. by Bennett Simpson (Pennsylvania: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2006), 17.

The roundtable discussion, while claiming in its title a similar usurpation of artistic identity as a 'currency' that can be performed by anyone as an act of legitimation, broadens the scope through the dynamics under which these performances take place. Other than Strau, the participants of the roundtable don't refer to the art world as a closed of cosmos, but acknowledge the rifts and tendencies whose origins are of a socio-political nature to which the art world reacts and is shaped by. It is here that identity politics and the 'affective turn' become relevant, because the artist not only performs oneself – the 'non-productive attitude' cannot be said to suffice – but also considers a broader sense of subjectivation in their art. The separation lines discussed here are extended by another dimension: the artist, the Self, and their situatedness in society as a projection plane for the public. Yet, the artist cannot outrun their institutionalisation – even if they proclaim a collective and fluid understanding of subjectivity – as there point of reference is already capitalised ('branded') before it can be performed.¹⁵⁹ Summing up specifically Fraser arguments during the discussion, one could perhaps speak of an 'antinormative attitude' rather than a 'non-productive attitude', as it is precisely the seemingly subversive that already has a very well-integrated place within the economics of the art sphere.

Bringing these thoughts back to Tatiana Trouvé necessarily means asking: what dimension does her recourse to the biographical take on, especially when she juxtaposes her private and professional selves, when she makes her identity as an artist coincide with her articulations of identity as a whole? And since the institution of art is necessarily the authority that assesses the identity of an artist in terms of their professionalisation, it serves asking: What is Trouvé's relation to the institution as articulated by her *Administrative Module*?

Especially when compared to Andrea Fraser's *Presentation Book*, a work developed in 1990 for her first solo-show in Germany at Galerie Christian Nagel in Cologne (fig. 23–24), the sense with which both artists install themselves as a by-product of the art world becomes more apparent. The show was scheduled at the same time as the Cologne Art Fair, a circumstance which Fraser commented on in her piece. Since this early work in her oeuvre is not extensively documented in many of her catalogues raisonnés, it is worth quoting a longer passage in which Fraser describes the work herself:

"So I took [the Cologne Art Fair] as a context and decided to install the gallery as an art-fair booth, with the same textured wall covering, rubber floor mats and furniture that they used in the fair building. Unlike an art-fair booth, however, the gallery was almost empty. I installed a little 'retrospective' of my work, which was kind of a joke because I was twenty-four and had produced very little at that point. [...] However, the installation was just a kind of stage set for a book I made. It was a black binder and looked like the kind of presentation

¹⁵⁹ cf. Anastas et. al., "The Artist Is a Currency," 118.

book a gallery might bring to an art fair with information of its artists. [...] The book starts out, as might be expected, with the invitation to the show and what looks like an artist's biography. But instead of starting with my first show, it starts in 1945. Instead of being a C.V., it's actually a chronology of American art in post-war Germany. The book itself is a kind of portable archive of photographs and 'clippings' from newspapers and catalogs documenting this chronology."¹⁶⁰

There are several formal aspects that are similar to Trouvé's work: the staging of a *mise-en-scène* of a specifically coded place of artistic production and economic circulation in the exhibition space itself; the adaption of an administrative aesthetic in form of a CV and newspaper clippings; the conflation of the document, the archive and the artwork; as well as the self-reflexive engagement of the artists' subjectivity *produced by* and *produced for* the institution. Both artists seek to find ways to establish a sense of identity from the viewpoint of the early stage of their career, without a substantial oeuvre that undergirds their institutional recognition. This examination of how the system infiltrates and shapes the artistic subject is thereby conducted precisely at the point of reification: the exhibition space of the gallery or the museum.

In both works, artistic identity is therefore presented as something that is not inherently authentic or self-determined but is rather shaped and influenced by external forces. But while Trouvé seems to go more into introspection, investigating identity as oscillating between the impersonal and the personal, the individual and the bureaucratic, Fraser's approach can be said to be confrontational from the outset. In the *Presentation Book*, Fraser investigates two notions of autonomous and heteronomous subjectivation: through a self-historization that frames her work and herself as 'American', thereby contextualising both as a continuation of the history of post-war Germany and its relation to the USA; and the commodification of the artist in a gallery system, a relation that appears even more tapered in context of the art-fair. The text passages of art criticism that are included in the binder underscore both points of critique, while offering a third pathway through which the artist is produced through the eyes of the critic. It also discusses the artist in such close relation to what she produces, that artistic identity and artistic production become inseparable from each other.

While Fraser formulates a critique of the institution *from within* the institution that aims to upset the institutional framework under which art operates, Trouvé engages with the institution with a different incentive. When I wrote earlier that the *Administrative Module* serves to harbour the attestations to all her failed efforts for professional recognition, which the artist cunningly turned into her entry ticket to the art sphere – by way that the *Administrative Module* resulted in

¹⁶⁰ Andrea Fraser, "Andrea Fraser," in: *Make Your Own Life: Artists In & Out of Cologne*, ed. by Bennett Simpson (Pennsylvania: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2006), 43.

the project of the *Bureau of Implicit Activities*, that is often credited as her breakthrough series – the assortment of documents implicitly gives an answer to the questions posed above. While it is true that Trouvé, particularly through the use of ID documents and the gesture of cutting out all the personalised parts of rejection letters – leaving only a structure of generic phrases – highlights the simultaneous documenting and erasing of the subject through bureaucracy, she also subtly reveals her desire to become part of the art institution from the outset. The goal was to gain institutional access, after all, in order to righteously call herself an artist. Her professional identity hinged on this very acceptance and legitimisation that can only be given by institutions – through education certificates, residencies, invitations to exhibit, favourable critiques, an atelier, a gallery contract, auction sales – all of which is summed up in the neat format of the curriculum vitae.

That her professional identity in that sense is inherently precarious, is highlighted when contrasted with the etymological definition of the word as “that which only exists thanks to a reversible authorization.”¹⁶¹ Just as much as the “contemporary artwork does not rightfully occupy a position in the field,” as Nicolas Bourriaud states, “but presents itself as an object of negotiation,”¹⁶² so too is an artists’ identity largely a performative act, aiming to tip these authoritative assessments in ones favour.

“In the end, the question amounts to an interrogation: what gives you the right to set foot on artistic soil? Do you have the correct papers, the deeds that give you the right to occupy the land?”¹⁶³

Just as much as the instances of temporality and labour Trouvé analyses, the question of professional recognition that is bound to her professional identity as an artist is ultimately connected to questions of visibility. And as is often the case, this search for visibility is waged from a position of precarity and exploitation. As she stated in an interview in her atelier, speaking of her arrival in Paris:

“I didn’t know if I was still an artist or not and what it meant to be an artist – did it just mean being in a show and showing that we exist and that we’re here? In that sense, of course, I was not an artist because I was totally invisible, but I was really immersed in all these strong activities all the time and I was trying to [make visible] the experiences that I was having: being someone young, without money, without experience, without anything – to show that it was possible to exist. I was existing through these activities without being recognised anywhere.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, “Precarious Constructions: An Answer to Jacques Rancière on Art and Politics,” *open: Cahier on Art and the Public Domain*, no. 17, ‘A Precarious Existence: Vulnerability in the Public Domain’ (2009): 32.

¹⁶² Bourriaud, “Precarious Constructions,” 32.

¹⁶³ Bourriaud, “Precarious Constructions,” 32.

¹⁶⁴ Trouvé, interview between the artist and the author in her atelier, February 17, 2024.

The tone in which Trouvé speaks of her work, compared to Fraser, is in that sense more contemplative, focusing on the tension between visibility and invisibility. But it is the visualisation of her artistic labour despite its futility and the precarious conditions to which she was subjected, that make the personal coincide with the political. In it, the institution of the museum becomes the site of her desires, to which she clings by pointing out the conditions and mechanisms that have excluded her from it. As much as the art system is structured by the logic of the economic, Trouvé implicitly refers to the two other economies that organise it: the social economy of status and recognition, and the individual economy of desire.¹⁶⁵ Prominent figures of institutional critique like Fraser frequently interrogate these dynamics through the complex and often opaque interplay of the various institutions of art – such as the museum, the exhibition space, collectors, critics, the gallery, insurance companies, the board of trustees, transportation companies, commercial enterprises, leading banks, auction houses, etc.¹⁶⁶ Trouvé concentrates on these questions of access and distribution too, but in a more straight forward yet personalised sense: in her *Administrative Module*, she collects all the letters of rejection and returns them to their sender.¹⁶⁷

Within this framework, it makes sense that Trouvé relies on the visual language of CVs and job application photos to give form to multiple identities that can be said to serve as an appropriation of the self through fiction. Trouvé therein disrupts the coherence of the subject that is sought after by the art market, as she – at least partly – destabilises the notion of unity of the subject by incorporating the social functions that frame the production of identity under the circumstance of institutionalised artistic labour. This approach gives voice to a fragmented identity and a sense of inauthenticity, which stands in stark contrast to the coherence typically expected from the figure of the artist – a coherence that, as Fraser points out, is commodified when presented as a ‘non-conflictual subject’.

In this context, Trouvé’s explorations of her own subjectivity are in constant motion and can be understood within the framework of identification rather than identity, in highlighting the malleability of postmodern subjectivity.¹⁶⁸ This distinction between identity and identification is underscored on an aesthetic level: The various assortments of identity documents at the base of the *Module* allude to a recessed body, where systemic abstraction takes precedence over any personal or political sense of identity – an abstraction that effectively strips the subject of the processes of subjectivation that constitute the self, reducing it to a rigid entity. This is contrasted with

¹⁶⁵ cf. Johannes Meinhardt, “Institutional Critique,” in: *DuMonts Begriffslexikon zur zeitgenössischen Kunst*, ed. by Hubertus Butin (Cologne: DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, 2002), 129.

¹⁶⁶ cf. Meinhardt, “Institutional Critique,” 129.

¹⁶⁷ cf. During, “The Strategy of the Implicit,” 65.

¹⁶⁸ cf. Shaked, *The synthetic proposition*, 10. For the conceptualisation of identification in contrast to identity, see Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

the handwritten notes, whose amicable address and little drawings provide a counterbalance to this bureaucratic capture of the artist's identity. But even these more personal accounts to her identity remain fragmented and inaccessible to the viewer; the letters sent to her are presented only as one element among many within the work. Same goes for the photo booth pictures: assembled on the work table and positioned on an equal footing with the surrounding office stationery, they serve not as mere representations but as a commentary on the annexation of the self within bureaucratic structures. The artist is herein isolated as an object, her inventory of self-subjection remains hollow, the alteration of her appearance with wigs and fake moustaches is more carnivalesque than self-revelatory. Perhaps it is through her ironic use of the fictional and the fake, that the terminology of identity becomes superfluous in her investigations of her artistic self. In this context, her assembly of administrative documents that chronicle her failures in gaining professional recognition, and that equate her artistic activity to that of an office employee – both deemed 'non-productive' – serves to defy any straightforward identification of her artist-self with her individual self. This blurring of boundaries illustrates just how ultra-thin the line is between these different *modus operandi* of subjectivation Trouvé presents, revealing and reinstating the precariousness of these identity constructs.

