

Introduction

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Art for UBI (manifesto) was born as an international platform of artists and activists who came together in winter 2019–2020 around the topics of income, social justice and economic sustainability. Those were the months of the first lockdowns in China, Italy, Europe and soon all over the world. At that time, the *Institute of Radical Imagination*, as an international coalition active in the field of commoning of artistic practices, launched an online self-training space called the *School of Mutation*. In this open school, various discussions and research lines—iterations—began to arise, involving intellectuals, activists, artists, researchers and scholars of various origins and backgrounds.

Art for UBI is one of those iterations, which soon took the form of a political platform, participated by collectives and individuals from several European and non-European countries. The collectives and the individual participants who joined in the *Art for UBI (manifesto)* had different approaches: some brought precise demands addressed to government policies in their countries, some focused on art sector unions, some focused on self-organization of alternative and autonomous economic spaces based on the refusal of work and mutualism. Among them there were precarious artists, cultural managers and operators with very heterogeneous income.

The collective discussion led to a common proposal: the time has come for a transnational positioning of the art workers world to strongly demand a universal and unconditional income for society as a whole.

Many of the collectives to which we belong, come from years of mobilization and activism on this ground, and we are well aware of the richness of art workers struggles, artistic coalitions, guilds, trade unions and militant art, and has its roots in history for generations.

In the discussions of *Art for UBI (manifesto)* we believe two important dimensions emerged: on the one hand, the point

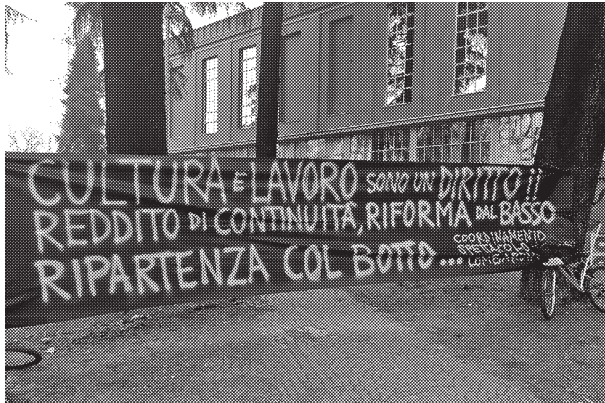
of view of art, of artists as workers, of art as production of content and imagery; on the other hand, the role that art has in the transformation of the labor market, housing, economy and social conflicts.

We have been discussing for years the relationship between art and work, between the value of the artist as an author and the collectives' shared artistic paths, between the processes of financialization of the art work in the big events market or in collecting, and the diverse and numerous practices based on cooperation, care and self-management.

What seems relevant to us is a growing awareness of the role that art and culture play within the financial market and in the transformation of the labor market in general. The artistic community, at times more sensitive—and therefore freer, yet less exposed to capture mechanisms—has constituted a resistance to the dominant social model and to the norm it conveys both in the symbolic production and in the lifestyles, while at the same time being an ongoing laboratory to imagine and invent alternative ways of life and production. Now, more and more it is a common understanding that terms such as art, creativity, innovation have played a decisive role in the transition from the agricultural and industrial, to the so-called post-Fordist economies. Work precariousness has grown hand in hand with the multiplication of professional roles and the propensity for multitasking typical of the creative industries. The symbolic and reputational capital increased by artistic and creative experimentation has played an important role in the financialization of real estate markets in the great global metropolises. Concepts such as city-factory, social factory, bio-capitalism, effectively describe this transition: the production of content and material goods is increasingly disseminated in processes of social cooperation where the assembly line and the interdependence of repro-

ductive forces increasingly coincide in indefinitely with the times of life of the whole society.

After a year of discussion within the *School of Mutation*, the *Art for UBI* platform decided to draw up a programmatic manifesto.



Milan, 2021

The *Art for UBI (manifesto)* opens with declaring that the art world demands a universal and unconditional income for all, refusing to invest in corporatist and identitary logics. Art workers no longer ask for category bonuses, privilege rents, or preferential treatments based on the exceptionality of the artistic work, but are fighting for universal social justice. Basic income is first of all a measure that frees up time, and emancipates the worker from the blackmail of exploitation. As David Graeber said, basic income allows us to say “NO” to shit jobs.

