From tools of criticality to mechanisms of control: Instructions in art from the 1960s to the 1990s

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Abstract

This research examines instructional texts in art practices from the 1960s to the 1990s. Instructional texts refer to written words by artists for thought experiments and participatory actions. Scholars have previously examined the interplay between instructions and the specific art forms they generate, revealing the complex relationship between control and freedom, order and disorder, as well as organization and risk. However, these relationships are contextually nuanced. By incorporating the social function of instruction as a critical tool and control mechanism, this research adds complexity to the current scholarship on instruction between participatory agency and authorial control. This research focuses on two historical periods: the 1960s and the 1990s. Whereas the 1960s signaled the transition to a post-industrial society that sought creative labor and adopted a more flattened organizational model, the 1990s witnessed the standardization and globalization of demands for entrepreneurial and artistic labor. To explain the resurgence of instructional texts in the 1990s, this research contextualizes these texts within a broader social framework. It argues that commercial co-optation has transformed these instructions' critical power against the bureaucratic top-down management model in the industrial era into an apparatus of control over creative laborers cultivated in the post-industrial age.

Keywords: Instructional texts, Work culture, Socially engaged art, Participatory art

Extended Abstract

Introduction: Art instruction can manifest in various forms, ranging from textbooks and manifestos to Fluxus scores and Minimalist sketches. A review of existing literature reveals that the notion of instruction has often been associated with institutional didacticism, serving as an authoritative means of organizing, sustaining, and disseminating knowledge. Within the realm of art, written instructions also impose a structure between the instructor and the instructed. Some allow room for diverse interpretations by participants, while others with predetermined outcomes aim to perpetuate existing artistic conventions through standardized replication. Nevertheless, whether it's Fluxus scores that encourage diverse readings or authoritative notations that govern production and regulate artistic endeavors, instruction invariably positions itself along a spectrum between participatory agency and authorial control. Numerous studies have explored the formal tension between participation and artistic control in the context of instruction. However, the social and political dimensions of instructional practices in art have not received substantial scholarly attention. This research adds complexity to the prevailing analysis of instruction's interplay between participatory agency and authorial command by introducing the social function of instruction as both a critical tool and a control mechanism. Initially conceived as a tool to challenge the top-down management system of our society during the 1960s, the role of instruction has shifted from a means to encourage open interpretation to an instrument for organizing and overseeing emerging forms of creative labor in the contemporary cultural landscape. By scrutinizing art instruction as a potential field of command and execution, this study underscores the susceptibility of historical avant-garde art forms to economic, political, and cultural hegemony. In a word, this research redefines instruction, with its dual characteristics of critique and discipline, as a cultural apparatus that can either foster revolutionary societal change or condition participants' perception of and response to their social environment, particularly within the context of their work environment in this study.

Purpose and scope: This paper seeks to address two main questions. First, it aims to interpret why instructions from vastly different artistic fields were grouped under the term "art-by-instruction" during the 1990s. Second, it explores the

motives behind the appropriation, fetishization, and commercialization of these instructional texts, especially if not primarily intended to inspire participants' creativity. By delving into the social and political connotations and functions of instructions, this research strives to shift the prevailing perception of instruction from being merely a technical tool to a cultural apparatus. The paper's scope encompasses instructional texts within the realm of artistic practices spanning from the 1960s to the 1990s.

Method: This research employs a contextual analysis method to situate the instructions within their historical and social settings. Given that certain instructions from the 1990s were directly appropriated from the 1960s, the emphasis of this research is less on the actual content of these instructional texts and more on how they were framed socially. The study examines the various ways these instructions were gathered, disseminated, and promoted in two distinct historical periods. By embedding instructional texts in their social contexts, with a particular emphasis on broader labor dynamics in society, this research redefines instruction as a cultural apparatus that encompasses both its role as a tool for revolutionary critique and as a means of disciplinary control.