That Trouvé distances herself very much from the context of identity politics while doing so, becomes apparent in the way she refers to the content of her CVs:

"I was Chinese, I was a black man; I was 15 years old again, or 40, 60; I was a doctor, etc. I invented other jobs, other studies – in short, other identities. I started to have a thousand possible existences."¹⁶⁹

Unfortunately, the CVs inside the *Module* were not applicable to me during my research and with only that statement available to me, the following assumptions are written with a critical caution. While it is true that Trouvé neither aligns with the authenticity claims associated with the 'affective turn,' nor presents a subjectivity that is non-conflictual or easily subsumed, it equally doesn't seem like she engages in an active mapping of the subject in terms of social orders, like gender, race, or class. The easiness with which Trouvé slips into different persona – especially when they are of a different nationality, socio-economic background and non-white – seems disconcerting from today's perspective, to say the least. The discourse on identity politics has become in many ways more narrowed to an authorial authenticity, in which the frame of reference is very much marked out by one's own situatedness. Nevertheless, the term identity politics was and still is an important tool for a critical systemic analysis, as it considers the socio-economic, political and geographical

¹⁶⁹ Trouvé, "In the Studio," 88.

power structures that “pushed subjects to a unified identity understanding. Subjects forced into unity by shared socio-economic circumstance, and sharing one or a set of characteristics defined by themselves or by others, consolidated their struggle around the terms of their oppression.”¹⁷⁰ While Trouvé never claimed that her *B.I.A.* pursued a political agenda, the act of assuming various identities in her fictionalised CVs without addressing the underlying structures of oppression casts a shadow over the criticality her project seeks to convey nonetheless.

Even though an autobiographical impulse can be detected that informs the documents Trouvé assembles in her *Administrative Module* as well as in the others, she broadens her materials in a way that complicates interpreting the *B.I.A.* as a straightforward, expanded portrait of the artist. Specifically in the *Modules* in which subjective notions are figured most prominently, as is the case with her *Administrative Module* but also in the *Modules* ‘Secrets and Lies’, ‘Unsent Correspondence’ or her *Polders*, Trouvé’s gestures exhibit a certain evasiveness: even though they are laid out in plain sight, they always retain an element of concealment or absence. The psychological filling or unveiling of these works makes the presence of the viewer indispensable, while also granting both entities – the viewer and the work – a certain potentiality. In the following I will analyse the aesthetic measures Trouvé installs that figure the viewer as a ‘potential subject’; an instance, as she says, that is primarily mediated through the spatiality the *B.I.A.* claims. While chapter 2.3. analysed how Trouvé thinks of time through space, the next pages will consider the narrative dimensions that reflect on the viewer’s subjectivity.

3.1.2. *The viewer as a potential subject*

While the *Administrative Module* emphasises failure in the face of the bureaucratic system, reflected not least in its gatekeeping position in the form of applications for jobs, grants and residencies, the *Polders* specifically explore subjectivity in terms of an intangible manifestation via the unconscious, at the core of which is this dialectical search for and in opposition to emptiness that Trouvé seeks to express in her *B.I.A.* as a whole. In her *Polders*, Trouvé recreates absence from memory: Made from residue materials of the *B.I.A.*, the *Polders* resemble memories of interiors that the artist visited at some point in her life.¹⁷¹ They create a space marked by an absence for which the small furnishings serve as proxies, pointing to an inhabitation that can only be relived mentally. Particularly when compared to Giulio Paolini’s 1966 installation *Ut-op* (fig. 25), for ex-

¹⁷⁰ Shaked, *The synthetic proposition*, 7f.

¹⁷¹ cf. Maraniello, *Polders*, 33.

ample, Trouvé's *Polders* appear like a doll's house, inviting our enlivenment through a mental engagement (fig. 26). As Jesi Khadivi points out in her essay on Trouvé's work: "They invited participation, but from a distance – demanding a form of mental travel similar to what we experience when we read novels."¹⁷² Working with emptiness as a spatial condition, Paolini's installation creates a double of the given space, mimicking the empty corner of the room in a minimalist gesture as a reflection of the modalities of exhibition. Trouvé's early *Polders*, too, are also closely related to the exhibition space: often assembled on site, they occupy a corner of the room, suspended a few centimetres above the gallery floor.¹⁷³ But unlike Paolini's piece, Trouvé's *Polders* don't necessarily reference the given space, but rather create a space themselves.¹⁷⁴ They also apply this aesthetic of absence in an inverted sense, because in fact, her *Polders* are filled with numerous tiny objects: mattresses, office partition walls, burned traces on the walls, little chairs. But precisely because these objects reference so blatantly interiors of the private and public sphere, one begins to wonder about the human absence they symbolise. Trouvé applies these notions of emptiness, reduction and doubling therefore differently, in a way that includes the subject as the basis of these reflections:

"The *Polders* are reduced spaces. They're too big to be architectural models, but too small to be usable. They put visitors out of step in relation to the environment they're entering. It's as if the scale of the objects were absorbed by the architecture that houses them, as if the forms of the objects had been absorbed by the material that composes them. The doors are sunk into the walls, and objects are frozen while apparently in the midst of falling, as if the emptiness of these spaces, their alterations and densities, created a recessed body."¹⁷⁵

Because the *Polders* evoke a certain desire – a desire that can only be lived through imagination – the spatial dimensions of the *Polders* include the viewing subject as a '*potential subject*'. Trouvé compares this evocation of desire and potentiality with Baudelaire's poem *À une passante*, in which the protagonist falls in love with a woman precisely because the nature of their encounter was ephemeral, leaving space for the imagination to fill in the details of what was only suggested by her fleeting appearance, the sense of irrevocable loss serving as a catalyst for his romantic feelings.¹⁷⁶ As Sylvie Coëllier points out, this affective dimension is what introduces the dialectic of dis/appearance in Trouvé's oeuvre:

"In the *Polders*, it's the spectator who mentally becomes the bodily operator of these objects awaiting human life (seats, tables, curtains, devices for sporting exercise and suffer-

¹⁷² Khadivi, "Rites of Passage, Connecting Worlds."

¹⁷³ cf. Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 59.

¹⁷⁴ cf. Maraniello, *Polders*, 32.

¹⁷⁵ Trouvé, "A Body Without A Face," 136.

¹⁷⁶ cf. Trouvé, "A Body Without A Face," 138.

ing...). Mentally active and physically in expectation, he finds himself caught between his projection in the reduced space and the illogic of being its missing presence. [...] Here, doubling is not about appearance, but about feeling. It accompanies the course of desire, which makes the absent present by opposing loss with infinite reconstruction.”¹⁷⁷

Here, a certain instability – in the sense of a potentiality, a flux – infiltrates the viewing process: the viewer can be said to occupy two places at once. Positioned in front of the work, the viewer becomes acutely aware of their own bodily presence when confronted with the shift in scale, which in turn provokes a projection ‘inside’ the work, as a potential presence that fills the suggestive absence of the body.

A comparable revisiting and recreating of architecture from memory can be detected in Mike Kelley’s seminal work *Educational Complex*, which he developed around a similar time in 1995. Interested in what he called ‘repressed memory syndrome’, Kelley’s installation served not only as a means of ‘infinite reconstruction’ – to make visible what would otherwise remain intangible – but also to make visible what was actually lost, mnemonic details buried by the unconscious and therefore unable to be expressed in the architectural model.¹⁷⁸ What is represented in both Kelley’s and Trouvé’s work, in terms of precariousness, is the instability of memory as formative to the subject, therefore always rendering subjectivity potential, albeit incomplete. On both a material and conceptual level, the *Polders* express a potentiality that is central to what Trouvé calls *dédoublement*: a doubling that doesn’t serve to stabilise one’s identity, but rather introduces an “endless field of possibilities”¹⁷⁹ as a starting point for Trouvé’s investigations into subjectivity.

As with the activities undertaken, the body is therefore always ‘implicitly’ taken into account. The architecture of the *B.I.A.*, reminiscent of standard office cubicles, takes the body as its size reference – a crucial observation, since this is how the viewer is affectively included into the narrative dimension of the *Bureau* as an ‘office’; a fact that further serves to introduce a reflection on the relationship between subjectivity and the subject of labour:

“It’s all a matter of scale and eye. The modules of the *B.I.A.* have the particular feature of all having a standard height (5ft), precisely tallying with certain dimensions used for office furniture in industry. By being in the sitting position for work, this makes it possible to be isolated, and for a person standing up, to skim what’s going on inside with the eye. From the very outset of the *B.I.A.*, the issue of scale has thus been a central one, the same way that the issue of the projection and shift of the viewpoint from the outside

¹⁷⁷ Coëllier, “Une Poétique de l’Enigme,” 202; 207.

¹⁷⁸ cf. John Miller, *Mike Kelley: Educational Complex* (London: Afterall Books, 2015), 17.

¹⁷⁹ Trouvé, “In the Studio,” 92.

towards the inside has impacts on a reading of the work (depending on whether you take the place of the project manager or the worker).¹⁸⁰

Except for the *Waiting Module*'s sound scape, the sensual experience of the *B.I.A.* as an environment or architectural ensemble is limited, marked by a distancing that yet tries to draw the visitor closer. This applies in particular to the *Administrative Module*, with its cut-out Plexiglas-covered windows: In order to see what has been left by this imaginary worker, the viewer needs to step closer, therefore automatically shifting their perspective, as Trouvé proposes. Much like entering a real office space to which the viewer does not belong, one wanders through the corridors created between the *Modules*, observing but never interacting, obeying the social code in place. As a feature that links all *Modules* conceptually, the left-out presence of the artist and the spectator leads to an aesthetic of absence that at once more signifies unproductiveness as much as it questions the status of representation. Ross continues:

"[...] whereas the spaces include a variety of objects, they exclude the physical presence of the artist and of the spectator: they remain uninhabited, non-accessible, and impractical. They are hybrids between private and public spaces, between architecture and design. In short, the expanding *B.I.A.* provides protective sites for unproductiveness, but insists on making these sites unused and unusable, only partly accessible by sight, and never fully visible. Unproductiveness is exactly that: something not represented; something that cannot simply be represented; something that cannot be made productive simply by representing it. The *B.I.A.* is a struggle against disappearance."¹⁸¹

Precisely because it is not enough to simply visualise activities deemed as unproductive labour, to merely represent them, the *B.I.A.* needed to find an aesthetic language that makes it possible to translate this *temporal* critique into a *perceptual* critique. As *mise-en-scène*, i.e. a spatio-temporal scenography continuously activated through the spectator's presence, the pendulum motion of unproductivity turning productive while maintaining 'unproductiveness as its driving force' is ensured. It is here that potentiality is introduced as the *B.I.A.*'s ontological condition: it is not just Trouvé's subjectivity that is pending between artist / non-artist, construction worker / manager, subjected to success or failure, but also the viewer's embodiment as decentred and fragmented, yet inevitably integrated into the work's structure. The notion of the passage is in that sense essential, as it shifts the emphasise from the art object to the viewer's presence and therefore highlights the perceptual activity involved in the aesthetic experience.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Trouvé, interview by François Poisay, 61.

¹⁸¹ Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 55f.

¹⁸² On the notion of passages in reference to installation art, see: Anne Ring Petersen, *Installation Art: Between Image and Stage* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2015); Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977).

