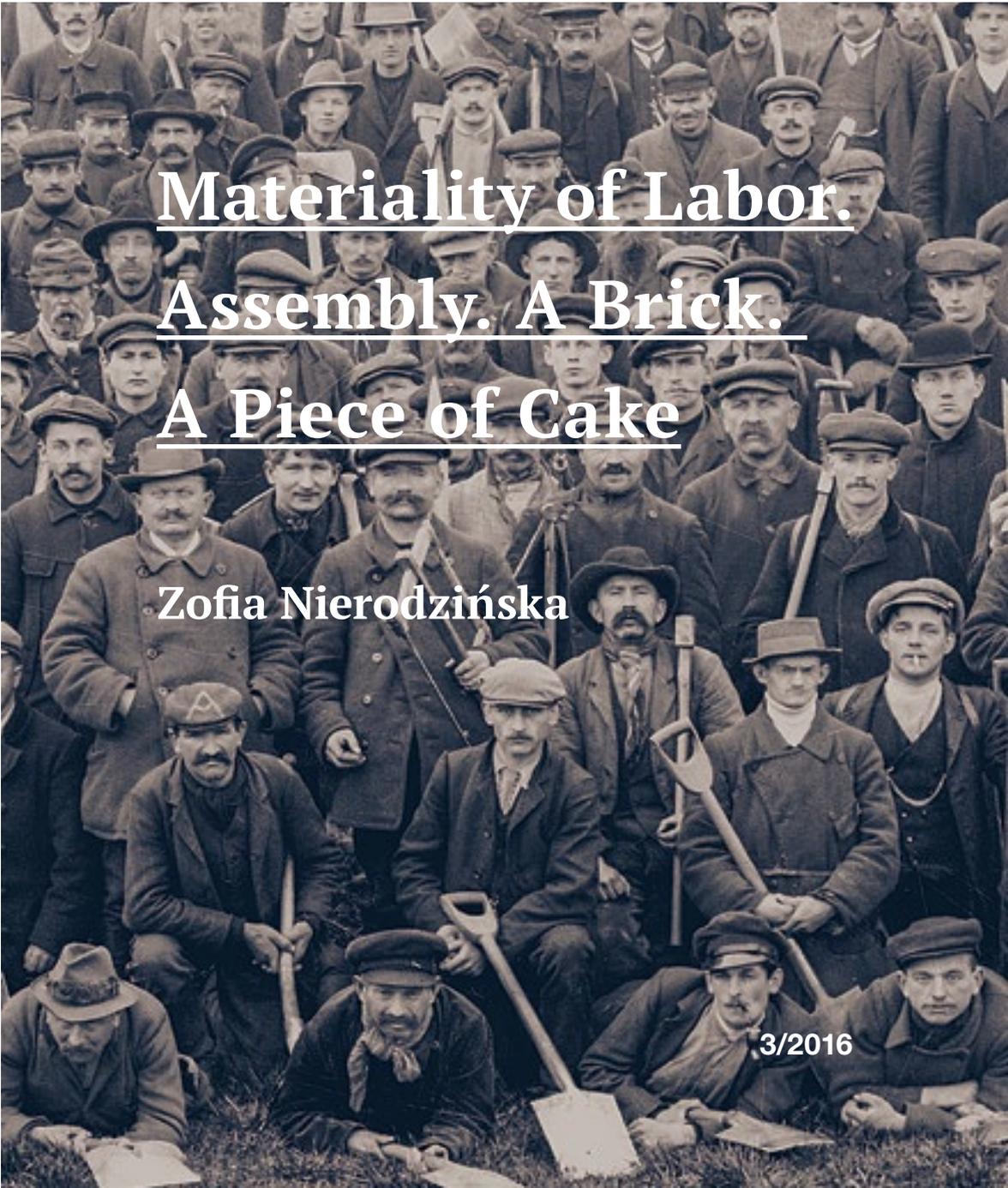


CzasKultury/English



Materiality of Labor.

Assembly. A Brick.

