

Two perspectives upon the economic equation of studio assistance (using a Victorian paper saving technique)

My experience with studio assistance had until May
been limited to 2 business interviews (that came once or
twice a week over the course of 2 months), short term
project related technicians and my friend Alison, who
has done fine hand sewing for me. Although definitely
in need of more and regular help in the studio, I have
never been able to bring myself to hire someone. The
reason being a mixture of not being able to pay them
properly, a lingering suspicion of the 'division of labour'
and according to my friend Gregor, 'middle class guilt'.
Also I prefer to work alone and find it hard to con-
tact with someone else around. The main issue
has always been that I live in my studio which is
basically one large room with a movable wall that
separates the sleeping area and a bathroom with walls
that don't quite reach the ceiling. Anyone working there
with us would inevitably become intimately acquainted
not only with my work, but also my private routines
and personal baggage. The whole person seemed the
walls. Richard had been in my place before, a few
years ago when I was away on holiday. I had hired
someone to build a book shelf and paint the walls
during my absence. It turned out Richard was the one
helping him with the job, which I didn't know, nor
knowing so I met him for the first time at the end
of May. I never saw him again.

Black clothes, calm voice, quiet presence, strong
frankness. Not in the sense of a harshness
but more like flashes of one's own past.
Richard was like the previous two guys that had
helped me a self-empowered art technician.
Working with them two techs, technicians like him
have been an ever-recurring of the London art scene
since the first Frize art fair in 2003 and the
subsequent influx of contemporary art galleries.
That event drew in £150 and they are usually
held at galleries during the installation and
exhibitions and art fair booths. Most of them
are artists or art students. Richard however
had studied history and philosophy, collected
sculpture and wrote.
I needed to repair an ill-fitted face shield, a
helmet that came from a few years da-
maged years ago. To make it work, it was
necessary to re-arrange my sculpture completely,
which I didn't pick up by myself. A bit over-
whelmed with the situation of making a
change in my studio flat going through my
carefully constructed mess, I fled and left
him alone to sort. Not out of panic but instant
frustration. However, when I came back I was very
pleased with what he had done and that I
didn't have to do it. A few weeks later when
a large project with a good budget came through,
a collaboration with a fashion house, I
asked him whether he wanted to work on
this together over the summer. Meanwhile

I had been looking at his Instagram,
full of empty streets, light fixtures and
strange reflections, a sort of urban alchemy
in between concrete and light that I
quite liked.
We started a routine which was quite difficult to
maintain where I would normally go out for
breakfast and lunch, we now had coffee and
a chat at the studio before we started to work
and I would buy or prepare some lunch. I have
around 2pm. This was something I had ex-
perienced before when living alone to do
something that I couldn't or didn't want
to do myself, I often end up cooking and
caring for them. Constantly making coffee
and when they are ok, exchanging labour
for reproductive labour, out of guilt maybe
or just the feeling that money as compensation
wasn't enough.
Richard was relatively quiet at the beginning, pottering
away at the other end of the studio, the "loading"
area" while I was working in the "homestead"
part of the studio closer to the kitchen and the
computer, making phone calls, taking care of things.
One day this changed over a conversation on
a recent political where he passionately argued an
angle that I hadn't anticipated. It dawned
he was heavily invested in a variety of con-
spiracy theories. Together with an earlier re-
mark of him being an anarchist and
dismissing the idea of anarchists as well.

as having a history in the London fashion industry made for interesting and sometimes confusing conversation. I couldn't quite categorize this particular mix of codes and interests and had to realize that I knew way less about his generation. (Outside the class of German art students I read) than I thought. Having pictures of the dire economic condition of our situation and social respect by the Ukrainian setting we quickly reached a point where we were talking about each others lives and covered a lot of ground within a few weeks from personal anxieties, obsessions and sexual diseases. I was a course actively aware of the social board of chairs situations like this present and simply surprised by my interest in him. I also found myself wondering whether personal elements of the situation may reflect that on this professional performance would alternate with feelings of anxiety that I was saying something to him from my ramblings and that of that.

On the whole it seems naive that he talked more than I did, and I think balanced the fact that the soundings of my life were place, give off so much information about myself. Also, it was almost like asking questions. I was personally interested to know how about the social system for the situation, and so I asked him about it and he talked

around as well as the music he was listening to. The project we were working on involved permanently fusing stacks of conference and other vintage stacking chairs using different techniques depending on the different designs. The stacks were then to be 'occupied' by puffed seats. The work was fiddly and progressed extremely slowly. Chairs needed to be taken apart, repaired and re-upholstered which we were constantly waiting for replacement parts. The technical difficulties reached a point one day where I thought we both to quit this project as it was taking too long in the given time frame. So last year, the day after what he later admitted was "technician's sweet talk" to calm my anxieties but by the evening it seemed all to collapse. I stayed surprisingly calm and actually felt sorry for him as he seemed genuinely that it was over as a deadline he refused to stay longer without charging. To see whether the problem could be solved and to cool down dinner.

Although I am enjoying having sound and one thing I rather don't or can't do, as well as generally getting more used to it, I am never feeling entirely at ease with it. I have never felt very comfortable asking. People for help and although now I am exchanging money for help this is not a great thing to do a day to day thing.

In fact I often forget about the pay-
ment aspect altogether, which I imagine
is the necessary base for any bearable
employment situation.

Early on this summer Richard and I discussed (over take-away lunch) how outsourcing all aspects of one's life is exactly the cause and symptom in the theater of late late capitalism etc. I asked him to collaborate on a contribution for this magazine as I knew he was interested in writing and had performed his texts for radio programmes. When I brought it up we talked animatedly about how strange a situation this was for both of us. Definitely not a neutral work environment nor a very professional relationship with both of us frequently pausing and reflecting on this obvious relation. As he knows mine so well now he mentioned that he wanted to advise me to see his house. It seems he lives only a few houses away from where I lived in 2002.