Findings and conclusion: Although there have been academic discussions on instruction-based art, they typically focus on how instructions give rise to specific artistic features. Furthermore, scholars in participatory art scrutinize the social dynamics emerging from participatory practices and the social conditions that facilitate such artworks. Nevertheless, these studies of participatory art have yet to delve into the relationship between instructional practices in the art world and instructions within workplaces or commercial settings. This research, through an examination of the social and political dimensions of instruction and a case study of the do-it project, contends that avant-garde instructions played a pivotal role in shaping the work environment of the 1960s. These same critical tools were subsequently appropriated by corporations and institutions to cultivate a work mindset suited for the emerging cultural economy. While certain instructions promoted anti-war sentiments and a democratizing spirit during the 1960s, the implementation of neoliberal policies from the 1970s onward, coupled with the shift to a post-industrial society emphasizing services, information, and research sectors, saw these same instructional texts being employed in the 1990s as a means of social control over new creative laborers. However, it's important to note that this research does not intend to assert that art is solely manipulated by external societal forces, as art can also serve as a powerful tool for challenging dominant powers. By bridging the realms of art and the workplace and connecting artists and participants with the workforce, this research explores the intricate relationship between art and society. By exposing the ideological influences behind the creation and dissemination of different types of instructions, this study reveals that the control mechanisms inherent in instruction can also be harnessed as a potential tool for revolutionary change.

Keywords: Instructional texts, Work culture, Socially engaged art, Participatory art

INTRODUCTION

During the COVID pandemic, *do-it* (home) was launched online via the Google Arts & Culture platform, sending art instructions to isolated individuals with the hope that they could make art during lockdowns. The pandemic has changed many white-collar employees' sites of work from the office to home. In our post-pandemic era, companies continue to grapple with issues of work flexibility, and governments are managing the transition of workers from full-time to part-time employees. While previously instructions flowed from the management level to workers to sustain a corporate order, today workers are receiving less restrictive, more motivating instructions, which facilitates their adjustment to the new system. Collective discussion and cooperation have been continuously replaced by self-help and self-management. As the problem of shifting the burden to individual workers is becoming more exacerbated today, it is significant to discuss how instructions, including art instructions, can be manipulated not to empower the participants but to make them submissive laborers who are willing to enforce self-administration. More pertinent to this research is the question of how art instructions respond to, influence, and are shaped by the prevailing modes of work in society.

Instructions in art encompass a diverse range of forms, spanning from textbooks and manifestos to Fluxus scores and Minimalist blueprints. Instructional texts in this study contain a list of imperatives that invite the participants' action upon objects of everyday life, or they can be thought experiments of that action. For example, George Brecht's *Drip Music* (1962) (Figure 1) instructs the participants to find a water source and put an empty container underneath to catch the water, creating the sound of dripping. Instruction-based art reached its first peak in the 1960s through the linguistic propositions of Conceptual art, technical instructions to produce Minimalist sculptures, operational instructions in Happenings, and event scores in Fluxus. Even

though these art movements had distinct goals, they were interconnected through key figures such as John Cage, Henry Flynt, and Robert Morris. Buchloh (1990: 107) notes that conceptual artists denied any connection to or knowledge of the Fluxus. However, La Monte Young, a central figure in New York's Fluxus art scene, dedicated his instructional piece *Compositions #10* (1960) to Robert Morris, a conceptual artist and a Minimalist who was deeply associated with the Fluxus movement. Instructions facilitated the formation of a large art community in the 1960s because these instructions were sent out to friends on postcards and were written in dedication to one another. Though these artists from different movements had distinct conceptual and aesthetic inclinations, they were actively engaged in the democratization of art by relinquishing artistic authority and control.

In the Fluxus Manifesto, Maciunas advocated a world purged of bourgeois sickness and promoted a "non-art reality to be fully grasped by all peoples, not only critics, dilettantes, and professionals" (Maciunas, 1963). Fluxus scores-initiated events not in institutionalized art spaces but on the street, at festivals, and in artists' apartments. The minimalists strategically employed instructions to delegate the production of their sculptures to local factories. Conceptual art exhibitions such as *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art* (1966) at the School of Visual Arts Gallery, New York, abandoned traditional exhibition formats, displaying Xeroxed prints with notes and instructions in loose-leaf binders for viewers to flip through. To sum up, in alignment with the spirit of the anti-war and civil rights movements, artists from diverse art movements in the 1960s held the shared belief that by encouraging the participation of the public, art could enter the realm of daily life. The celebration and aestheticization of mundane activities in the 1960s encouraged participation in the art world by non-experts. Textual instructions became one of their conceptual and participatory strategies to engage a wider audience.
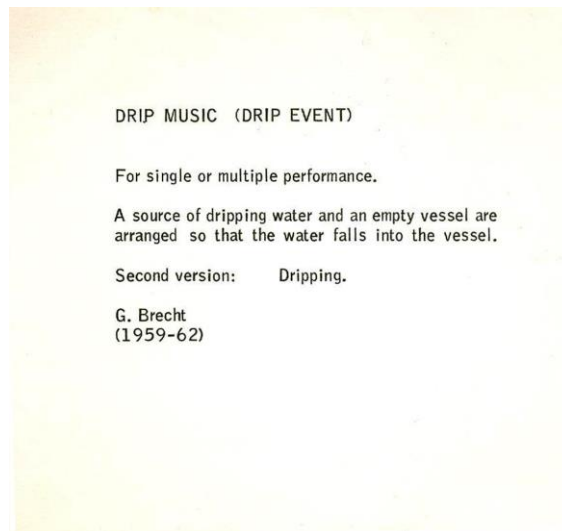