A Piece of Cake

Zofia Nierodzińska

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Materiality of Labor. Assembly. A Brick. A Piece of Cake¹

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Materiality of Labor. Value. Translation

Work as a physical quantity is immaterial and refers to the that is energy transferred between physical bodies, in electrical, thermodynamic and mechanical processes. Energy as work can materialize in the form of a commodity, such as three pieces of cake, one page of writing or four minutes of a presentation. The products of work are not subject to direct comparison as three pieces of cake and four minutes of a presentation have little in common except their value². The value can for instance be measuring the time that was devoted for making a given product as well as its suitability as a tool for making other objects. Both features can be empirically tested and estimated. A risk of unobjectivity appears when the value is regarded as an abstract quantity since, according

¹ Original title: *Materialität der Arbeit. Eine Assemblage. Ein Ziegel (ein Stück Kuchen)*. The article is a translation of an extract from the Master's thesis for the Kunst im Kontext at Universität der Künste in Berlin in the winter term of 2015/2016.

² The notion of value derives from the German language, from the words *Wert* and *Würde* which mean "dignity", "honour", "seriousness" or "worth" and "valuable". The Polish *PWN Dictionary* gives for instance the following meanings: "1. the material value of something; 2. a feature of something that is good in some respect", <http://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/wartosc:2534732.html> (25.03.2016).

to its definition, it is then immune to physical factors and paradigms of natural sciences. As an abstract idea, it is rather connected with the field of advanced mathematics, magic and economy represented for instance by money, also the virtual money or symbolic capital³, the latter being of particular importance in the case of the outcome of creative work.

In a patisserie, time is measured in money; the amount of work, the so-called *workload*, in the Kunst im Kontext Institute is measured in ECTS points. An amount of time costs €8.50 in a patisserie, while it equals 0.03 points at a university, which, given that a piece of cake costs €3 per piece, comes to 2,040 pieces of cake for the whole university program with two projects: a small and a big one, conceptual work, planning, performance, presentation and documentation. To sum up, when adding the above to the Master's Thesis the equation is thus: 3,600 hours, €30,600, 10,200 pieces of cake or 120 ECTS points.

Throughout the day three patisserie employees bake approximately a hundred cakes of different types. Provided every one of them works eight hours, then in a piece of cake there is 1.5 minutes of their time. Within an hour every baker makes about 33 cakes; yet he earns only 22 pieces, that is only slightly more than two whole cakes.

³ Symbolic capital is a term coined by Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, philosopher and anthropologist. It is described in *Raisons pratiques. Sur la théorie de l'action*, Paris 1996, p. 161. In the Polish translation e.g. in A. Matuchniak-Krasuska, *Zarys socjologii sztuki Pierre'a Bourdieu*, Warsaw 2010, p. 37–39. Symbolic capital is the most important of all capitals (economic, cultural, social, legal) distinguished by Bourdieu since it is superior towards the others. Power over symbolic capital might cause symbolic violence.

What happens to the remaining 31 cakes? A potential answer can be tracked down when using Karl Marx's terminology, in the notion of additional value (*Mehrwert*)⁴, which is accumulated by a capitalist; in this case the boss, in the form of the capital⁵ (minus the costs of rental and purchase of semi-finished products). For the sake of comparison, within an hour a student makes 0.03 ECTS point and produces no additional value; hence the whole collected capital belongs to them. Unfortunately, the symbolic capital is not widely used in the post-industrial world which means that the student cannot buy a piece of cake with it. What the student earns at the Universität der Künste along with their ECTS points is of a symbolic value, an abstract amount with no objective exchange rate.

A student does not earn money so they cannot afford to eat cake, and yet they are in a symbolically privileged position towards the baker whose financial situation is more stable. The student is protected by the symbolic capital which is always implemented in its virtuality. A bakery employee is "fulfilled" in the present tense as they work and earn real money (paper, sheets printed with use of steel engraving and circular alloys of copper and nickel).