Universal income is no welfare or work-conditioned measure, it breaks the logic of unemployment benefits, it is not a measure for those who are waiting to get a job. It is instead the recognition of the value produced by the social cooperation already in place. It is the recognition of a change of phase: after years and years of precarisation process, working conditions



Venice, 2021

have deeply degraded and wage labor is no longer able to distribute enough wealth and purchasing power. Those are the reasons why we need a new form of distribution of liquidity.

Let's face it: the rulers themselves have realized they have reached a threshold of unsustainability. Yet the way they react is schizophrenic and always based in response to the emergency. That's how the 2008 financial crisis was faced, and it has become even more evident during the recent Sars-Covid19 health crisis. Governments have reacted to the effects of the wage crisis with buffer measures, issuing bonuses and grants, reimbursements and cash-backs, job category by job category. All measures that step by step have tried to avoid social revolt which could have arisen from the explosive economic situation faced with falling wages, higher and higher cost of living, and rampant rising unemployment levels. Thus transforming welfare into a bureaucratic jungle of implemented exceptional micro-measures.

From the art worker's perspective we know too well how much our time is now vampirized by project writing, and heavy bureaucracy, where most of our energies are used to

demonstrate again and again that our production is useful to society. Mountains of bureaucracy and a huge waste of time, only to demonstrate what is already evident to everyone: whoever takes care of society and its reproduction produces great value, the most essential value, and for this very reason an income in liquidity must be distributed alongside a universal access to essential services.

Art for UBI (manifesto) is also explicitly linking the history of the refusal of work to the transfeminist, decolonial and ecological perspectives. The manifesto recognizes a fundamental point of inheritance in the history of feminism. In particular of Marxist feminism that has firmly indicated the exploitation and invisibility of the reproductive workforce as the architrave on which capitalism is based. In this last phase of late capitalism, this balance of power is increasingly evident. Profit is accumulated not only in the exploitation of wage labor, but to a large extent, by not recognizing and invisibilizing care work. Precisely on this lack of recognition of care work that an unconditional universal income must leverage to arm with conceptual legitimacy a post-labor distribution of liquidity.

From the decolonial perspective, the manifesto emphasizes that the precariousness of the labor market is increasingly racializing within the economically stronger states, while the most tiring, poorly paid, and degrading tasks are being outsourced to the global market, concentrating them in those countries that once were their colonies. The universal distribution of income would allow first of all to indistinctly recognize the right to a worthy life for all.

Finally, the ecological perspective. If basic income breaks the chains of degrading work blackmail, it also offers the possibility of breaking blackmail by our present way of production that exploits the planet. UBI answers one of the political questions that has strongly extended through the twentieth century:

the blackmail between health and work. For a little salary the working class has been constantly forced to get poisoned and to poison the planet. We believe that UBI can inaugurate the process of liberation from this model of progress and production. It allows us to reply to the claim that has dominated the political arena from the 1980s onwards: there is no alternative.

The ecological criticism can open a further perspective to overcome the Capitalocene. Just as universal and unconditional income is based on the recognition of the value produced by human reproductive labor and social cooperation, it is urgent to extend this recognition also to non-human reproduction. The planet as an ecosystem, and the living environment of the biosphere continue to reproduce resources whose fundamental value should be recognized rather than going on relating to them in an extractive way. As much as we want to break the chains of wage exploitation among humans proposing a distribution of wealth as recognition of reproductive alliances and interdependencies, we should also break the chains of the exploitation of the planet's resources labor introducing a culture of interspecies or pluriversal recognition. Listening and recognizing how other agencies—non-human actors—work daily in symbiosis to maintain and reproduce the biosphere.

This allows us to introduce the index of this book, which we thought of in the form of cartography. A political cartography that is able to break the chains of exploitation through a cosmogony that proposes other cardinal points, other reference stars.

In their *Progetto d'un Manifesto* (1941), Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi, anti-fascists in exile on the Tyrrhenian Island of Ventotene, mention the income of existence as one of the conditions for a free and united Europe.

Human solidarity turned towards those who succumb in the economic battle ought not, therefore, be shown with the same

humiliating forms of charity that produce the very same evils it vainly attempts to remedy. Rather it must take a series of measures which unconditionally guarantee a decent standard of living for everyone, without lessening the stimulus to work and to save. In this situation, no one would any longer be forced by misery to accept unfair work contracts.