Figure 1. George Brecht, *Drip Music*, 1959-63

However, significant social and political changes occurred from the 1960s to the 1990s. Participatory activities in the arts can also be co-opted by the industry as a fetishized experience through its encompassing power of administration and capitalization. During the 1990s, there was a revival of instruction-based art practices, marked by the resurgence of participatory approaches. Of particular note is the *do-it* project initiated by curator Han Ulrich Obrist, and artists Bertrand Lavier and Christian Boltanski. While *do-it* is supposed to highlight "interpretation in its various permutations and iterations" (Curators International, 2013) as opposed to the art world's fetishization of the unique art object, there are numerous publications (Figure 2) of this project as collections of instructions, none of which feature the realization by local practitioners and participants. This poses two questions: First, why were instructions from drastically different artistic disciplines grouped under the same name "art-by-instruction" in the 1990s? Second, if not to stimulate the innovative output of participants, what drives the appropriation, fetishization, and commercialization of these instructional texts?

Figure 2. Flow diagram developed through the coding phases of the research

METHOD

This research adopts the method of contextual analysis that frames the instructions in their historical and social milieu. Because some of these instructions in the 1990s were directly appropriated from the 1960s, this research focuses less on the content of the instructional texts than on their social framing. This research aims to ask the following questions:

1. What distinct characteristics define these instructions, and how do these features offer insights into the social contexts in which they originated?
2. To whom were these instructions primarily directed?
3. Where were these instructional texts exhibited and circulated?
4. What kind of action or inaction was advocated by these instructions?
5. How did the instruction affect the community of participants?

By asking these questions, this paper studies the ways these instructions were collected, circulated, and promoted differently in two historical periods. By placing instructional texts in their social contexts, with a particular focus on labour relations in society at large, this research defines instruction as a cultural apparatus encompassing the functions of both revolutionary critiques and disciplinary control.

FINDINGS

Instructional Texts between Participatory Agency and Authorial Control

As modes of communication shift in different artistic contexts, instruction assumes a diverse range of functions, such as notation, score, sketch, social pedagogy, or direction for social action. From classroom teaching to manual guides, the concept of instruction has often been associated with institutional didacticism as an authoritative manner of structuring, maintaining, and transmitting knowledge. While oral and performative instructions embody the ordering subject, textual instructions separate texts from the speaker. The decontextualization of speech enables texts to reach a status of abstraction, objectivity, and authority (Olson, 1989). Textual instructions in the form of textbooks and user manuals sometimes suspend the identity of the writer in favor of an institutional identity, imparting readers abstract knowledge that can be repeated under the same situation. Because of their seemingly objective and abstract characters, textual instructions are used by the power to achieve infinite reproducibility of its authority (Anderson, 1983: 182). Textbooks, exhibition catalogues, campaign slogans, and religious scripts, among others, could fall under the administrative techniques of the authorities to impose social order on their readers.

