

UNWORK UNTIL YOU'RE FIRED

In *Be Your Own Boss!*, Kiah Reading explores performance and its different connotations. He clearly delves into performance art, but also into “performance appraisals” and “productivity performance reviews”. Performance as in how much capital —creative, symbolic, informational, social— can you deliver as a human body when put under very specific and strict conditions devised to boost productivity [\$].

Reading uses the corporate presentation format and imagery to make his point. The easily identifiable visual language of aspirational 9-to-5 normalcy, alleged affluence, and tucked-in shirt modesty that overcrowds urban advertising and dreams of financial stability. Office yoga, business casual, team spirit and collaborative competition are a few of the neoliberal clichés depicted in Reading’s visual support: a Powerpoint directs this bureaucratic logic into the art world to form a sort of critique, if not more of a TM presentation enlisting a series of artworks that he’s culled and modeled from his personal experiences as an immaterial worker. He re-forecast: What will be of the hyper-professionalized, highly indebted artists once they’re set free on a very limited and unregulated job market?

Embodying a very eerie type of enthusiasm, Reading walks us through the whole process: when the cubicle becomes the atelier, the conference room turns into the gallery; even when the private business school becomes a disembodied artist collective —much like when corporations turn into people for the profit of politicians. If the ultimate goal is to access the “labor camp”, and if many artists are on the path to become glorified content churners; it could be said that having “time to think” is essentially a type of wealth. That having time to be creative and think outside of the interests of capital and corporations is a refuge exclusively available to the kids of the 1%.

At the core of this is a particular type of contemporary existence, in which our every gesture is instrumentalized and capitalized —the only alternative being FOMO [fear of missing out] by withdrawing from the cacophony of discussions going on in social media—, there’s a ceaseless demand of performativity and labor. These protocols require a level of role-playing —physical performance— and unquestioned adherence to the axiom of the properly suited and groomed, highly-educated, middle-class-aspiring individual, even as the middle-class and education system collapse all around us.

This adherence, as Reading’s presentation makes evident, is achieved in part by the constant indoctrinating happening through ultra-normative advertisement. In the streets of Barranco — Lima’s arty, almost completely gentrified neighborhood—, huge billboards ask “Tell me where you work, and I’ll tell you who you are”; in any given city, really, they’re telling us to “work where you love, love where you work”. But what if we were to hate where we work, what if after all of this capitalist conditioning, we would still prefer to sabotage labor, to “unwork until we’re fired” like Valerie Solanas suggested; is there really an alternative?

When Reading asks us to delay our Skype call, to “let it ring” and to also “let it ring a little bit longer, each time”; he’s essentially asking that we unwork, that we allow dead time, moments of no-productivity. We probably can’t steal actual capital without consequence, but perhaps we can get away with wasted meditative time, maybe it feels as good as money stolen. But is dead time at the office truly anti-capital? Or is it already calculated into corporations’ annual loss estimates, like Wal-Mart’s petty theft budget; or Big Pharma’s yearly allocated lawsuit allowance? Is stealing with dead time as [un]effective against capital as tweeting on #ResistCapitalism day?

Reading leaves those questions unanswered, perhaps for the best; humans are a hopeful species, and he does end his presentation on a hopeful note. *Dj Business No Pleasure*, is a short Dj-Set in which Reading still in his business casual, dances around the audience to a series of simple digital almost-melodies, sounding a lot like phone ringtones. At last, we contemplate the human body in its unbounded potential, beyond laptops and hands-free telecommunication devices. The true Human Body is finally present to remind us of what was missing before, when it was merely a metaphor for disposable labor and capital.

—GABY CEPEDA, 2016.