The clamors and horrors of the Second World War did not succeed in silencing this “confined” voice that would become, in the following decades, a reference point for those who fight against nationalism and against the wars fought in the name of sovereignty and imperialism.

Eighty-one years later, the interventions inspired by our much more modest *Art for UBI (manifesto)* reactivated, albeit in a semi-conscious form, the link between universal income and the critique of national sovereignty.

Gabriela Cabaña and Julio Linares in their essay in this volume articulate against the capitalist apparatus of nation-state and private banks that, beating the drum of war and debt, impose the present model of money and monetary policies. They maintain today more than ever UBI looks to a new internationalist project, in its nature even pluriversal, that is, capable of supporting through policies of commoning and solidarity the right to difference of self-governing communities.

Erik Bordelau argues the importance of unfolding liberation projects not only against finance, but also within and through finance; that is, to update the movements’ arsenal with tools capable of pushing the markets towards a liquidity crisis and, at the same time, realizing the potential of a radical cosmos-finance.

Like other contributions in this book, Bordelau’s is crossed by a speculative vein not naively utopian, open to fiction, and to the imagination of alternative presents and futures. We like to

think that the struggle around UBI (therefore also his theory) is a specific genre of that “poetry of the future” Marx hopes for when thinking of the revolution of his time. Not a financial exercise to forecast future scenarios, but one of radical imagination that offers itself, lives, and emerges in the struggles.

An interesting element that emerges from this collection is that, today, UBI grammars seem to be substantiated above all as an assembly of on the one side a radical criticism of the present as nationalist, capitalist and patriarchal; on the other side and imagination/performativity moving in the present towards the future. Turning to the history of art it is possible to identify an antecedent (albeit by no means immediate) of this political-aesthetic linkage. After Ventotene, we may look at another ‘island’ in times of war: *Cabaret Voltaire* in Zurich, founded in 1916 in the midst of the First World War. T.J. Demos argues that Dadaists geographical displacement in Switzerland is reflected in their poetic techniques of linguistic displacement, which gave rise to what the scholar defines as *beteroglossia*: a different language that had unlearning and abolition of the official language as its premise now unable to articulate itself outside the nationalist rhetoric.

Also today we see how the battle for a multi-universal basic income cannot be separated from the battle against the device of the sovereign nation-state. But Dada is also poetic of fortuity, the breakthrough of the ready-made, the overthrow and mockery of the patriarchal and warmongering accelerationism of (Italian) Futurism. In essence, it is a critique of the political economy of art, and of what today we would call the extractivism of modern capitalism. For example, Maurizio Lazzarato has identified in Duchamp the traits of a pioneering refusal of work, the same refusal that animates the mobilization for UBI with his request to unhook, once and for all, income from the work performance, and even more so in a moment in which

capitalism contradiction was made really visible—think of the pandemic—between the centrality of care labor and its lack of recognition by the neoliberal device.

UBI is radical imagination, yet the new worlds towards which it tends, do not derive from any reformist illusions and are not actualized in intentional communities. The micro-utopias, and the community experiments that artists and non-artists carry out, are not the horizon—upon which one comfortably rests with the alibi of capitalist realism. Rather, they are experiments of aesthetic-political subversion of capitalist abstraction, that is, of the general condition of the social relationship. Glimpses of UBI new worlds appear at the heart of prefiguration—another term summoned by the authors of this collection—which takes shape only in broadened social dynamics, in the unexpected, constituent and conflictual spaces opened up by the struggles for the commons.

In this sense, Ilenia Caleo and Kuba Szreder contributions bring us back to the materiality of the struggles and the centrality of the investigation. The terrain, according to Szreder, is that of the organization of the *projectariat*, that's to say that fragmented galaxy of art and cultural workers. The challenge for Szreder; is to move beyond the obsolete belief in the exceptional nature of artistic work, to overcome corporatism, and to promote mutualism and interdependence. Caleo moves from the theoretical perspective of a vital and feminist materialism to affirm that art is not an innocent field. Indeed, it is a space marked by sexist, patriarchal and neo-colonial logics. To defeat them, transfeminist struggles must intersect with decolonial and income struggles, overcoming the boundaries of identity politics.