Similarly, in the art world, textual instructions impose a structure between the instructor and the instructed. Textual instructions have taken various forms in performance, participatory art, and conceptual art, among others. Because an artist's identity is usually manifested along with the instruction and textual instruction in art contains both embodied words and stabilized reproducibility, extending artistic authority to the public when the artists claim to delegate their authorial control to the participants. Instructions are frequently employed at the beginning as documentation that stabilizes ephemeral ideas and art forms so that they can be produced or enacted in the future (Peters, 2009), as we can observe in musical notations and sketches. When following or interpreting these instructions, the social relationship between creators, curators, performers, and the audience can be perpetuated or challenged. In the Fluxus movement, instructional texts are used by artists to document their performances, which are subsequently dedicated and mailed to other artists as an emblem of friendship (Bech, 2008: 10). Although transient concepts could be consolidated by texts, certain activities emphasize individual interpretations of these fixed instructions. Instructions are enacted by individuals who are not the creators of the scores, and these scores "are open to variation and interpretation" (Knowles, n.d.). In a discussion of Fluxus's performance in the 1950s, Dezeuze (2008: 26) emphasizes that not only did performers use the technique of indeterminacy to carry out instructions, but they also had very different readings of instructional signs to begin with. However, even with these more flexible instructions in avant-garde art movements, artists sometimes resist too much performative improvisation of the scores, as Knowles notes "I am not at all flexible or loose about what goes on… I've sometimes had people try to interject ideas or performances of their own. But this is not allowed, because what I want people to do with the piece is to see how really simple things can be done if you concentrate on what you are doing" (Knowles, 2012). In a word, even with the more open-ended and loose instructions, there has been tension between notational discipline and interpretative agency.

On the other hand, some fixed instructions that produce preordained results attempt to self-perpetuate existing forms through a standardized reproductive process. First designed by choreographer Rudolf von Laban in the 1920s in Weimar Germany, Labanotation is a complex symbology to codify the directions, body parts, level, and duration of human movement in space, with the aim of producing repeatable and standardized movements. The authoritative Labanotation was then used to purify the German dance of alien gesticulations (Laemmli, 2016: 10) when Laban became the Minister of Dance under Nazi Germany. The Labanotation aims to produce intended and homogenized outcomes, disciplining politicized bodies through codified scripts. However, at the same time, Laban expressed that those dancers "experience a complete spiritual reversal which elevates them above everyday attitudes of life" (McCaw, 2011: 89). The Labanotation results in the standardization of human bodies, conforming to a centralized idealization and extreme rationalism. But at the same time, there has been a sense of romantic expressiveness in contrast to the mechanization of the human body. Instructions from these diverse practices have not been clearly defined because of their lack of conceptual coherency and formal consistency. However, whether it be Fluxus scores that may allow diverse interpretations or authoritative notations that administer production and regulate the bodies, instruction always situates itself on this spectrum between participatory agency and authorial control. Extending from the inherent qualities of instruction, at which end of the spectrum different social-political mechanisms employ instruction is a matter of concern.

The Social-political Dimension of Instruction

Altshuler's "Art by Instruction and the Pre-History of *do-it*" is one of the very few essays solely dedicated to the history of instruction-based art. As an analysis of Avant-garde exhibitions, it overviews instructional artworks, discussing terms such as chance operations, audience participation, freedom of execution, and conceptual openness without resorting to the social background from which these practices emerged. He concludes that the *do-it* project is "enjoying in postmodern pastiche both nostalgia for the 1960s and accommodation with the institution" (Altshuler, 2013: 37). By postmodern pastiche, he refers to the title of the project, which combines both Jerry Rubin's *Yippie Manifesto* in the 1960s and the advertisement of Nike shoes. However, he abruptly ends the paper at a place where he could have analyzed the commercialization of previous avant-garde art forms.

Similarly, a few scholarly discussions approach instruction from an art historical perspective. The exhibition *Fluxus scores and instructions: The transformative years* (2008) was launched at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark, to present instruction manuals from the Fluxus movement. This exhibition

catalogue presents scores and event cards in historical narratives, containing personal memories of the art community and the movement. Scholars (Bech, 2008: 9-12; Hendricks, 2008: 14-19; Anderson, 2008: 20-23) provide different perspectives on these instructions as guidance for performances, narratives of past events, and descriptions of artworks. Young's (2012: 41) essay emphasizes the musical aspects of Fluxus' scores, which challenge its categorization as visual art. Kotz (2007) studies the objectification and depoliticization of language in art in the 1960s and 1970s while ignoring that many instructional texts are making functional political statements. Christian Paul (2019) explores the relationship between rule-based practices and the advent of new technologies. In general, these essays delve into the history of instruction-based art through its structures, formal qualities, or relationship with technological advancement. They lack a critical perspective to examine what social forces contribute to the emergence and endurance of instructions, how these social forces have been simultaneously shaped by instructional art, and specifically the relationship mediated by instructions between participants in art projects and the labor force in society at large.