⁴ The term of added value according to PWN dictionary entry: "in the Marxist meaning: a part of value of goods produced by paid employees claimed by capitalists" <http://sjp.pwn.pl/slowniki/wartosc%20dodatkowa.html> (25.03.2016); compare K. Marx, *Das Kapital*, Köln 2001, p. 210–211.

⁵ The term of capital according to PWN dictionary entry: "1. fixed assets and financial assets invested in production and profitable in default; 2. One's fortune in cash or securities; 3. A group of people who have this fortune at their disposal; 4. Intellectual or artistic heritage of an individual or a group that can use in the future, <http://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/kapital:2562821.html> (25.03.2016).

The actions of students of fine arts are an investment in the future, a performative study directed at a process and its implementation lies beyond the horizon of the present tense, at least until the moment the Master's thesis is submitted. Studying is related to hope and having a belief in the prophesy which says that the moment managers of the symbolic capital reach the peak of Mount Olympus is neigh.

Recipe

The recipe is understood here as a hint for commencing a willful act completed by manufacturing a product. The prevailing idea of drawing up a recipe originates from the assumption that specific human actions can be repeated regardless of cultural differences and personal values of the people performing them. Anyone is able to produce a successful Master's thesis "type C", shall we assume that they have access to the acclaimed means of production⁶.

The acclaimed symbolic means of production can be found in such institutions as a university, an academy, a museum, and/or an art gallery. The product-outcome that connects all singular recipes is a Master's thesis which, just like in an assembly process, puts together smaller pieces into one whole, here a book, a picture and a hand-drawn film.

⁶ The notion of means of production (German *Produktionsmittel*) is the key issue in the Marxist economy. The economic system of the country is defined there through a method of using the means and through which social class controls them.

Meta-recipe as a written comment in the form of assembly

Ingredients:

table of contents

introduction

recipes

instrumentarium

reading list

Preparation time:

520 hours

Degree of difficulty:

**

A successful Master's thesis begins with a table of contents, that is a division of the whole paper into its smaller parts. The table of contents contains headings accompanied by their precise location of the number on particular pages. The headings are supposed to logically bring the reader closer to the content of the paper and facilitate orientation. The table of contents should not exceed one page. The introduction (łac. *exordium*), in other words the first part of the rhetorical paper should be placed right before the main body of the Master's thesis so that the reader may painlessly indulge in the thinking process of the author. Being inspired by the art of confectionary and the medium of a cookbook, the introduction to my Master's thesis is a direct turn towards the readers. It contains the objective of

my theoretical and practical scientific work. It also defines the conditions necessary to be met for every Master's thesis type C to be considered type C and it also names (semi) finished products which are in the paper. In the chapter entitled *Recipes*, which is the main part of my work, describes ingredients, the degree of difficulty and tips for preparing and reproducing artistic and creative outcomes of the Master's thesis; that is the picture, the hand drawn film and the book. The practical part is followed by a reflective comment which sheds some light on the notions of the work and its assembly. At the end of the paper we name the *instrumentarium*, the tools and materials as well as the reading list.

The picture (*das Bild*)

Ingredients:

cotton textile (115 x 135 cm)

wooden slats (110 x 130 cm)

acrylic paint (cinnabar, cobalt, ultramarine, titanium white, umbra, ochre, burnt sienna)

tap water (firmness < 2)

Preparation time:

55 hours

Degree of difficulty:

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The picture, one of the three (semi) finished products of my Master's thesis is, apart from a presentation of a wedding

cake, a reflection of the time invested in it. This time was partially purchased from Anita Mikas in the number of 36 hours valued at 306 euro (8.50 per hour)⁷.

The finished picture is an assembly of our other outcome of work, including the means of production, such as cotton, acrylic paint, wooden slats and metal staples. Every single one of them contains an amount of human labor and the time for natural processes that created the picture (metal, wood, cotton, minerals, chemical compounds). After taking on the form which is recognized in terms of art, the picture is still subject to the activity of time which modifies its material shape and is hence a process rather than an artistic and creative (semi) finished product.