One prominent example for such critical investigations of the exhibition space as a social situation that includes the viewer, and one which further bears some surprising aesthetical similarity to Trouvé's *Administration Module*, are Hélio Oiticica's environments and participatory installations, to which he also refers to as "work site" or "place-site-context-work open to participation."¹⁸³ Here, too, the privileging of the closed off art object was rejected by the Brazilian neo-avantgarde of the 1960s, ultimately resulting in the dismissal of the "pictorial projection as the foundation of artistic subjectivity"¹⁸⁴ and the concomitant modernist object / subject divide. As Monica Amor points out in her paper "From Work to Frame, In Between, and Beyond: Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, 1959–1964" (2010), this discourse was strongly influenced by the writings of Ferrar Gullar, specifically by his 1959 essay "Theory of the Non-Object". In it, Gullar proposes how the *nonobject* as the new paradigm for art requires no mediation, it aims for a tangible experience instead of representation, therefore claiming an autonomy of the art object whose primary nature is affective. Drawing on Russian avantgarde's removal of the frame in painting and the base in sculpture, the dissolution of the 'fictional space' of the painted surface and 'real space' altogether was one of the main spatial-aesthetic goals. However, what leading figures of the avantgarde in Brazil such as Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Pape were problematising, effectively, was "not only the concept of object as a stand-in for something else (an idea, a feeling, etc.) but the projective nature of representation in which the subject, in a gesture of dominance, recognizes itself in the object."¹⁸⁵ The work of art was taken out of its own symbolic realm and positioned into the real space, in order to defy a rationalist comprehension of the artwork and therefore, also, a pure conceptualism as arts' main prerogative. Especially Oiticica's colourful environments under the title *Tropicália* (1966–67) – comprised of several *Pentrables* the viewer could enter, reminiscent of Brazil's favelas – aimed "to redefine spectatorship and incorporate the viewer into the meaning of the work,"¹⁸⁶ therefore creating a corpus of works that articulate models of individual and collective identity.

"Against the 'concept' and 'idea' that structured the work as a privileged site of meaning, Gullar and the neoconcretist artists acknowledged the embeddedness of both the work and the spectator in a somatic and psychological matrix that took into account the work's structural relationship to the here and now."¹⁸⁷

What was being produced in Lygia Clark's and Hélio Oiticica's participatory and interactive artworks, was a 'sensorial-conceptual flux', that aimed to transcend the static categories of the art

¹⁸³ Monica Amor and Carlos Basualdo, "Hélio Oiticica, Apocalipopótese, 1968," in: *The Artist as Curator: An Anthology*, ed. by Elena Filipovic (London, Milan: Koenig Books, Mousse Publishing, 2017), 77.

¹⁸⁴ Monica Amor, "From Work to Frame, In Between, and Beyond: Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, 1959–1964," *Grey Room*, No. 38 (Winter 2010): 21.

¹⁸⁵ Amor, "From Work to Frame," 25.

¹⁸⁶ Amor, "From Work to Frame," 27.

¹⁸⁷ Amor, "From Work to Frame," 28.

object. It is also in this context that Oiticica invents the terms ‘supra-sensual’ and ‘creleisure’: While ‘supra-sensual’ refers to the affective staging of his artworks as sensory environments that aim to engage the viewer on a deeper, more immersive level, ‘creleisure’ offers the programmatic structure to his aesthetic – as a more liberated and interactive form of artistic experience that breaks down the boundaries between art and life, specifically through a fusion of creativity and leisure.¹⁸⁸ As Sabeth Buchmann points out in her book *Denken gegen das Denken – Produktion, Technologie, Subjektivität bei Sol LeWitt, Yvonne Rainer und Hélio Oiticica* (2007), this overcoming of modernist traditions by the Brazilian neo-avantgarde was based on a decidedly socio-political vision to translate art into life; aiming to apply a socially and hierarchically critical reinterpretation of the reception mechanisms of art. It is in this sense that Clark’s and Oiticica’s artistic programme must be interpreted: their installations must be seen as part of an activity aimed at liberating the creativity of each individual and breaking down psychological or social barriers to the perception of art.¹⁸⁹ Rather than giving centre stage to the individual subjectivity of the artist as author, they propose an empowerment of the *societal* individual in regaining their trust in intuition, passions and ambitions.¹⁹⁰ Clark, Oiticica and Pape therefore propose the concept of ‘New Objectivity’: an understanding of art that is indebted to the collective revolution of society and therefore necessarily incorporates “an engagement and a position on political, social, and ethical problems [...]”.¹⁹¹

In *Tropicália* (fig. 27), Oiticica thus strives for an aesthetic concept of resistance against the prevailing mechanisms of work and production, which, in their logic of efficiency and technologisation, assert an all encompassing influence on both the subject and everyday life.¹⁹² Being comprised of “materials as diverse as sand, plastic, television sets, fabric, cheap plywood and live parrots,”¹⁹³ Oiticica employs the concept of precariousness as a site for contradictory encounters: through the oppositional mix of ‘poor materials’ with technological appliances of the everyday,

¹⁸⁸ cf. Hélio Oiticica, “General Scheme of the New Objectivity,” in: *The Great Labyrinth*, ed. by MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt am Main et. al. (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2013), 192.

¹⁸⁹ cf. Buchmann, *Denken gegen das Denken*, 235. This emphasis on the liberation of the subject needs to be understood and grounded in the political environment of Brazil of the 1960s: 1964 marked the beginning of the 21-year military dictatorship in Brazil, which resulted in a climate of severe repression and political persecution. In 2014, the results of the so-called ‘Brazilian Truth Commission’ were presented, describing the human rights violations committed between 1964 and 1985. After two and a half years of research and hearings with over a thousand witnesses, the commission, which was appointed by President Dilma Rousseff in 2011, came to the conclusion that the human rights violations and the elimination of political opponents were the result of a systematic campaign by the state. According to its findings, at least 434 people were murdered by the military regime, cf. Werner J. Marti: “Brasiliens Militärdiktatur verfolgt das Land bis heute,” *NZZ*, accessed March 12, 2024. <https://www.nzz.ch/international/brasiliens-militaerdiktatur-verfolgt-das-land-bis-heute-id.1720983>.

¹⁹⁰ cf. Buchmann, *Denken gegen das Denken*, 236.

¹⁹¹ Oiticica, “General Scheme of the New Objectivity,” 179.

¹⁹² cf. Buchmann, *Denken gegen das Denken*, 238.

¹⁹³ Camila Maroja, Caroline Menezes, and Fabrizio Poltroniere (eds.), *The Permanence of the Transient: Precariousness in Art* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), xxiii.

Tropicália becomes an environment in which the visitor encounters a set of contradictions, ranging from nature and culture to the transitory space Brazil occupies as a so-called 'third-world country' under a dictatorship. As Buchmann concludes: Oiticica's environments demonstrate the multifaceted attempt to locate an artistic practice in popular, folk and everyday cultural traditions that articulate a language of resistance to the appropriation by the capitalism of the West. His concept represents a perceptual-aesthetic of process, that Buchmann compares to the works of American Minimalism and Conceptualism, but which seeks to respond anew to the fragmentation and serialisation of time and space in industrial society through a physical relationship between the subject and the work of art.¹⁹⁴ A similar connection was observed by the curator Carlos Basualdos regarding Oiticica's programmatic texts:

"Oiticica's work had explored the possible relations between constructivist structures and forms of life since the late sixties, with installations such as *Tropicália* in 1967 and then *Eden* in 1969. [...] And yet the question of the viewer's participation in the work seems gradually to be reconfigured from the early years of the seventies onward, in the form of an investigation into the relations between subjectivity and labor. In the words of Oiticica himself, the finality of this process would be the invention of a 'structure of leisure as pleasure opposed to the current one of leisure as the programmed desublimation that sustains hour-periods of alienated work-production.'"¹⁹⁵

The materials used in *Tropicália* are, therefore, an emblematic reference to ways of life that relate the status of their aesthetic characteristics to the material, cultural and social conditions of their production, presentation and reception. For this reason, Oiticica's artistic practice can be seen as a vanguard of what was to be found in the 1970s onwards, in works of post-minimalism, institutional critique and contextual art: its everyday cultural frame of reference, which resolutely links the place of art to non-privileged living spaces.¹⁹⁶

While Oiticica's understanding of participation largely removes or blurs the boundaries between art, body and subject, this relationship takes on an ambivalent character in Trouvé's work. Hardly participatory or even necessarily socially engaged, Trouvé's *Bureau of Implicit Activities* cannot be said to follow the same aim as Oiticica's very political agenda. However, the distance between viewer and object in Trouvé's installation takes on a different notion when viewed in perspective to the room she creates: an office, is it were, that refers to the barriers and precarity imposed on the subject by the creative industries. In that perspective, Trouvé's own statement that the viewer's body is largely excluded from the *B.I.A.*'s constructions should not be dismissed as trivial. It is no coincidence that the *B.I.A.* adopts the language of a bureaucracy that negates

¹⁹⁴ cf. Buchmann, *Denken gegen das Denken* 237, 259.

¹⁹⁵ Carlos Basualdo, *Hélio Oiticica: Quasi Cinemas* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2001), 47.

¹⁹⁶ cf. Buchmann, *Denken gegen das Denken*, 260.

the affective body, increasingly classifies the subject and unifies its experiential space in drop-down menus. The ‘reality status’ of her *Modules*, as Christine Ross points out, is therefore “far from stable, as they consistently oscillate between imaginary, functional, and real working spaces.”¹⁹⁷ In this respect, the negation and simultaneous implementation of the body in a spatial dimension can actually be interpreted as a reflection of the social negation of embodied subjectivity. Comparable to Oiticica, Trouvé’s interplay of *Modules* as an ‘architectural ensemble’ creates an environment that not only reflects her own reality as an emerging artist, but also situates this subjectivation in the context of the neoliberal, bureaucratised France of the 1990s. It is through this spatial implementation of the *Bureau* as a somewhat actual / fictional office, that the viewer is included into the meaning of the work. Here, Trouvé refers to the ‘ways of life’ that encompass her as well as many other individuals, even if she doesn’t offer a programmatic ‘way out’ in her representation of subjectivity. Without creating a space for participation, the *B.I.A.* nevertheless articulates “a kind of proposition to behaviour,”¹⁹⁸ much like Oiticica’s *Penetrables*.

But unlike Oiticica, who challenges the unproductivity of art by making it accessible and active, or Pierre Huyghe, who mobilises unproductivity under the notion of non-work as a site of resistance, as will be shown in the next sub-chapter, Trouvé finds a visual language that reinforces unproductivity as an activity emanating from her *Modules*. Both Trouvé and Oiticica aim to propose an artistic practice that is “linked to the act of creation as a process (rather than to the notion of representation).”¹⁹⁹ But they traverse these thoughts to a spatial dimension, implementing perception as an “*action* or a *behavioural exercise* that becomes important.”²⁰⁰ In doing so, they address the process of subjectivation as their main point of interrogation on an aesthetic level. The two artists, however, relate to this in very different ways: Oiticica’s aim, according to Amor and Basualdo, was to allow “a radical subjectivity [to emerge] outside norms and social constraints.”²⁰¹ What Trouvé presents, on the other hand, is not a subjectivity that frees itself from the social constraints of an oppressive system (the political realities that separate these two artists are, of course, beyond comparison), but the niches that a young artist seeks in order to assert herself against invisibility. Trouvé doesn’t so much point to the margins of society as to the dead corner of the museum’s own vantage point, to the precariousness it reproduces.

¹⁹⁷ Ross, *The Past is the Present*, 54.

¹⁹⁸ Oiticica quoted in Matthew Cheale: “Hélio Oiticica: Waiting for the Internal Sun.” *Art Monthly*, no. 472, Britannia Art Publications Ltd, 2023: 27.

¹⁹⁹ Amor & Basualdo, “Hélio Oiticica, Apocalipopótese, 1968,” 78.

²⁰⁰ Amor & Basualdo, “Hélio Oiticica, Apocalipopótese, 1968,” 78.

²⁰¹ Amor & Basualdo, “Hélio Oiticica, Apocalipopótese, 1968,” 74.