Contrary to the formal approaches to the study of instruction-based art, Sherer (2016) considers Fluxus a social practice against the overtly bureaucratic institutions of bourgeois society. Even more explicitly, Oren (1993: 28) emphasizes the anti-art socialist campaign in Fluxus' artworks. The edited volume *The "do-it-yourself" artwork- participation from Fluxus to new media* highlights that instruction-based art practices are always contextually specific. Rooted in countercultural activist movements, instructions have been co-opted as entertainment services by institutions and forces of the capital (Dezeuze, 2010: 16). However, by using the phrase "do-it-yourself" artwork, Dezeuze is still maintaining a connection to the Utopian model of DIY culture in the 1960s and 1970s. This paper, however, opens another aspect of written instruction as a form of prescriptive ordering. Even the most open-ended instructions explicitly prescribe what to do and implicitly indicate what is not expected. As Kwon (2010: 229-239) suggests, the system of reciprocity in participatory art imposes an obligation on the audience to act while maintaining the artist's position of superiority. And such disciplinary practices may resonate with the participatory culture in our workplace.

Tying art with work culture, Buchloh's influential paper on conceptual art from 1962 to 1969 highlights the social background of the modern aesthetics of administration. Analytic propositions of early Conceptualism were trapped in scientific positivism and institutional validation. As the class of white-collar workers bloomed in the 1960s, the aesthetic characteristics of Conceptualism were influenced by this new workforce that hinged on the administration and distribution of resources instead of the production of material goods (Buchloh, 1990). The exhibition *Work Ethic* (2003) at the Baltimore Museum of Art is precisely a reflection of artists as new types of workers or service providers when there were paradigmatic shifts in society into the information economy and the experience economy. Bernes explores the relationship between the counter-cultural left and the dominant social structure of the 1960s, specifically between avant-garde art and work. Art is viewed as an experiment with imaginary alternatives to existing work conditions. Those experimental tools, terms, and coordinates of avant-garde art and experimental poetry were deployed by white-collar workers in the mid-to-late 1960s against the technocratic administration of society (Bernes, 2017). Using artistic tools and mindsets, these workers demanded more creative types of work and greater autonomy.

However, the potential of art to challenge the dominant ideology and social structure is often co-opted once it has achieved its goal. As early as the 1970s, Kaprow (1977: 8) worried that the experience of "happenings" and performance art could be applied to the commercial world as "sales training". Schiller (1989) warns us that the essential underpinning of democracy has been seriously damaged in the post-war years in the face of the continuous corporate co-option of public knowledge and cultural production. As the welfare state dwindled, it became a standardized practice to use participatory art forms to enhance workplace productivity and boost workforce morale through feedback and team-building exercises. In the United States, museums as the public sector transformed from providing service to the public to benefiting the corporate order (Schiller, 1989). Big corporations sponsor art institutions to promote their brand images, and employees of these corporations can visit the museum for free. Art functioned to lubricate the social environment so that the society as a whole, could function more productively. On the governmental level, social inclusion was the key concept in New Labour's cultural policy in the UK, which was backed up by the argument for the positive impact of social participation in the arts (Matarasso, 1997). Participatory art has been employed to enable the public to self-administer in the face of an increasingly privatized world. The practice of instruction-based art has been

deprived of its former function as a critical tool against the world of administration when authority is delegated to participants. Instruction has become a means to indoctrinate the public in self-responsibility and compliance, aiming to enforce a smoother and more harmonious social environment in the face of dwindling public services. Therefore, in the 1990s, the resurgence of instruction-based, participatory work signaled a more comprehensive commodification of our experience, demanding a new type of creative labor to create that experience.

Bourriaud is one of the first scholars to identify the social turn in the 1990s. His conceptualization of relational aesthetics expands on the Marxist notion of social interstice, a space that facilitates social interaction as a countermove against cultural industry and commercial spectacles. He advocates artworks based on human relations in a social context, denouncing commercialized art objects (Bourriaud, 2002: 5). However, in his promotion of relational art forms, he fails to consider that it is the human experience that was fetishized in the 1990s, and participatory art became a standardized practice in museums. The emphasis on events and projects rather than objects resonates with the shift from the industrial age to the post-industrial age when inter-human relations and conviviality in the service sector are treasured. Foster (2003: 21-22) coins the term "arty party" to describe these events and to criticize the fact that too often these curators and artists see discursivity and sociability in rosy terms. The fiercest critique of relational aesthetics comes from Claire Bishop, who argues that Bourriaud lacks validation of what good relational art is. She proposes the concept of "relational antagonism" in place of "relational aesthetics". "If relational art produces human relations," Bishop pointed out, "then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?" (Bishop, 2004: 65). Bishop champions art pieces that use dissonance and antagonism to expose power relationships between artists, participants, performers, and spectators. Bishop explains the social turn in the art world in the 1990s following the dismantling of the welfare state and the triumph of neoliberalism (Bishop, 2012). It led to a collective desire for a "decentred and heterogenous net that composes post-Fordist social co-operation" (Penzin, 2010: 89). The cultural policy in the UK managed to include marginalized individuals by leveraging art projects as a means of social amelioration. Simultaneously, it aimed to propagate the concept of individual self-reliance in the context of increasing privatization within governmental sectors. Once a critical tool against the top-down management system of our society, the role of instruction has shifted from a tool for open interpretation to an apparatus of disciplinary organization. It has been transformed into a mechanism for nurturing and controlling emerging categories of creative laborers in the new cultural economy.