Time in the bakery is a product that can be exchanged for a paper banknote and four metal coins. It is of the round form and depending how you see it or not, it shrinks or gets longer. At an art university time can be both a product and a means of production; it takes on an unspecified form and can be exchanged for the European Credit Transfer System Credit Points which might imply that the enumeration earned when studying is practically a debt, money borrowed by an art student from... well from whom? A bakery employee? It would mean that art is not of an added-value but in fact that the student is short and this debt cannot be paid off with real work since its characteristic point is an abstract symbolic value. What gets accumulated during university years are negative points which are increasing

⁷ The hourly rate at the amount of 8.5 euros has been the minimum pay since 2015 for all individuals employed on the territory of Germany.

with the time invested in studying. 3,600 hours, 30,600 euros, 10,200 pieces of cake, 120 ECTS credit points. A completed Master's thesis would in this case constitute an accumulation of the debt whose payoff is virtually impossible and the only solution is its breaking in the form of more highly-valued points awarded to PhD students.

The hand drawn film (der Zeichenfilm)

Ingredients:

transparent paper 45 g/m² (that is 70 micrometer) thick
2 wooden rolls of 5 cm
7 pencils of various thickness – from 2H to 6B

Preparation time:

2,184 hours (three months)

Degree of difficulty:

*

The film is drawn with the use of time, which means that it shows three months, 2,184 hours, in the form of seven different graphite traces of the pencil on paper. The film contains the time of human labor and the time of natural processes and it is subject to its passing; it is no different from the picture described above as well as other temporary density of matter (objects) existing on earth.

Let's return to practicalities, that is to the film that is a five-centimeter-wide transparent parchment with stripes

of different shades of grey drawn with a pencil. Each shade corresponds to another category which was for three months dedicated to the creation of the Master's thesis at the Institute Kunst im Kontext in Berlin. The categories according to which I rationalized my own, usually informal, time are: sleep - pencil 6B; food-4B; artistic work (not necessarily related to economic exchange)-2B; contract work (paid employment)-B; transport-HB; free time-H; and others-2H.

Different degrees of firmness were assigned to particular categories by way of intension (connotation), hence sleep-night-darkness-soft pencil 6B, food, an activity related to maintaining life processes-materiality-body-4B, artistic work, also related to the body is by definition less alienating than paid employment and paid employment – respectively 2B and B, transport so relying on work of other human and non-human actants in the form of public transport – HB, free time, so the most difficult category to put into the timeframe – H pencil. The borders of categories, as it might have been predicted, were not subject to clear drawing, food intake usually took place at the same time as the transport category or it also took place during artistic work, sometimes also paid which, in turn, acted as inspiration for writing the Master's thesis in the form of a cookbook. Only sleep turned out to be a quite permanent timeframe, relatively easy to determine. Film-time-work is therefore, despite robust efforts to specialize in the form, rather an object of a nomadic character, a phenomenon of an unclear identity that might be sustained only with the power of concentrated contexts.

The hand drawn film was then wound on two 5-centimetre rolls made of maple wood so that it might be unwound manually under intermittent speed depending on users' preferences.

The book (*das Buch*)

Ingredients:

paper (100-gram, offset-cream, 17 sheets)
cover (linen, format DIN A5, vermilion 64)
photos and reproductions (p. 8-9, 11, 13, 19)

Preparation time:

108 hours

Degree of difficulty:

The book is the third artistic and creative (semi) finished product of my Master's thesis. At the same time it unites all the other products in the form of descriptions and reproductions. It is made up of 30 pages of writing and nine A5 photographs printed on the 100-gram offset cream paper in the CMYK color format and 300 dpi.

This form of publication that resembles a cookbook brings together two of my professions on the aesthetic level and connects them; that is a patisserie and a university. Thanks to this solution, it becomes a type of heterotopia, if we use the notion coined by Michele Foucault in March 1967 during

his lecture at the conference *Cercle d'Études Architecturales*, that is a place (*topos*) where “various incompatible spaces, emplacements are put together”⁸, where are different (*hetero*) principles of functioning than the ones accepted by a given society. In the heterotopia of the Master’s cooking paper work is an economic activity, while the identities deprived of their architectural frames (student-university, seller-patisserie) meet in the real space of the book.