3.2. On Labour: Implicit Labour and Precariousness

If the *Bureau of Implicit Activities* can be seen as a fictional work-site, it portrays artistic labour caught in a state of impasse. Here, the artist's work consists of a series of continuous, implicit activities that ultimately lead nowhere and produce nothing, except for the documentation of their own failure. Or so Trouvé claims. The implicit activity of the *Modules*, after all, is to recognise these processes as work, implicitly anchored in the artistic process, and to emphasise their generative value. The numerous letters of application displayed in the *Module* show how close the work of an artist is ultimately to that of an office worker: it is about managing correspondence, sorting letters of application, and archiving these endeavours. The office and the artist's studio are thus equalled to the same level. In that sense, the *Administrative Module* is not only a reflection on the 'bureaucratic compartmentalisation of contemporary life', but also a questioning of the content artistic work can and must take on in order to legitimise one's own identity as an artist. But it also asks the question when the work of an artist actually begins: Does it start with the formulation of an idea, no matter if it is realised or only implicitly contained in the development of other projects? Does it begin with the writing of funding applications and, if successful, is that money actually a wage before or after the work? If the application doesn't go through, who pays for this amount of futile labour? Is it even recognised at such?

The notion of work is clearly at the heart of the *Module's* implicit activity, but in a way that highlights failure and the socio-economic precarity that the artist was experiencing at the time. This precarity is further emphasised on a material level: the rubber bands that cover the table will become dry and brittle and eventually disintegrate; the ink on the stamp pads will dry up; the glue that holds the ID documents to the wooden façade will slowly dissolve. The *Administrative Module* incorporates and materialises precisely the instability and precariousness it seeks to express. Identity, here, is elaborated in the face of one fundamental question: What makes an artist an artist? The *Administrative Module* explores this question in light of what is recognised as artistic labour in the broader sense, especially when success fails to materialise and the action slips into the unproductive, the futile. I am interested here in how Trouvé proceeds aesthetically to think about labour, precarity, and subjectivity together. While the adjacent terms of precarity and precariousness have already appeared throughout this thesis in a more or less systematic way, I would like to expand on these notions at this point.²⁰²

²⁰² I will follow Anna Dezeuze's differentiation between precarity and precariousness, in which she defines "'precary' as a socio-economic condition [that] affects different individuals in radically unequal ways, while 'precariousness' can be a shared condition of uncertain experience." Anna Dezeuze, *Almost Nothing: Observations on Precarious Practices in Contemporary Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 23. The term 'precarization', on the other hand,

3.2.1. (Artistic) Labour, Precarity, and Subjectivity

As was established in chapter 2.1., when working out the meaning of the implicit that conceptually unifies the *Bureau of Implicit Activities*, Trouvé emphasises activities that are not traditionally recognised as part of an artistic practice and which are therefore at the risk of going unnoticed. In her *B.I.A.*, activities such as painting, sculpting, drawing, etc. are substituted with activities that usually take place in an office – and curiously so, not as a performance, but as a materialised and aestheticized collection of the traces such work produces. In doing so, Trouvé points to a distinction between the creative labour and wage labour, exactly in her proposition that artistic labour *often times is* immaterial labour. This comprises various processes that are preliminary to and implicit in the artwork – such as thinking, sketching, waiting, modifying, discarding, doubting, failing. But just like the commodity form that conceals the labour that produced it,²⁰³ so do these processes remain invisible in the artwork. They constitute unrecognised – and ultimately unpaid – forms of artistic labour. It is here that the Marxian notion of ‘unproductive labour’ echoes in Trouvé’s exploration of the implicit, in that she engages in actions that belong “to the realm of non-productive activity,” because they don’t result in the direct production of capital.²⁰⁴

Rather than using ‘unproductivity’ as the primary category of analysis, I propose rephrasing it as *implicit labour* when speaking of the activities assembled by Trouvé in her *Bureau*. While the notion of unproductivity was important to analyse the specific temporality Trouvé is interested in and to define the frame of reference to which her project articulates a criticality, this shift in terminology redirects the focus from the content and supposed value of her activities (what is produced by that labour or whether it is ‘useful’) to the process and conditions of such labour. This is especially pertinent when considering implicit labour as a continuation of the post-Fordist erasure of the boundary between leisure time and work: “There is no longer any dividing line between leisure time and work,” the political scientist Isabelle Lorey writes. “There is an accumulation of knowledge during the unpaid hours that is not remunerated separately, but which is naturally called on and used in the context of paid work.”²⁰⁵ With this structural relation at stake, almost every action that cannot be safely subsumed under the terms of wage labour – i.e. as a salaried action that takes place within a defined timeframe, with a clear beginning and end, in which a person consciously

I derive from the German word *Prekariesierung* or the French *précarisation*, which describes the process of becoming precarious.

²⁰³ cf. Leigh Claire La Berge, “Introduction: Socially Engaged Art and Decommodified Labour,” in: *Wages Against Artwork: Decommodified Labor and the Claims of Socially Engaged Art* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2019), 17.

²⁰⁴ Paolo Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles, New York: Simiotext(e), 2004), 54.

²⁰⁵ Isabell Lorey, “Virtuosos of Freedom,” in: *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity, and Resistance in the Creative Industries*, ed. by Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray, and Ulf Wuggenig (London: MayFlyBooks, 2011), 86.

sells their labour to another – risks to transform into implicit labour.

This erosion of the division line between life and work and the subsequent subjectivation process is a well-rehearsed argument in the theories of labour. With the crisis diagnoses of the 1980s, which postulated the end of standard employment structures, Fordism, and the labour society in their previous forms, important process concepts emerged that aimed to comprehend the changing relationship between life and work: the dissolution of boundaries ('Entgrenzung'), the subjectivation, and the precarization of work.²⁰⁶ These terms were intended to describe the still-capitalist but economically fundamentally restructured labour relations. Deliberately summarised under the broad term of post-Fordism, these radical changes have now become the new model for how life and work became structurally intertwined under late capitalism. The terms 'Entgrenzung', subjectivation, and precarization of work essentially need to be understood in close connection, as they all include and refer to the following shifts: Common division lines that made it possible to separate work from the private spheres of life, or work from the Self, are being eroded. Institutional regulation is replaced by self-regulation, the temporal separation of working hours and leisure time is dissolved in favour of a flexibilization of work (which essentially leads to a potentially unlimited extension of working hours), and work itself is subjectivized, in the sense that a 'job' turns into a 'vocation'.²⁰⁷ As a result, the work-related performance itself becomes individualised, which in turn feeds into a continuous self-optimisation. Under the false claims of freedom, autonomy, and self-realisation – that have become the new values in this *New Spirit of Capitalism*²⁰⁸ – the labourer partakes in a systemic implosion between the spheres of production and reproduction as modes of subjectivation.²⁰⁹ As Lorey points out so aptly in her essay "Virtuosos of Freedom":

"It is about regeneration beyond work, also through work, but still very often beyond adequately remunerated wage labor. It is about (self-)renewal, creating from oneself, recreating oneself through one's own power: of one's own accord. Self-realization becomes a reproductive task for the self. Work is meant to ensure the reproduction of the self."²¹⁰

This implosion Lorey describes and the concomitant commodification of the Self under late-capitalism is centralised under the term 'cognitive capitalism', prominently theorised in *Empire*, by Michael Hardt and Antoni Negri. They postulate an increase in biopolitical power over the social subject, in which emotional skills and social intelligence are capitalistically appropriated and exploited, thereby commodifying entire personalities.²¹¹ At the same time, in this neoliberal permea-

²⁰⁶ cf. Alexandra Manske and Wolfgang Menz, *Theorien der Arbeit zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 2024), 139.

²⁰⁷ cf. Manske & Menz, *Theorien der Arbeit zur Einführung*, 141–159.

²⁰⁸ See Luc Boltanski, Ève Chiapello, and Gregory Elliott, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London, New York: Verso, 2018).

²⁰⁹ cf. Lorey, "Virtuosos of Freedom," 87f.

²¹⁰ Lorey, "Virtuosos of Freedom," 87.

²¹¹ See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

tion of work and private life, any potential failure is perceived as self-imposed. While the idea of upward mobility is the driving force behind this commodification of life through work, its actual realisation becomes increasingly unlikely.²¹²

In this evolved form of capitalism, precarity, according to Pierre Bourdieu, becomes “part of a new form of domination based on the establishment of a state of general, permanent insecurity, with the aim of forcing workers into submission, making them accept their exploitation.”²¹³ Precarity has not only material but also, above all, affective consequences, in which the relationship to life is increasingly perceived as one of nervousness, anxiety, a sense of imminent insecurity and instability, as well as a general crisis awareness. Precarity is therefore perceived as both: an economic as much as an affective situation. As Berlant resumes: “This emergent taxonomy raises questions about to what degree precarity is an economic and political condition suffered by a population or by the subjects of capitalism generally; or a way of life; or an affective atmosphere; or an existential truth about contingencies of living, namely, that there are no guarantees that the life one intends can or will be built.”²¹⁴ As future-oriented life planning becomes impossible, the site of struggle is located in the present; if such a politization seems attainable at all.²¹⁵

Although an actual theorisation of precarious working conditions only took place parallel to Trouvé’s project, most prominently by French sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Robert Castel, I would like to discuss precarity in the following as a background against which Trouvé’s *B.I.A.* and her notions of artistic labour as implicit labour can be positioned nonetheless.

As Nicolas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider point out in their introduction to the special issue on ‘Precarity and Performance’ in *The Drama Review*:

“Precarity is life lived in relation to a future that cannot be propped securely. Precarity undoes a linear streamline of temporal progression and challenges ‘progress’ and ‘development’ narratives on all levels. Precarity has become a byword for life in late and later capitalism – or, some argue, life in capitalism.”²¹⁶

As briefly lined out in chapter 2.2., precariousness thus posits us in a suspended present: while many of the good-life-fantasies that are mirrored in the rhetoric to ‘make the best of one’s life’, to

²¹² cf. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 10; 200.

²¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, “Prekarität ist überall,” 100. Translation by the author.

²¹⁴ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 192.

²¹⁵ cf. Manske & Menz, *Theorien der Arbeit zur Einführung*, 173. Lorey argues in a close reading with Paolo Virno, that the ascribed new set of values and fantasies of self-realisation ultimately lead a self-precarization that concurs with a de-politization, cf. Lorey, “Virtuosos of Freedom,” 83.

²¹⁶ Nicolas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider, “Precarity and Performance: An Introduction,” *TDR (1988-)* 56, no. 4 (2012): 5.

‘succeed’, or to ‘arrive at a better future’ have provided a certain sense ‘to keep going’, neither of these goals appear objectively maintainable in the precarious present moment. Rather, this historical present, as Berlant suggests, is increasingly perceived as an impasse – a term she introduces with a dual meaning: it refers both to a certain passivity, where one arrives at a standstill, and to a cul-de-sac, which prevents forward movement and introduces the temporality of delay. However, neither meaning implies non-action. Instead, Berlant is concerned with the various ways individuals respond to and resist the growing conditions of insecurity, anxiety, and precariousness that permeate our environment. In this regard, she provides a particularly pertinent definition of precarity: as “significantly more than economic: it is structural in many senses and permeates the affective environment too.”²¹⁷ Precarity, in that sense, is not just a byword for late-capitalism, but in many ways its ultimate consequence.