Studies of instructions from other disciplines also render insights into the relationship between this specific cultural form and the new cultural economy. Shorey (2020: 122-128) argues that DIY instructions alternately challenge and contribute to corporate logic. In her exploration of two manual texts: issues of *Make:* magazine and DIY pamphlets distributed to General Motors employees, Shorey observed that as DIY practices generate innovative thinking, these practices can both strike against the corporate system of bureaucracy and inspire verve and creativity among the staff. In the same way, instructional texts in art can foster an artistic mindset among the participants, who might later create a better relationship with other staff, create innovative products, or question the current corporate system. Conor investigates instructional manuals for novice screenplay writers as a means to cultivate a compliant form of creative work within the new cultural economy. Instead of examining the direct relationship between instructional texts and corporate strategies like Shorey, Conor situates these instructions in the context of neoliberal, post-Fordist capitalism. In the new cultural economy, talents are "incubated, concretized, and made necessary, or even compulsory" (Conor, 2012: 123). These instructions exemplify a chaotic, precarious economy, contributing to a continuous sense of insecurity among cultural workers. They set up and maintain "relations of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility" (Berlant, 2006: 21). The same mindset of forging possibility and anxiety is manifested in *do-it* instructions. An instruction can reinforce an ideal subjectivity for participants to be successful in the cultural economy, rising to artist status rapidly, "you can become an (almost) instant artist if you follow these instructions" (Obrist, 2013: 66). It can also stress and perpetuate the romantic notion of an artist as a rebel, "Burn this book. ASAP" (Cantor, 2004). At times, it fuses the two agendas, "Do something unique that only you and no one else in the world can do. Don't call it art" (Barry, 2012). These instructions intensify the drive among the readers and participants to be more creative and innovative, while at the same time immersing them in a perpetual state of insecurity. These instructions produced by established artists offer a form of self-help not

only to emerging artists but also to other workers who aspire to be and are pressured to be more innovative in their careers.

To sum up, the social-political implications of instructions in art have not yet received much scholarly attention. This research complicates the existing analysis of instruction between participatory agency and authorial command by introducing the social function of instruction between a critical tool and a control mechanism. By examining instructions in art as a potential field of command and execution, this study highlights the vulnerability of historical avant-garde art forms to economic, political, and cultural hegemony.

The *do-it* project

This research selects the *do-it* project as a case study because it was the first time when many diverse practices using instructions were grouped together and promoted fervently. In 1993, Swiss curator Obrist and two French artists, Boltanski and Lavier, conceived of an exhibition project in which written instructions would circulate around the world so that each local interpretation and enactment would be different. Initially, twelve instructions were compiled and produced as a publication by AFAA (Association Française d'Action Artistique) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Culture of France. They were translated into eight languages and sent out as diplomatic dispatches to countries with which France established and maintained diplomatic relations (Obrist, 2013: 15). Because of the diplomatic gesture, these art instructions could be viewed as a strategy to promote a democratized form of art with open-endedness and audience participation, extending the cultural hegemony of the West to other parts of the world. In both the 1960s and the 1990s, instructional texts were circulated globally. Fluxus comprised a community of artists from the United States, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America. The international postage system also allowed for minimalist sculptures to be manufactured and exhibited overseas based on instructions sent by the artist. However, as mentioned by Siegelaub in his conversation with Obrist, in the 1960s, international artists established friendships and gathered out of shared belief and interest (Siegelaub, 2013). Whereas in the 1990s, on the level of execution and circulation, these instructions were possibly functioning in part as propaganda or commercial slogans.