The heterotopia of the space of the book goes hand in hand with Foucault’s principles only to a certain extent. For instance the system of opening and closing takes place differently than in the space mentioned by the French philosopher (i.e. the space of a prison, cinema, or a zoo). Master’s theses in the Kunst im Kontext Institute are for the first time presented as a part of the oral exam to the students and associate professors while outsiders are not welcome at that time, even for a small fee. The next step is a ritual of the end-of-the-year exhibition in the main building of Universität der Künste where the outcome of the artistic and creative work is shown as well as the theory printed out in A4 format. Theoretically, anyone can see the exhibition; in reality it is only for those who can be present between 10am and 7pm. After the official presentation, the theoretical product of the Master’s thesis is moved from the representative part of the building to a more modest (in terms of architecture) postgraduate section where it is locked behind a glass showcase in the university library on the third floor of the Kunst im Kontext Institute. The key to the showcase

⁸ M. Foucault, “Inne przestrzenie”, translated by A. Rejniak-Majewska, *Teksty Drugie* 6/2005, p. 117–125.

is then swallowed by Mr Doorman and gets dissolved in the stomach acid watered down with a cup of bitter Earl Grey tea. Shall you miss the exhibition, you won't be able to see the theoretical outcome of the Master's thesis for the next five years. Thereafter, publications are transferred from the glass showcase to an upper metal shelf in the library. What fate awaits the theses after the metal phase shall remain a secret of the Institute. In the top part of the library bookcase the number of publications remains the same.

Work. What is work?

Work encompasses the activities subject to trade and those related to self-supply, the ones that ensure survival and those satisfying luxurious needs, belonging to a social status, the ones connected with cultural representation and the ones showing power and faith⁹.

*Work (praca in Polish) – a type of human activity;
in economy it is one of three production factors;
work – a relation between an employer and their employees, which is regulated by the Labor Code;
work – a force in physics ;
SS “Praca” – a Polish oil tanker;
Praca – a film from 1915;
Praca – a weekly newspaper
published from 1896 to 1926;*

⁹ A. Komlosy, *Arbeit. Eine globalhistorische Perspektive*, Wieden 2014, p. 7. „Arbeit umfasst und umfasst Tätigkeiten für den Markt und für die Selbstversorgung, für das nackte Überleben und für die Befriedigung von Luxus und Statusbedürfnissen, von kultureller Repräsentation und zur Demonstration von Macht und Glaube“ (own translation).

Places in Poland:

Praca – a village in Łódź Voivodeship, Piotrków County, Gmina Wola Krzysztoporska;

Praca – a hamlet in Łódź Voivodeship, Piotrków County county, Gmina Wola Krzysztoporska¹⁰.

“Praca” – etymology of the Polish word:

The expression “praca” (14th century) – most likely borrowed from German; compare to Czech *práce*, “labor”, old Czech *práce* “labor, painful, suffering” as well as Upper Sorbian *próca* and Lower Sorbian *proca* – they have the same meaning.

Work in the patisserie means:

- * baking cakes,
- * making coffee,
- * selling cakes and coffee,
- * exchanging time for money.

At a university work dedicated to writing a Master’s thesis means:

- * making an artistic and creative product in line with the student’s major, accompanied by a written commentary of 10 pages (1,800 characters per page),
- * consulting the above with the supervisor,
- * exchanging time for ECTS.

One of them is paid work while the other is preparing for work exercised on an independent basis. The first is re-

¹⁰ *Praca (work) Wikipedia*, <https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Praca> (25.05.2016).

lated to an economic need while the latter to an interest, a symbolic benefit and the belief that artistic work means more autonomy in the society of late capitalism rather than paid employment.