According to Berlant, in such conditions of pervasive insecurity, the precarious subject is compelled to engage in relentless efforts to determine “how to maintain footing, bearings, a way of being, and new modes of composure amid unraveling institutions and social relations of reciprocity.”²¹⁸ The will to build a better life is what structures these ongoing efforts, no matter how fragile and unattainable these ideas turn out to be. This is what Berlant ultimately describes as ‘cruel optimism’, which she sets out as the prevailing dynamic of our present. ‘Cruel optimism’, she argues, is a psychological and affective state that holds the precarious subject in a double bind: acutely aware of the instability and insecurity of their lived situation, the subject is simultaneously “feel[ing] attached to the soft hierarchies of inequality” that, no matter how desperate their effect, “provide a sense of *their place in the world*.”²¹⁹

When Trouvé speaks of her *Administrative Module* and the autobiographical roots it aims to fictionalise, she admits to exactly that question: if an artist does not produce anything – at least nothing that is recognised as *valuable* by the art sphere – what is her place in the world after all?

Labour, time and subjectivity thus enter into an inseparable correlation that Trouvé showcases as decidedly precarious: the labour she performs is not recognised as such, unpaid and stuck in repetition, delay, or failure; through the implications of implicit labour, time can hardly be freed at all, as even the futile moments of waiting are claimed as formative to the subject; a subjectivity which, ultimately, can neither escape institutionalisation nor commodification, as was shown in the previous chapter. This of course paints an overtly fatalistic picture of her *B.I.A.* as a project – and perhaps in some cases, this observation is not fundamentally false: In her *Archives*

²¹⁷ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 192.

²¹⁸ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 206.

²¹⁹ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 194.

Module ('Drawings'), for example, Trouvé stores copies of her drawings and project sketches on tracing paper. This action is in fact artistic labour in the most straightforward sense. Being more a drawing exercise than the execution of an autonomous work of art, her skills nonetheless improve and feed into the more capitalizable forms of artistic labour. The *Module* reproduces this in-between-step infinitely. Yet, these drawings hold an ambiguous autonomy: more traces of the absence of a work in its own rights, their project character positions them in a kind of limbo – they become a “substitute for a work” that “can now demonstrate *in every form* (including that of set-back or failure) the virtually infinite character of work-process, to the point of precluding any prospect of effective elaboration.”²²⁰ The temporality of the delay that is employed here, appears not so much in the sense of an ‘unwork-process’, its permanent non-realisation, but rather fosters a potentiality that is detached from its actual manifestation.²²¹ It shifts the emphasis from the object as commodity to the process of artistic labour. The *Module* is in fact an archive of Trouvé’s work, in its doubled sense: her artworks as well as her art-as-work.

In what follows, I will further contextualise the idea of *implicit labour*, which I used to describe Trouvé’s highlighting of her artistic activities as forms of immaterial labour. As these are activities that not only go unnoticed but are also unpaid (a circumstance, as I will elaborate, that goes hand in hand), I will discuss her work in conjunction with Leigh Claire La Berge’s term of *decommodified labour*, which she established in her book *Wages Against Artwork: Decommodified Labour and the Claims of Socially Engaged Art* (2019). With this emphasis on work and artistic labour in her *Bureau of Implicit Activities*, I will also argue that her project poses a certain criticality that moves beyond an institutional critique, even though elements of which can be recognised in her work, and towards an infrastructural critique, as it was theorised by Marina Vishmidt. Both theoretical gateways will offer a useful perspective on Trouvé’s work and its ambivalent quality that oscillates between a hopeful utopia and a critical reflection on the impasse.

3.2.2. *Trouvé’s Implicit Activities as Decommodified Labour, or: From Institution to Infrastructure*

With this emphasise on work – in its many notions such as the artwork, implicit labour, administrative and artistic processes – Trouvé connects to many ideas on the relationship of art and labour established in the 1960s and 1970s, as Pamela M. Lee points out in her essay “Work Space: Tatiana Trouvé’s Bureaucratic Imaginary” (2010). Bringing on references of institutional critique,

²²⁰ During, “The Strategy of the Implicit,” 67.

²²¹ cf. During, “The Strategy of the Implicit,” 67.

for example Michael Asher's project for the Claire Copley Gallery in Los Angeles, Lee is one of the few authors who have acknowledged the implications of such works for Trouvé's artistic practice. In exploring these art historical references and how they resonate in Trouvé's work, Lee underscores how her *B.I.A.* reflects a deep engagement with bureaucratic and administrative environments, highlighting the often unseen labour and organisational structures that underpin artistic production. By drawing connections between Trouvé's work and earlier Conceptual artists, Lee situates Trouvé within a broader discourse on the intersections of art, labour, and institutional critique, emphasising the continued relevance of these themes in contemporary art. However, without explicitly mapping out why, Lee ultimately comes to the conclusion that the *B.I.A.* doesn't quite fit the label of institutional critique. She concludes: "Departing from those practices in which a body politic is at stake, her art nonetheless meshes the site of the workplace with the impulse to gather and collect information. However, the sum total result is less an aesthetics of elucidation than something far murkier: certainly you would not call it 'institutional critique'."²²² Rather than dismantling the veil that hides such 'back stage' processes of administration, as did for example Asher in 1974, Trouvé's imaginary architectures install themselves in the exhibition space as an unyielding, albeit cryptic presence. The complicated shifts between creative work and wage labour, productivity and unproductivity, are thus positioned in the context of their social arena; they stage a precariousness that serves to maintain its own structures. In effect, Trouvé determines the place of the museum as the larger institution that contains her *Bureau* as a site for her social investigations. Such gestures have a long history in the development of institutional critique, of which Michael Asher's piece is just one prominent example. Artistic practices of the 1970s have thus transformed the museum into a site with an explicit political agenda and incorporated the context of its display as an intrinsic aspect of the work, without which the work cannot be understood.²²³ It also brought into focus other social realms that had traditionally been outside the museum's frame of reference – or, as figures such as Hans Haacke notoriously revealed, were deliberately kept under wraps.²²⁴

But what is it then, that doesn't make Tatiana Trouvé's project fall into that category? I think that a potential answer lies in the recently ascertained shift – or, as Marina Vishmidt preferred to call it: 'drift' – from institutional critique to infrastructural critique that Vishmidt dates to the 1990s as a response to such first generation examples of institutional critique. This drift, as she maps out, was fuelled by the gloomy realisation that the "artistic strategy of institutional critique was

²²² Lee, "Work Space," 242.

²²³ cf. Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 164.

²²⁴ See Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*, 166–171.

fated from the start to slot into the master's tool box."²²⁵ The "key significance" of these second generation of institutional-critique-artists – of which Vishmidt names individual artists such as Andrea Fraser, VALIE EXPORT, Jimmie Durham, David Hammons, as well as collectives such as the Guerrilla Girls, Women's Liberation Art Group, the Art Worker's Coalition, etc. – "was in laying a track between the critique of institutions to the critique of infrastructures," thereby "locating the institution into an expanded field (of structural violence)."²²⁶ This theoretical pivot that Vishmidt was developing until her untimely death, I will argue, is crucial for understanding Trouvé's work. It also offers valuable insides that allow me to analyse the 'implicit activities' Trouvé structures in her *Bureau* as forms of labour, thereby opening the project to a deeper level of criticality.

In her text, "Beneath the Atelier, the Desert: Critique, Institutional and Infrastructural" (2017) that appeared in an anthology to honour the artist Marion von Osten, Marina Vishmidt develops her concept of 'infrastructural critique' along two main premises. The first establishes the notions of 'institutional' and 'infrastructural' as rather loosely defined terms. This expansion serves to expose the institution to larger scrutiny, in which other institutionalised forms of exclusion "which have traversed but are not contained by the institution of art – institutions such as white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism"²²⁷ – are positioned in the centre of artistic critique. This further serves to investigate "the art institution as a site of resources – material and symbolic [...]."²²⁸ Thus, the second premise inserts a set of dualistic divisions that Vishmidt introduces to navigate between the breach of institutional to infrastructural critique, asking "whether these institution-critical practices situated themselves principally in an *immanent* or a *transversal* relation to the spaces of artistic exhibition and discourse."²²⁹ However, as Vishmidt concedes, neither the immanent nor the transversal can offer a clear cut distinction within these practices, as both spheres continuously overlap and inform each other. Rather, as she makes clear, they are introduced on a more methodological level to distinguish the substance and subject of certain projects from each other – in terms of whether the institution of art is treated as a fixed entity that represents itself as distinct from and impervious to other social arenas, or as a relational setting that is continuously formed

²²⁵ Marina Vishmidt, "Beneath the Atelier, the Desert: Critique, Institutional and Infrastructural," in: *Marion von Osten: Once We Were Artists*, ed. Maria Hlavajova and Tom Holert (Utrecht: BAK, 2017), 218. For a particularly illustrative example on how institutional critique in fact got incorporated by the institution, see the catalogue to the exhibition *Art in Los Angeles. The Museum as Site: Sixteen Projects*, ed. by Stephanie Barron (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1981).

²²⁶ Vishmidt, "Beneath the Atelier," 219.

²²⁷ Vishmidt, "Beneath the Atelier," 218.

²²⁸ Vishmidt, "Beneath the Atelier," 219.

²²⁹ Vishmidt, "Beneath the Atelier," 219f. Emphasise added by the author.

through the social parameters that constitute it.²³⁰ In the latter case, this conceptual expansion serves to include critical interrogations of the infrastructure that shapes these institutions, such as the specific working conditions at place, that focus on the links between the institution's ideological and material conditions.²³¹ Or, as she points out in a later text: "This entailed switching from a critique that called on a certain discourse or performativity of citizenship – institutional – to a critique that took an immanent view on the means of production or conditions of possibility of both the institution as its critique – infrastructural."²³²

The postconceptual artwork specifically adheres to such an expansive understanding of the institutional that is constituted via the infrastructural. Not only on a material but also on a conceptual level, Osborne's theory posits that postconceptual art transcends the traditional boundaries of art by integrating critical reflection on its own conditions of production and reception, thus inherently questioning the nature of art itself. This critical approach involves a deep interrogation of the systems and structures that make art possible, including its economic, social, and political dimensions. Vishmidt's theory of the drift from institutional to infrastructural critique further elucidates this by emphasising the shifted focus from the visible, traditional institutions of art – like museums and galleries – to the less visible but equally critical infrastructures that underpin these institutions. By connecting Osborne's and Vishmidt's theories, one can see how postconceptual art not only operates within these infrastructural systems but also brings them to the forefront of artistic discourse. Thus, postconceptual art expands the field of institutional critique to encompass the myriad ways in which art is produced, distributed, and experienced in a globalised context.

Both Vishmidt and Osborne at one point in their texts refer to a lecture held by Jeff Wall, titled "Depiction, Object, Event" (2006), in which Wall, almost with an indignant rhetoric, diagnoses exactly such an expansion of the art sphere, one that mimetically includes other social institutions that were at once related but yet distinct from it: "a museum department, a research department, an archive, a community-service organisation, and so on [...]."²³³ One could add to that list 'an office', for that matter. The artwork, according to Wall, has lost track of, as much as interest in, its distinguishing borders; the postconceptual condition has produced an 'expanded field' in which anything and everything can be incorporated to make their 'second appearance' as art.²³⁴ Art is therefore produced primarily by virtue of its symbolic recognition by the art sphere. In this way, social relations are brought into the art sphere as depictions, often mimicking the political

²³⁰ cf. Marina Vishmidt, "A Self-Relating Negativity" Where Infrastructure and Critique Meet," *Journal of Science and Technology of the Arts*, vol. 13, nr. 3 (2021): 14.

²³¹ cf. Vishmidt, "Beneath the Atelier," 224.

²³² Vishmidt, "A Self-Relating Negativity," 14.

²³³ Jeff Wall, "Depiction, Object, Event," *Hermes Lecture* (2006), 24.