Not only were the organization and circulation of the instructions different, but also the publicization of these texts in the 1990s was divergent from the practices in the 1960s. Whereas in the 1960s, artists attempted to hand over authorial control to others; in the 1990s, artists were promoted as ideal subjects. In the introduction to the *do-it* project, Obrist sets up a few "rules of the game" on how to execute these instructions in museums. He proposes that "at the end of each *do-it* exhibition the presenting institution is obliged to destroy the artworks and the instructions from which they were created, thus revoking the possibility that *do-it* artworks can become standing exhibition pieces or fetishes" (Obrist, 2013: 18). However, it is not the objects but the artistic subjects that are promoted by the project. The instructional publication of *do-it: the compendium* has been arranged alphabetically according to the artists' initials. The promotional slogans on Google Arts & Culture (n.d.) include "Free your inner artist", "make a wish with Yoko Ono", "Gilbert & George's rules to live by", and "cook with Marina Abramovic". Artists became role models for others to follow.

When the *do-it* exhibition was opened in 1997 at Independent Curators International, Altshuler wrote an essay about instruction for its exhibition catalogue, in which "art-by-instruction" was loosely defined as a "modern tactic" to generate work by following written instructions and "insert chance in the realization of an artwork" (Altshuler, 2013: 29). This essay attempts to group different art forms together to validate the idea of instruction-based art. However, it seems that this definition is restricted in its teleological conceptualization. First, many instructions are not intended to be used to produce artwork. For example, Yoko Ono's *Cloud Piece* (1963) invites the readers to imagine putting dripping clouds in a hole, which can only exist as a poetic thought experiment (Figure 3). Gilbert & George's *Ten Commandments* (1995) comprise ten principles in life for others to follow. It becomes problematic as one wants to identify where a realized artwork is in this piece -in the actions of the participants who follow the commandments or in the internalization of the commandments as a discipline. In addition, Altshuler defines instruction from the point of view of the artists, while these instructions are meant to be executed by participants other than the artists who designed them. In his attempt to define art-by-instruction through art historical narratives, Altshuler only selects examples that fit the pre-established concepts such as chance operations, the delegation of authorial control, and the tension between

idealization and materialization, while ignoring the social-historical conditions for art-by-instruction to exist and to thrive. It is impossible to define art-by-instruction only in artistic terms because instructions transverse drastically different artistic genres. By situating instruction in its historical and social context, from the critique of object fetishism to the fetishization of artists, this research conceptualizes instruction as a changing apparatus from a critical tool to a control mechanism.

Figure 3. Yoko Ono, *Cloud Piece*, 1963/2016, Modern Art Oxford, United Kingdom

This research does not try to single out the *do-it* project, as many other art practices since the 1990s have also used instructions to incubate ideal creative laborers. With ironical wittiness, Peter Fischli and David Weiss painted ten tips on how to work better (Figure 4) on an office building in Zurich in 1991. But it could also be read as helpful adages at the workplace for those "who appreciate both the artwork itself and the real-life applicability of its ten cheerfully common-sense directives" (Dover, 2016). In a more complicated case, before her excruciating performance of living paintings, artist Vanessa Beecroft handed to her models a set of textual instructions that read, "Do not talk, do not interact with others, do not whisper…be simple, be detached, be classic, assume the state of mind you prefer… interpret the rules naturally…" The instructions exerted her authoritative power over vulnerable female participants at work (Steinmetz et al., 2006: 753-783) (Figure 5). The instruction is composed of both disciplines of action and freedom of interpretation, underscoring the complexity of behavioral patterns in contemporary workplaces - be composed and be creative. In all, instructions in art since the 1990s have gradually shifted to mechanisms of control that reflect our mode of participation in the workforce.

