

Self-exploiters, funding and reactionary cinema

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Post-event despondency has set in following [last Friday's sound art and video event, InCounter](#). After weeks of organization and running around trying to remember a thousand and one little details, all of which are equally important for the smooth running of the night, its back to normal life and the realization that there's still no money and that all that effort was, after all, unpaid. But every email I receive of positive feedback is a reminder of why we do these things: the generosity of the people involved, and the sense of coming together to make it happen, cheesy as it sounds, makes it all worth it.

But it's tricky. On the one hand I hate the notion that life can only be lived with an "only worth it if it makes money" mentality which reduces every transaction to an opportunity to profit financially; some things *are* worth doing unpaid. But my aversion to that mentality means I inadvertently fulfill exactly the criteria that neo-liberalism demands from us as workers and citizens: 'flexible', willing to work for nothing if we love something enough and fully cognizant that it's our 'responsibility' to make opportunities for ourselves. Or, in other words, become part of the Big Society: if you really want to be an artist- or an end to homelessness, youth crime and poverty- volunteer!

So by working for free and *not* asking for funding, we set a precedent that artists don't need it; but then applying for funding- especially as an individual artist- is an incredibly time-consuming process with slim chances of success.

Alternatively, you could decide to work a little more- especially if freelance- and self-fund your practice, since at least the money is guaranteed that way. Again, this is the ideal artist from the perspective of a government intent on cutting funding for the arts: work more in order to pay for it yourself.

It's a perfect illustration of 'the system-compatible, neo-liberal self-exploiter' type of artist that [Dominic Eichler in Frieze](#) writes about, the other two models being the 'neo-bohemian' and the 'self-institutionalizer, dependent on public funding', none of which are especially palatable choices, as his essay's title- *Its Complicated*- suggests. However the self-exploiter does rely on having freelance income, which will become scarce as jobs for artists in school projects, community arts and teaching are reduced.

There have also been articles in Art Monthly regarding the funding of artists films, which is bound to suffer under the cuts. One solution could be to give out smaller bursaries for films, with concomitantly lower production values, but to more artists. Wouldn't this spread the available money, meaning less for each individual, but a healthier artistic community overall? Addressing the issue of how non-commercial art could continue to function is an [Open Meeting at no.w.here](#), whose aim is to ask "What kind of non commercial art practices will there be in the future age of austerity? Where are supportive spaces where group discussion, collective thought, and critical practices can grow and disseminate if they are removed from the Universities or if they become too expensive to access?" Good questions, especially once more and more spaces like theirs start to really lose money.

Another perspective on the funding and making of films is offered by Juan García Espinosa, of Third Cinema. The first line of his essay, [For an Imperfect Cinema](#), written in 1969, is "Nowadays, perfect cinema — technically and artistically masterful — is almost always reactionary cinema." He finishes by arguing that a film shouldn't be judged on quality, or the camera, format and technique used to make it (a Mitchell or 8mm camera

are offered as examples). Rather, the important question to ask for him was "What are you doing in order to overcome the barrier of the "cultured" elite audience which up to now has conditioned the form of your work?"

Its interesting to consider this in relation to moving image work- where do well-funded, high production values videos or 16mm films (extremely expensive and specialist in today's world) fit, when everyone can make a video of sorts just using their mobile phone?