²³⁴ cf. Wall, "Depiction, Object, Event," 25.

language of activist efforts, while still operating within the patronage and reference system of the art world.²³⁵ But as Marina Vishmidt points out, this in turn has drastic implications for the way in which labour appears only as a metaphor, a quotation, a second appearance. “Under these conditions,” Vishmidt critically adds to Walls observations, “a speculative link could be drawn between the expansion of contemporary art into social life – such as labour, representational codes or political claims – and the ebbing visibility of labour as a political force in the social terrain where this expansion occurs.”²³⁶ Instead of being a social fact that can be changed, with all its encompassing notions of exploitation, inequality and financial infrastructure, the material conditions of labour are presented as an abstraction; or, as John Roberts argues, “a phantasm of a phantasm.”²³⁷ Yet, the political implications this reduction evokes are very real: instead of politicising the spectator, the diffusion of art and politics that touch upon the interlockings between the “labour-capital-relation and the expanded post-conceptual terrain of artistic practice”, risk succumbing to a ‘melancholic allure’, that ultimately “locks the spectator into a supine, ‘this is all-we-can-hope-for’ from art and political transformation.”²³⁸

The *Bureau of Implicit Activities* can be read as an example of such “discrete instances of labour in contemporary art,”²³⁹ in that it incorporates the process of artistic activity as unrecognised or implicit labour, whereby the project aims to revalue the position of subjectivity in the realms of un/productivity. In the *Administrative Module* in particular, the subject of labour appears in a double sense: the rejection letters pinned to the walls of the *Module*, stripped from the content and reduced to only the credentials of rejection, could both refer to Trouvé as an unemployed wage labourer looking for a job, or an unpaid artist engaging in free artistic labour seeking representation or funding. Not making money either way, Trouvé highlights “the gap between making art and making money,”²⁴⁰ as she stresses the latter as a precondition for the former. In positing unproductivity at its centre, Trouvé makes visible the entire apparatus of labour and productivity. Thus, Trouvé’s project can be said to encompass an infrastructural critique that points to the precarious working conditions that structure the institution of art.²⁴¹ In the following, I will map out the different ways in which Trouvé installs these instances of labour in the exhibition space, though it

²³⁵ cf. Wall, “Depiction, Object, Event,” 24f.

²³⁶ John Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 2015), acknowledgments; cf. Marina Vishmidt, “Situation Wanted: Something about Labour,” 21.

²³⁷ cf. Vishmidt, “Situation Wanted,” 22.

²³⁸ Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde*, acknowledgments.

²³⁹ Vishmidt, “Situation Wanted,” 22.

²⁴⁰ La Berge, “Introduction: Socially Engaged Art and Decommodified Labor,” 3.

²⁴¹ See Marina Vishmidt, “Between Not Everything and Not Nothing: Cuts Towards Infrastructural Critique,” in: *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989*, ed. by Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2017) 266.

remains to critically question the pitfalls described above, in which the artistic exploration of working conditions only succumbs to an abstracted depiction that forfeits its political potential.

In her gestures of archiving and imagining of what *could be*, but what is not yet, Trouvé highlights the part of artistic labour that is often bestowed with little to no value; especially when there is no final result, no project, at the culmination of these efforts. For Groy's in particular, this scenario represents the tipping point at which "the entire labour invested in the project's formulation" – that is: the sketching, describing and developing of an idea; the consequent time invested in applying for funding; the thinking, discussing, discarding and reformulating of that specific idea – all of which make up a large part of the process of creating art – "has been a waste of time."²⁴² After all, if no discrete object can be presented for external validation, a fact that hinges on *visibility*, such labour is on the verge of disappearing altogether. Trouvé installs this awareness as an ongoing recovery process that opposes such feared disappearance.

This is an essential point: The *Administrative Module* ultimately *is* the answer to her question of what makes an artist an artist – the existential question with which the whole project started. Trouvé is concerned with the question of when artistic labour is recognised as such and why it is distinguished from wage labour in the first place. This approach aligns closely with Bruce Nauman's concept, where any activity performed in his studio is designated as art by virtue of its location: "If you see yourself as an artist and you function in a studio... you sit in a chair or pace around. And then the question goes back to what is art? And art is what an artist does, just sitting around in a studio."²⁴³ But neither Trouvé nor Nauman just sit around. Consequently, Trouvé turns Nauman's proposition around: In establishing her *Bureau* as a metaphorical workplace, every action – irrespective of its productive character – is installed as implicit labour, as work before the work. Trouvé herein aligns the process of artistic production foremost with the administration of labour, thus challenging the division of manual / immaterial labour and the values associated with it. As such, the *B.I.A.* not only functions as a metaphor for a workplace, but in fact becomes an office in which Trouvé herself appears as its only unemployed worker, infinitely occupied in registering all her futile efforts. Speaking of Mika Rottenberg's video work *Dough* (2005–2006), Vishmidt writes:

"The dialectical condition of art in relation to its outside – that it can only be in relation to what it is not – is here turned inside out, so that the visualisation of labour in contemporary

²⁴² Boris Groy's, "The Loneliness of the Project," *New York Magazine of Contemporary Art and Theory*, 2008. <https://www.are.na/block/472583> (last accessed: June 23, 2024).

²⁴³ Nauman as quoted in Molesworth, *Work Ethic*, 39.

art has a politics to the extent that the futility of artistic and non-artistic labour is rendered common to both, but also that in the core of the work (the actions) whimsy and brutality are intertwined.”²⁴⁴

The quote can be used to describe Trouvé’s *B.I.A.* just as well. Trouvé takes up the question of labour in her *Administrative Module* in light of the symbolic capital her efforts were supposed to produce, as an answer to the question who has the right to enter the institution of art. Paradoxically, Trouvé makes these various instances of labour visible at the very moment of their failure. This approach shifts her critique from focusing solely on the institution of art, to an interrogation of the broader infrastructures of precarious labour that underpin it.

In her book, *Wages Against Artwork: Decommodified Labour and the Claims of Socially Engaged Art*, Leigh Claire La Berge established the term decommodified labour, that refers to forms of unpaid work under the neoliberal structure of late-capitalism, specifically with a focus on the realms of art, aesthetics and artistic labour. Distinguishing work from labour to arrive at a definition of her term, she writes:

“I understand work as a local action in which we all engage in order to make our lives both meaningful and possible, and labor as an abstraction through which our work is organized. What I mean to capacitate with the term ‘decommodified labour’ is a kind of work that is not compensated through wage or available through market purchase.”²⁴⁵

This distinction is meaningful for the analysis of Trouvé’s *Bureau of Implicit Activities* in several ways: In respect to how La Berge defines ‘work’, the realisation of the *B.I.A.* fully qualifies as such. Trouvé engages in all kinds of activities that make her life meaningful by organising the paraphernalia of her life into these *Modules* as ‘frames’, through which she assigns them relevance both autobiographically and artistically. Furthermore, her work becomes a showcase project that legitimises her professional identity as an artist. But as has been shown in reference to the many ways in which an artists’ identity and work is institutionalised, it also encompasses aspects of the abstract organisation of labour as “a structure that ultimately comes to structure us, acts in concert to compose something no longer reducible to work, but rather better conceived of as the social form of labour.”²⁴⁶

The term decommodified labour therein includes “a kind of everyday, unwaged, yet formal and professional work,” that describes the “state in which our formal labor is devalued to the point

²⁴⁴ Vishmidt, “Situation Wanted,” 29.

²⁴⁵ La Berge, “Introduction: Socially Engaged Art and Decommodified Labor,” 3f.

²⁴⁶ La Berge, “Introduction: Socially Engaged Art and Decommodified Labor,” 12.

of wagelessness while we are still doing it.”²⁴⁷ La Berge’s term, in that sense, connects very much to Paolo Virno’s notion that “post-Fordist labor is always, also, *hidden labor*.”²⁴⁸ With the disappearing threshold that once separated labour time from non-labour time, Virno goes on to emphasise the post-Fordist shift in values like communication and intellect. He describes these as “experiences and knowledge matured outside the factory and the office,” yet reintegrated into the realms of labour-power as a productive force. Virno argues that

“[I]abor and non-labor develop an identical form of productivity, based on the exercise of human faculties: language, memory, sociability, ethical and aesthetic inclinations, the capacity for abstraction and learning. From the point of view of ‘what’ is done and ‘how’ it is done, there is no difference between employment and unemployment. [...] The old distinction between ‘labor’ and ‘non-labor’ ends up in the distinction between remunerated life and non-remunerated life.”²⁴⁹

In this context, La Berge recounts a fictional anecdote from the HBO series *Girls*, whose content many art workers have either heard second-hand or engaged in themselves to maintain footing in the creative industries: the character in the series took on a new job, in this case, “as an assistant to a curator of dance. It is unpaid, but it could lead somewhere.”²⁵⁰ It is precisely here that Lauren Berlant’s concept of *Cruel Optimism* becomes particularly relevant, describing the dominant condition of a precarious present in which individuals pursue actions fuelled by the hope for a better future, yet, these very actions contribute to the deterioration of their current living conditions. As Isabell Lorey points out, this acceptance ultimately leads to what she calls self-precarization, which permeates most of the jobs in the creative industries:

“The unpaid or low-paid jobs, in the cultural or academic industries for instance, are all too often accepted as an unalterable fact; nothing else is even demanded. [...] It is perhaps because of this that creative workers, these voluntarily precarized virtuosos, are subjects so easily exploited; they seem able to tolerate their living and working conditions with infinite patience because of the belief in their own freedoms and autonomies, and because of the fantasies of self-realization. In a neoliberal context, they are so exploitable that, now, it is no longer just the state that presents them as role models for new modes of living and working.”²⁵¹

Art’s production therefore becomes a vital site for these investigations, as its social and economic structure substantiates such precariousness as an ongoing condition of the present, at least for the subjects that partake in the creative industries’ economy. Despite everybody knowing that the

²⁴⁷ La Berge, “Introduction: Socially Engaged Art and Decommodified Labor,” 3, 5.

²⁴⁸ Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 103.

²⁴⁹ Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 103.

²⁵⁰ As quoted in La Berge, “Introduction: Socially Engaged Art and Decommodified Labor,” 7.

²⁵¹ Lorey, “Virtuoses of Freedom,” 87.

working conditions are often unjust, poorly paid, with relentless working hours through an informally demanded always-available-mentality, rarely anyone seems to find a sustainable way to challenge these deeply engrained mechanisms. One virtually participates in the impasse that Berlant describes under the illusion of free choice. In the logic of the creative industries as a 'second economy', Bourdieu's concept of the different types of capital becomes prevalent, as social and cultural capital are argued to subsidize economic capital. With neoliberalism perpetuating an anything-goes mentality that transforms each individual into an entrepreneur, who can turn each and every investment of one's own labour into profit if only making the right choices, "wagelessness may be narrated as a failure of self-investment: it's not that one didn't get paid, it's that one's investments did not produce the desired return."²⁵² In that sense, decommodified labour can be understood as labour "that fails to return a wage even through [*sic!*] it requires expending energies and affects in a scene indistinguishable from formal employment [...]."²⁵³

The underlying notion of freedom within the prevailing neoliberal fantasies of self-realization – fantasies that ultimately contribute to one's own precarization while devaluing artistic labour to the point of wagelessness – is now perhaps more troubling than ever. In this context, labour becomes decommodified, yet still retains its role as an expression of the social organisation of work. In recourse to John Roberts, La Berge concludes that "art exists in a 'second economy, a precarious realm of under-monetized and unwaged artistic activity that the majority of artist now operate within'."²⁵⁴

It is not easy to discern in how far Trouvé can be said to participate in such an economy of self-precariation, or rather, whether her *Administrative Module* in fact aestheticizes these instances of failed self-investment: Even in her re-appropriations of identity through fiction or her narrations of reclaiming unproductivity as formative for both her project and subjectivity, it remains to critically question the utopian quality that is implied in these gestures.