Figure 4. Peter Fischli and David Weiss*, How to Work Better*, 1991, Guggenheim

Re-orientating Instruction

Altshuler traces the lineage of art-by-instruction back to the early 20th century. In his narration, the progenitor of modern art-by-instruction is Marcel Duchamp. His wedding gift to his sister, *Unhappy Ready-Made* (1920), is an instruction for the couple to hang a geometry book on the balcony and let the wind flip through the pages, choosing its own problem. Due to the intimacy of the instruction as a gift to two family members, Duchamp's work can be seen as an instruction of the pre-industrial age. Unlike instructions of the industrial era, early instructions were passed to only a few makers, as "most items of domestic technology up to the 1850s were manufactured in the home or on the farm, and most information describing their use was transmitted by word of mouth" (Schumacher, 2018). As the means to use technology became democratized, cars, TV sets, and washing machines entered the domestic sphere. User manuals were also simplified, standardized, and widely distributed. It may not be a coincidence that Haynes, a publishing group solely dedicated to producing user guides, was founded in 1960 when a large quantity of art-by-instruction works emerged. What makes instructional texts in the 1960s different from Duchamp's instruction from the previous era is how these texts were produced, distributed, and received. Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit*, a collection of 150 instructions, was originally published in 1964 by Wunternaum Press in Tokyo in an edition of 500. The Fluxus aimed to reach the largest possible audience, producing prints, kits, and small objects disseminated at low prices through artist-run Flux shops or by mail order (Hanley, 2011). In the 1990s, as previously discussed, instructions were employed by institutions to cultivate creative laborers. Tracing the history of instruction from family how-tos in the pre-industrial age to user manuals in the industrial age and later to self-help mottoes in the post-industrial age, this paper exposes a strong connection between instructions in art and instructions at work. In contrast to Altshuler's definition, instruction should be dislodged from autonomous artistic disciplines and engage with a broader realm of cultural studies that identify the shared belief of what constitutes good workmanship and answer how instructional texts in art can foster ideal laborers.

On the one hand, instruction in art can be used as a critical tool against the highly administered world, embracing chance, unpredictability, and participation in artworks; on the other hand, instruction manages the participants under the guise of freedom of interpretation. Mills articulates this duality of the "cultural apparatus". While a cultural apparatus seems neutral because it is "the lens of mankind through which men see; the medium by which they interpret and report what they see" (Mills, 1967: 406), a circle of institutional power may be established around the cultural apparatus, undermining public discourses by producing complacency and fetishism of commodities. For example, participatory art may be employed by cultural institutions to create satisfying experiences that eclipse the inherent problems in our society. On the other side, there is a bastion of intellectuals and artists who produce critical reflections. Mills (1960) considers "cultural apparatus" a "possible, immediate, radical agency of change." Mills believes that the opposing sides of control and criticality are connected, and he used the term "cultural apparatus" to capture this inter-connection (Sawchuk, 2001: 35). In the same manner, the opposing ends of control and freedom, co-optation and criticality, can be mediated through a piece of instruction.

Instructions are less defined as artistic tools to produce a piece of work but more as cultural apparatus through which information is produced and distributed and from which we understand the world. While this apparatus can mediate critical art forms, it can also be controlled by dominant institutional powers. In this research, instruction as a critical tool has been later co-opted by the logic of post-industrial society to enforce entrepreneurial self-management among the labour force. In a word, instruction, with its dual qualities of critique and discipline, is redefined in this research as a cultural apparatus that either encourages revolutionary change in society or conditions the participants' understanding of and action upon their social milieu, which refers to their work environment in this study.

CONCLUSION

While there are a few scholarly studies on instruction-based art, they usually discuss how instructions generate certain artistic characteristics. In addition, scholars of participatory art analyse the specific social relationships created by participatory practices and the social conditions that make participatory artworks possible. However, these studies of participatory art have not explored the relationship between instruction in art

practices and instructions at the workplace or in the market. By tracing the social-political dimension and the modern history of instruction, with a case study of the *do-it* project, this research argues that avant-garde instructions helped shape the workplace environment in the 1960s, and the same critical tools were co-opted by corporations and institutions to create a work mentality suitable for the new cultural economy. While some instructions fostered the anti-war and democratizing ethos in the 1960s; as Neo-liberal policies were implemented from the 1970s onward to ameliorate economic stagnation and as the transition to the post-industrial society encouraged the development of services, information, and research sectors, the same instructional texts were implemented in the 1990s as a form of social control of new creative laborers. However, by studying the social conditions that make certain forms of instruction possible, this research does not aim to state that art is manipulated by external social dynamics, because art can also be used as a critical tool against hegemonic powers. By connecting art space with workspace and by bridging artists and participants with the workforce, this research explores the dialectical relationship between art and society. By exposing the ideological forces behind the production and distribution of different types of instructions, this research reveals that the control mechanism of instruction can also be turned into a "radical agency of change" (Mills, 1960: 23).

Authors' Contributions

The author contributed 100% to the study.

Competing Interests

There is no potential conflict of interest.

Ethics Committee Declaration

This study does not require ethics committee approval.

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