How are mobilizations' achievements supported and substantiated? Emanuele Braga suggests the need to create what the movements define as “institutions of the common.” Through



Rome, 2021

his personal involvement at MACAO in Milan across ten years of struggles between financial crisis in 2008 and the health crisis in 2020, Braga constructs a genealogy of the action of social movements at the intersection of digital, creativity and finance, clarifying the terms of a dialectic that contrasts profit-extractivism dichotomy, with care-mutualism linkage.

Raising Care assembly contribution to this collection focuses on the theme of care defined as “*nothing intrinsically ‘natural’, nor ‘nice’ or ‘maternal’, rather it is about the struggles against the current necropolitical management of lives.*” Starting from here, the text proceeds with the proposal to combine the struggle for UBI with that for UBS (Universal Basic Services), that is, for essential welfare services such as housing, health care and education. Too often UBI and UBS are presented as alternatives, if not in opposition. Raising Care, on the other hand, invites us to unite them towards UPL, an Unconditional Planetary Livability, i.e. not linked to external evaluations or to the measurement of a performance, capable of keeping together UBI emphasis on self-determination, with the importance UBS puts on care for the social infrastructure, and this within a plan-

etary framework that takes into account the complexity of the web of life on the planet.

We started *Art for UBI* as a radical pedagogy project within the *School of Mutation*. Our self-educating online assembly was transformed into a political platform which led to the drafting of the manifesto. In the following months, in the Spring of 2021, the manifesto was publicly read in several cities by activists—during the Covid-19 pandemic occupations or demonstration actions—claiming art workers rights during the economic crisis. The manifesto appeared in the banners of the temporary occupation of great European theaters such as the Globe in Rome or the Piccolo Teatro in Milan, in ADL Cobas protest squares in Venice, or in the MK&G program in Hamburg. All this was possible because some of the collectives that had joined in the path such as MACAO, Campo Innocente, Sale Docks then reported these claims in their squares, occupations, agendas and local programs.



Naples, 2020

This allows us to introduce how we relate to militant research. To discuss, to invent new concepts, to let them set from a theoretical point of view is never disconnected from the social processes and the transformative tension the paths of struggle have.

Rather, we consider these plans as connected, the one follows the other, and in the spiral of history they feed at times in a progressive way, sometimes in a non-linear way.

In the history of Italian workerism, the concept of militant research owes its reference to that of *conresearch*, defined by Romano Alquati as the posture with which knowledge is made in the struggle, and in a continuous process of investigation among the oppressed. It is only by questioning the needs and points of view of oppressed subjectivities that research can be done, that a common knowledge can be built and configured. Not an ideology, but a mobile political consciousness that provides theoretical tools for conflict. Furthermore, this type of knowledge-with or situated knowledge of the struggle also has a performative value. It is a practice inserted in a historical tension, in a process of mutation, of transformation of the existing. In short, the concept of *conresearch* and militant research rejects a division of labor in which the intellectual interprets the historical process and indoctrinates the oppressed on how and why they should fight. Just as it does not propose the opposite: a struggle that does not need knowledge. On the contrary, rebellion is also done through distancing, it is done through the right to intermittence, through the claiming of spaces and times other than the time of work and exploitation. At this junction the *Institute of Radical Imagination* places the production of the work of art. The performance, the exhibition, the show, the image gain meaning within this militant research process. Indeed, militant research could not exist without art and without performance. We refuse to conceive of art as detached from the political process, in a purely ornamental function or as a luxury commodity. Instead, we think creating languages that know how to train, to transform, to affect our individual and collective perception is essential to promote effective paths for the struggles and build common knowledge.

That is why *Art for UBI (manifesto)* turned into a performance. We were looking for an artistic and performative form in which the enquiry carried out in the different territories would translate into the formalization of a staging open to political debate. The spark lit when Anna Rispoli—one of the artists who participated in our platform—told us she was invited to open the Vienna Theater Festival (*Wiener Festwochen*) and she was thinking of doing a performance on UBI. We immediately began to collaborate. Anna organized a survey on the perception of income in Austria. We collaborated under her direction in the drafting of the dramaturgy of the show with the title *Income the Unconditioned Speech*. After a few months, we proposed the same experience of performative research to the community of Madrid, and we staged another performance at the Reina Sofia Museum under the title *One Income, Many Worlds (Una Renta, Muchos Mundos)*. Here we publish the complete dramaturgy of the show staged in Madrid in September 2021.

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