In a concluding comparison, I will link Trouvé's statements about her own project – especially with regard to the interplay of the three core concepts of labour, time and subjectivity – with the discussion on decommodified labour explained so far. To this end, I will compare her *B.I.A.* with another project, developed at a similar time and with a similar aim, that claims to 'free' time from the grasps of efficiency and capitalism's forward-driven logic of progress: *L'Association des temps libérés*. For this, I will draw heavily on the paper "The Prospects of 'Freed' Time: Pierre Huyghe

²⁵² La Berge, "Introduction: Socially Engaged Art and Decommodified Labor," 24.

²⁵³ La Berge, "Introduction: Socially Engaged Art and Decommodified Labor," 26.

²⁵⁴ As quoted in La Berge, "Introduction: Socially Engaged Art and Decommodified Labor," 16.

and *L'Association des temps libérés*,” written by Lauren Rotenberg (2013), as one of the only sources available to me about this particular project. However, I believe it opens up an interesting comparative perspective on the two notions of ‘freed time’ as articulated by both Trouvé and Huyghe.

3.2.3. *Labour, Time and Subjectivity: Unproductivity as an Impossible Utopia*

In 1995, just two years before the first comprehensive installation of the *Bureau of Implicit Activities* at Villa Arson in Nice, the *L'Association des temps libérés* (*The Association of Freed Time*) was created: a legally-recognised organisation headed by Pierre Huyghe, whose aim was “to develop unproductive time, to reflect on free time and the development of a society without work”²⁵⁵ (fig. 28). Huyghe conceived of the association as part of the exhibition *Moral Maze* at Le Consortium in Dijon, to which he was invited to participate by the artists and co-curators of the show, Liam Gillick and Philippe Parreno. The first members of the *Association des temps libérés* were also the artists featured in the exhibition, among them Angela Bulloch, Maurizio Cattelan, Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Douglas Gordon, Carsten Höller, Jorge Pardo, Phillippe Parreno, and Rirkrit Tiravanija.²⁵⁶ “As a way to extend the exhibition from a moment of culmination of ‘finished’ work to a starting-point for other projects,”²⁵⁷ the *Association* conceived of two artist-led projects – *The House or Home?* (1995) and *Temporary School* (1996). The first was conceived as a housing project, for which the *Association* aimed to buy an unfinished house and renovate it collectively. The second was conceived by Huyghe, Gonzalez-Foerster and Parreno as a collaborative project: a nomadic school whose scripted activities were documented with tape and audio recordings. Both projects claimed to position themselves outside the logic of capitalist production and economics, as they were based on the concept of non-work in conjunction with a community-building character.²⁵⁸ Condensed in the notion of ‘freed time’, therefore, was the hope to liberate time from its economic exploitation – either in terms of ‘paid labour’ or ‘leisure time’, which too is inextricably intertwined with the capitalist assumption of the need to rest in order to resume to work. Further, the association aimed to re-define community along this liberated understanding of time, in which “social encounters [would] no longer [be] regulated by the rhythm of the work cycle and contest the notion of an ‘experience as product’ within post-industrial societies.”²⁵⁹ However,

²⁵⁵ See fig. 28, as quoted in Lauren Rotenberg, “The Prospects of ‘Freed’ Time: Pierre Huyghe and L’Association des temps libérés,” *Public Art Dialogue* 2013, 3(2): 186.

²⁵⁶ cf. Rotenberg, “The Prospects of ‘Freed’ Time,” 186; Le Consortium, *Moral Maze*, June 22 – August 12, 1995, <https://www.leconsortium.fr/en/moral-maze>. Other artists featured in this exhibition were Lothar Hempel, Paul Ramirez-Jonas, and Xavier Veilhan.

²⁵⁷ Rotenberg, “The Prospects of ‘Freed’ Time,” 187.

²⁵⁸ cf. Rotenberg, “The Prospects of ‘Freed’ Time,” 187–188.

²⁵⁹ Rotenberg, “The Prospects of ‘Freed’ Time,” 188.

both projects fundamentally failed – *The House or Home?* was never realized and in *Temporary School*, the artists that came to teach were actually paid, therefore not qualifying to the self-imposed claim to “segregate their activities from economic capture.”²⁶⁰

While Trouvé claims that her *B.I.A.* was born as a project, both melancholy and bold,²⁶¹ Huyghe’s *L’Association* was conceived of as utopian from the start. However, I will argue that both projects aim to “construc[t] an alternative time, [...] wherein the artists model,” what Rotenberg calls, “a *utopian temporality* – a time outside of capitalist measured and productive time in which the artists stage the use of liberated time in projects that self-reflexively reveal the impossibility of time ‘freed’ from capitalism.”²⁶¹

There are several instances in which Huyghe’s and Trouvé’s thoughts on such a *utopian temporality* of ‘freed time’ coalesce: Huyghe, quite similar to Trouvé, believes in the radical potential of freed time as “‘a time of reflection and self-construction’,” that further serves to “function as negative interruptions of capitalist instrumentality from within its very conditions.”²⁶² There is a very active dimension to subjectivity articulated here, one which Huyghe positions through his projects as a collaborative and socially engaged process. In a personal interview with Rotenberg, Huyghe emphasised this point: “You must do something, you must construct yourself through an activity.”²⁶³

For Trouvé, too, the cohesion of ‘activity’ and ‘subjectivity’ occupies a central place in the *B.I.A.* However, she catalyses the idea of ‘freed time’ primarily through the notion of unproductivity, that seems to run counter to this active involvement of the subject constructing itself through an activity at first. But rather than engaging with unproductivity as a means of idleness, passivity or non-work, Trouvé does so in the account of numerous failed activities, but activities nonetheless. The temporality at stake in the *B.I.A.* is thus a time that is mobilised through an activity that does not produce a ‘productive’ result. According to the artist, such time is therefore considered as *lost* – i.e. not registered – in the chronological measurements of time. It is here that unproductivity finds its paradoxical realisation in Trouvé’s relentless pursuit of professional recognition and artistic production.

But, as I have argued, Trouvé’s ongoing efforts cannot be said to stand outside the ‘capitalist measured and productive time’ in that sense. Rather, they are dialectically presented as a continuation of the capitalist impulse to increase production, while at the same time attempting to

²⁶⁰ cf. Rotenberg, “The Prospects of ‘Freed’ Time,” 194.

²⁶¹ Rotenberg, “The Prospects of ‘Freed’ Time,” 189.

²⁶² Huyghe as quoted in Rotenberg, “The Prospects of ‘Freed’ Time,” 189.

²⁶³ Huyghe as quoted in Rotenberg, “The Prospects of ‘Freed’ Time,” 189.

subvert this logic through her notion of the unproductive. As Marina Vishmidt and Melanie Gilligan describe in their contribution to the exhibition catalogue *and Materials and Money and Crisis* (2013), the current state of contemporary subjectivity under capitalism is determined by the very fact that it is always in motion, constantly producing and reproducing new commodified forms of exchange. Whereas in industrial society the growth of production was evoked by collective production (e.g. division of labour in factories), in post-Fordist societies the growth of the productive power is individualised and subsequently secured by constant competition and regimentation by the disciplinary society.²⁶⁴ Although Huyghe works with a similar understanding of unproductivity, registering it as an activity that is not recognised as productive in the eyes of a capitalist imperative, he mobilises this idea differently, politicising it as a counter-movement to 'work', 'rest' and 'leisure', and more attuned to a rethinking of the concepts of 'laziness' and 'non-work'.²⁶⁵ For Trouvé, these categories appear to seem secondary. Materialised in form of her CVs, ID-documents and application letters, her own articulations of subjectivity still reside within the economic process of labour, production and its disciplinary structures, but in a way in which she renders both spheres indistinguishable. Her articulations of unproductivity, then, are more about the blank spaces that unrecognised labour occupies in artistic production, because her activities, taken for themselves, don't produce a result that can be reintegrated into the cycle of economic production. But it is through her meticulous registration of all these activities that Trouvé shows which of them usually fall outside the grid. As Paolo Virno points out, in the post-Fordist condition of contemporary life, "the qualitative difference between labor time and non-labor time falls short."²⁶⁶ What I have formerly described as implicit labour – and brought into proximity with La Berge's term of decommodified labour – can be just as well described with Paolo Virno's term *hidden labour*: "Hidden labor is, in the first place, non-remunerated life, that is to say the part of human activity which, alike in every aspect of the activity of labor, is not, however, calculated as a productive force."²⁶⁷ The *B.I.A.* can be read as a reflection of that assertion, since Trouvé recycles and re-commodifies every implicit activity her *Modules* account for as the very examples for her artistic labour as non-remunerated life. Making this labour visible *as art*, therefore aims to (re-)inscribe it with value.

In this sense, Huyghe is not so much interested in 'freeing time by recovering it', as Trouvé claims, but rather in freeing time by creating and mobilising it as an alternative model to the capitalist subsumption of the subject. Perhaps it can be concluded that Huyghe's aim is more to

²⁶⁴ cf. Melanie Gilligan and Marina Vishmidt, "Ökonomische Subjektivitäten in der Krise," in: *and Materials and Money and Crisis*, ed. by Richard Birkett and Sam Lewitt, Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (Cologne: Walther König, 2013), 103f.

²⁶⁵ Rotenberg, "The Prospects of 'Freed' Time," 196.

²⁶⁶ Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 102.

²⁶⁷ Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 103.

change the very premises that condition the subject, while Trouvé's is more to unearth what's already there, but buried in the constrained logic of efficiency and capitalizable gain. As Trouvé says so herself, one of her main goals in the workings of the *B.I.A.* "is to conserve what is produced by some of these experiences: feelings, for example, whether related glorious experiences involving success, or else painful ones associated with failure."²⁶⁸ By giving these feelings room for recognition, Trouvé doesn't necessarily try to take a position outside these economic dimensions that encompass time, but rather shifts their implications from within the subject position. It is therefore not surprising that the main component of Huyghe's *L'Association*, which distinguishes it from Trouvé's *B.I.A.* the most, is its strong social and community-driven component. While Huyghe was primarily interested in creating projects that critically engage and activate a certain sociality, Trouvé's *Bureau* constantly draws on the autobiographical and introspective as its primary source of activity.

"How does the time we spend waiting construct us, what does it construct, and what elements of that time and that construction are we able to grasp?,"²⁶⁹ Trouvé therefore asks. The answer to that question is as difficult to pin down to any concrete form as is the unfolding of the implicit in her project. It may even be the question that captures the logic of the implicit the best. Her *Waiting Module*, specifically, draws on a materiality that evades any concretisation, as its main aesthetic compound is sound – during the time of the exhibition, the *Module* emits a kind of muzak, made from recordings that Trouvé acquired in many periods of waiting, that were then sampled and edited by a musician. Here, as much as in the other *Modules*, time and the traces it leaves in the subject appear in the liminal spaces that the *B.I.A.* stretches out: They are discernible from the changing features of the many Tatiana Trouvé's collected in the form of ID pictures at the base of the *Administrative Module*; it takes on a performative gesture in the secrets and lies whispered into balloons and cast in concrete (*'Secrets and Lies', Archives Module*); and it generally grows in size through the continuous accumulation of strata as the *B.I.A.* is an ongoing project.