That is all when it comes to the theory. In my Master's thesis paid work is simultaneously a study being the root of artistic work while the symbolic capital of the latter is used as a tool for making the symbolically invisible service visible and discursively adequate. Artistic work means here a transgressive activity combining the fields not only from the area of the theory of culture, science and technology but also paid employment or affective work related to the nature of employment common in service-based societies. Artistic work is gaining its materiality thanks to being open to a working body and its precise location which leads to a resistance towards an alienating, virtual debt represented by the ECTS, the myths shaping the subject of an artist as well as other universalizing constructivisms hanging over it. Artistic work, thanks to the process of materialization, becomes a real and therefore a less alienating activity.

As an art student I am a part of an institutional assembly that makes up numerous human (students, professors, cleaning staff, door staff, clerks, etc.), pre-human, post-human and non-human actants (facilities, tools, multimedia equipment, plants, bacteria, viruses, quarks, etc.). This ontological and symbolic context outlines the borders of my activity, which in the case of the Master's thesis type C means a period of 720 hours exchangeable for 24 points which I fill in with content in such a way as to meet the criteria specified in

the program of Kunst im Kontext Institute¹¹. In a patisserie during an 8-hour working day, apart from some freedom in doing as I please during a 15-minute break, all the other activities I do are defined beforehand and measured in such a way as to bring a real profit. Paradoxically, some autonomy occurs during the moments of alienation from the pre-programmed body movements, when slicing the 19th raspberry cake and making the 26th double espresso, when the hand passing a cup of bio-arabica-fair-trade liquid seems to be an extension of a porcelain saucer, a steel teaspoon, a copper coin and last but not least a napkin. At that moment I usually feel a pleasant relaxation; I begin counting: during the day my body sells 166 pieces of cake, 125 cups of coffee and burns 800 calories; it produces 300% of added value with its own living work. The value is accumulated by the owner of the place. Dedicated to writing the Master's thesis during the day, the body of the student produces one page of the paper, 48 centimeters of the hand drawn film and it reads 20 pages from different data sources; it burns 1,258.7 calories per day. In the second case there is no added value produced which also means nobody can accumulate it. What the student earns when studying is of a symbolic value and even though sometimes it can be a negative value with time it can deliver tangible benefits, which, however, is not certain. Paid employment brings about an income thanks to which one can pay off the debt related to living in the society, in the city where nothing belongs either to the student or to the employee in the patisserie. Paid employment is not a task that allows for creating alternatives since there is no time for

¹¹ *Studienabschluss*, Universität der Künste Berlin, <http://www.kunstimkontext.udk-berlin.de/studienabschluss/> (16.03.2016).

them. Artistic work is in default exercised on an independent basis. Yet, if we take into account its institutionalized character, for instance in the form of postgraduate studies, but not only, its autonomy seems somewhat limited (720 hours exchangeable for 24 ECTS points). Holding on to the belief in the separatist nature of art means turning your gaze away from the brutality of social relations on an everyday basis.

In the cognitive sense it might be more interesting to see the outcome of the artistic work beyond its magical power; of the symbolic impact, as temporary compaction of matters that have the anthropological context among their many ingredients. It would weaken the representative character of art, yet it wouldn't necessarily entail cultural skepticism. On the contrary, it might lead to emancipation of the matter which is symbolically underestimated, including the human body. It could also change the story of the world in its current, affirmatively accelerating¹², alienating shape. A good beginning of this type of post-representative practice could for instance be active silence accompanied by the cooking methodology, listening to what our, not necessarily human, other mates have to say.

Z. Nierodzińska, *Picture*, acrylic paint on cotton, wooden slants? Lis-twy, 110 x 130 cm. Reproduction: Digital photograph, 300 dpi, paper: 100 g/m² offset-cream, 9.5 x 12 cm. Berlin 2015.

translated by Justyna Chada

¹² An allusion to the manifesto of accelerationist politics: A. Williams, N. Srnicek, *Critical Legal Thinking*, <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/> (26.05.2016).