The crux of the *B.I.A.* as an articulation of a *utopian temporality*, is that it introduces a temporality that is inherently ambiguous – one of the key features, next to fiction, that make up utopian practices according to Rotenberg.²⁷⁰ This ambiguity comes into play in the paradoxical emphasis that Trouvé places on the fact that her documents ultimately produced nothing, while, in fact, they produced the *B.I.A.* as their containing structure. Maraniello observes in that respect, that these different temporalities at stake effectively delude the confined borders of the *B.I.A.* as

²⁶⁸ Trouvé, "A Body Without a Face," 122.

²⁶⁹ Trouvé, "A Body Without a Face," 121.

²⁷⁰ cf. Rotenberg, "The Prospects of 'Freed' Time," 193.

an artwork and shift the emphasis, yet again, on activity. He writes:

“Not a work of art then, but an activity, actions that mimic the organized mode of producing an enterprise, whilst revealing themselves to be unproductive, ineffective [...]. Activities that are ‘implicit’ because they have a generative character and because they were at work before organized into a ‘Bureau’, even (and above all) when they are not completed. [...] a *work* that has always already happened.”²⁷¹

Referring to the previous chapter, one must ultimately add to his last sentence: a work that will always continue to happen. In shifting the focus from ‘what’ is produced to ‘how’ it is produced through her visualisations of implicit labour, and asking what value is bestowed upon that labour, Trouvé partakes in this shift “from artwork to art-as-work,” in which “labour is no longer concealed and sublated in the commodity fetish, but is itself foregrounded as a commodity [...].”²⁷²

Thus, when Trouvé says that working on her *B.I.A.* ‘was perhaps simply allowing myself to spend 10 years on it, and to help those years pass by,’ she utilises her *B.I.A.* to give an aesthetic form to these ‘excesses of time’. Trouvé therein installs a suspended present; an “infinite present – a present that was always already there, and can be prolonged into the indefinite future.”²⁷³ Its utopian potential lies in its claim that these times will never be actually ‘lost’, no matter how ‘stuck’ we are in the present. As Berlant emphasis in her notion of the impasse:

“In a cul-de-sac one keeps moving, but one moves paradoxically, in the same space. [...] [I]n the unbound temporality of the stretch of time, it marks a delay that demands activity. The activity can produce impacts and events, but one does not know where they are leading. That delay enables us to develop gestures of composure, of mannerly transaction, of being-with in the world as well as of rejection, refusal, detachment, psychosis, and all kinds of radical negation.”²⁷⁴

It is here, at this formulation of the impasse, that Trouvé’s project can be said to negotiate the agency one has under the regiment of post-Fordist economy, in which ‘free time’ itself becomes an utopia that is hardly maintainable. As the several theories of labour discussed so far point out: there is no such thing as ‘unproductive time’ that can be said to be positioned outside the capitalist measure of time and labour. Despite all her rhetoric to ‘free’ or ‘recover’ time, Trouvé in fact demonstrates “the impossibility of time ‘freed’ from capitalism” that Rotenberg detects in the project of Huyghe.²⁷⁵ Neither her articulations of subjectivity – whether her own or that of the viewer,

²⁷¹ Maraniello, *Polders*, 28. Emphasis added by the author.

²⁷² Sven Lütticken (ed.), *Art and Autonomy: A Critical Reader*, After All Books (Cologne: Walther König, 2022), 242.

²⁷³ Groys, “Comrades of Time,” 7.

²⁷⁴ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 199.

²⁷⁵ Rotenberg, “The Prospects of ‘Freed’ Time,” 189.

encompassed by the structure of the *B.I.A.* – find a way outside this grid. And perhaps more ironically than self-reflexively, the impossibility to really ‘free time’ from its economic capture is proven by the fact that her collection of failures and allegedly unproductive efforts resulted in the project that ultimately helped her gain international recognition as an artist.

But hopeful nonetheless, Trouvé chooses to seek out the little holes and blank spaces from within, to occupy the gaps such restrictive structures produces despite its own will – and reveals its fissures and contradictions. She mobilises a time that is deemed unproductive, yet insists that it remains so. She illustrates the restraints of a system that produces subjectivities, but utilises its formalised sign language as a tool for speculation. She addresses the hostility of the institution of art by means of its bureaucratised structure and maps out a potentiality that becomes her field of action – not quite against the institution, but as a showcase of the disciplinary structures that define the institution. “If the institution is reproduced in microcosm in every act of artistic authorship,” as Vishmidt points out, Trouvé’s *Bureau of Implicit Activities* does so in order to address the double bind situation that conditions the institution of art: in which the artist’s subjectivity is simultaneously constituted and erased through the very notions of artistic labour.

4. Conclusion

I have begun and ended this thesis with a question: Can Tatiana Trouvé's *Bureau of Implicit Activities* be read as an aesthetic manifestation of an utopian counter-programme to the economic capture of time, labour and subjectivity, or does it succumb to a 'second appearance', as the continuation of the always-work-imperative from which escape appears uncertain, if not impossible?

Even after 100 pages of looking at her work from every angle, her notions of the unproductive, in this context, remain ambiguous. While she stages her implicit activities as hidden labour that she visualises and helps to recognition by means of her *Bureau*, she simultaneously critiques and affirms the demand for productivity, the obligation to work, that is placed on artists as much as on every other precarious worker. There is always another job to which one could apply, a different identity one could assume, and another futile activity that could be, with a bit of artistic wit and intervention, turned into a project that leads to the road of success. It appears that from every failure, doubt, and unproductive moment of waiting, Trouvé draws something meaningful and turns the negative into its positive. That is not say, that her project lacks of criticality. There is an indisputable appeal in which she reclaims "the space between pleasure and necessity" and practices the "tactics of 'living in adversity'," to quote a phrase that is attributed to Hélio Oitica.²⁷⁶ She holds her head up high and regains agency in the matrix of economic pressure and institutional constraints, by metaphorizing these exact restraints through her use of fiction and the potential. She makes out the little niches such institutions produce almost in spite of themselves and uses them to her advantage. Indebted to the act of *bricolage*, she plays with these tensions.²⁷⁷ In this sense, her artistic labour might be better described as 'work', "as a broader category of transformative doing and making."²⁷⁸

I will illustrate this shift in perspective by way of one last example: In 1976, the Croatian artist Mladen Stilinović (1946–2016), an avid reader of Karl Marx, Jacques Derrida and Herbert Marcuse, wrote with red paint on paper: *Work Cannot not Exist* (1976) (fig. 29). Here, Stilinović engages in both a semantic negation (the double negative of 'cannot not') as well as a semiotic negation (the gesture of erasing the sentence when putting an 'x' over it), thereby producing a double: "Stilinović writes: work cannot not exist, meaning work can exist, does exist, *must* exist, and then that work must also not exist, a simultaneous rejection and admission of work's existence

²⁷⁶ Dezeuze, "Assemblage, Bricolage, and the Practice of Everyday Life," 37.

²⁷⁷ cf. Dezeuze, "Assemblage, Bricolage, and the Practice of Everyday Life," 37.

²⁷⁸ Deirdre M. Smith, "The Artist Works," 907. For a similar broad definition of 'work', see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, second edition (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]).

and necessity.”²⁷⁹

As Deirdre M. Smith makes clear in her essay “The Artist Works: An Imperfective Reading of Mladen Stilinović’s *Artist at Work*” (2021), specifically Western critics tended to interpret and praise Stilinović’s art as a refusal to work, as a consequent engagement in laziness and non-participation in capitalist society, and as a concept that he elevated as the prerequisite to any art making.²⁸⁰ But this and other works that include a similar deconstruction of the concept of ‘work’, point to a far more nuanced understanding in which non-productivity is not necessarily non-activity, and rarely ever is non-production. Rather than viewing this blurring between non-work time and work time as a fatalistic acceptance of the determinism imposed by late-capitalism, Smith argues that Stilinović actively exploits this lack of conceptual clarity: If laziness as non-work is meant to be the opposite of work, yet the dividing line between work and non-work becomes increasingly blurred, then laziness itself can, paradoxically, transform into a form of work.²⁸¹ His piece *Artist at Work* (1978) (fig. 30), which features a series of photographs of Stilinović lying, fully dressed, in his bed, need to be read in that sense. Stilinović’s notions of laziness, therefore, are much closer to Oitica’s neologism of *creleisure*, that aims to liberate a fatalistic understanding of work as continuously consumed by capitalism.²⁸²

Trouvé’s unproductivity, in a similar sense, can neither be equated with a refusal of work, for even in her self-claimed unproductivity, she produces endlessly. Her *B.I.A.* cannot be freed from this compulsion and maybe, this is not even the point the artist is trying to make. Perhaps more attune to Herbert Marcuse’s ontological understanding of ‘work’, the *B.I.A.* recognises itself as “a kind of performative ontics, a coming-into-being through working or doing,” which is an ontological understanding of work that reveals “an obligation to produce, including the production of the self, as an inescapable oppression that is necessary to human life.”²⁸³ And isn’t it precisely that production of the self what Trouvé is trying to uncover in every aspect – either through the administrative apparatus, through the archive or within moments of waiting?

Yet, the doubts I have about the *B.I.A.*’s critical scope might be situated in her distinctly aesthetic but also deeply poetic approach to these tensions, which seems to soften the sharpness of what might otherwise position her project more clearly on the side of a pronounced critique. Arguing with Vishmidt, such a criticality would necessarily entail the development of “a mode for

²⁷⁹ Deirdre M. Smith, “The Artist Works,” 908f.

²⁸⁰ cf. Smith, “The Artist Works,” 903. See Mladen Stilinović, “Praise of Laziness,” published on the webpage of the artist’s estate, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://mladenstilinovic.com/works/10-2/>.

²⁸¹ cf. Smith, “The Artist Works,” 907–914.

²⁸² cf. Jonatan Habib Engqvist, “Just as Money is Paper, the Gallery is a Room,” published on the webpage of the artist’s estate, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://mladenstilinovic.com/works/8-2/>

²⁸³ Smith, “The Artist Works,” 916.

critique that is not only aware of or dedicated to creating awareness of these (infrastructural) conditions [...] but a critique that makes cuts and lets in air, a critique that takes it upon itself to find or make the holes through which this infrastructure comes into view.”²⁸⁴ But instead of cutting transversally through the institutions of the art sphere that perpetually reproduces the precarious working conditions with which she has identified herself, Trouvé, as it were, gesturally cuts them out of her letters of refusal. Through this, she inevitably manifests her position within these relations of production: both as an applicant as well as a supplicant to the institution of art. For her, the gallery is not just a room, to quote Stilinović once more,²⁸⁵ but a necessary set of relations to which she clings in order to define herself, legitimately, as an artist. What is at stake in her *Bureau* is not only ‘work’, as defined earlier, but also ‘labour’ as the broader social organisation of work. It seems to me that a critical engagement with the latter is diluted in favour of a more poetic articulation of the former. While it might be true that her *Administrative Module* particularly creates an awareness of these infrastructures of institutionalism and precariousness, I am yet undecided whether Trouvé follows Vishmidt’s second modality of critique in every sense of her activist writing as a theorist.

My question, therefore, needs to be answered in a similar undecisive way: Tatiana Trouvé’s *Bureau of Implicit Activities* is utopian, yes – because it articulates itself as a gesture that positions unproductivity as a vital resource to reclaim one’s agency, to maintain footing, in the unfoldment of this world. But it is also an acceptance that time cannot be inherently freed from its economic capture. The obligation to work, especially for an artist, therefore appears as both: inevitable, but also self-forming.

²⁸⁴ Vishmidt, “‘A Self-Relating Negativity’,” 15.

²⁸⁵ cf. Stilinović, “Praise of Laziness.”

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