

*In loving memory,
with deepest sympathy,
we search for the murderer,*

CAPITALIST NIHILISM

AND

THE MURDER OF ART

Lukas Meisner

and

Eef Veldkamp

* 2020

Lukas Meisner and Eef Veldkamp

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Capitalist Nihilism
and the Murder of Art

by

Lukas Meisner

And

Life as an Artist
After the Murder of Art
and some reviving thoughts

by

Eef Veldkamp

Lukas Meisner

Meisner (1993) is a writer and critical theorist currently based at the *Università Ca' Foscari Venezia*. His creative work – mainly novels, novellas, and ‘j’essays’ – deals with topics as diverse as the concepts of utopia and dystopia, urbanisation as desertification, the dialectics of burnout and depression, and the entangled flood-phenomena of climate disaster and mass tourism. Meisner’s latest publications were *DysUtopia* in 2017 and *Das Buch der Wüste* [The Desert-Book] in 2019. Throughout its subjects, his writing portrays the embedment of real people’s existential struggles in the structural violence of most abstract but equally real societal processes.

Whereas his literature thus expresses the desires of a “sociological imagination” (C. W. Mills), his academic work seeks to go beyond the academic ivory tower’s reproduction of the battlefields ‘down-to-earth’. Consequentially, Meisner’s scholarly interest lies primarily in the history of capitalism and in its ambivalent relationship to accompanying ideologies. As

part of endeavours to reformulate radical critical theory, he currently attempts to develop a critique of ideology based on analyses of capitalism as an immanent religion of fetishised tragedy – whose ‘first commandment’ Meisner calls ‘capitalist nihilism’.

Eef Veldkamp

Veldkamp (1993) is an engaged artist and a researcher at *ArtEZ University of the Arts* where he also teaches. Delving into the philosophical concepts that underpin much of our reality he wonders about the condition of our present day. His latest publications include *The Politics of Non-Flammability* in which he draws a genealogy starting with the ontology of Parmenides of Elea leading to our contemporary obsession with fire retardant materials that coincide with a politics of domesticated change. Through artistic and philosophical research methods he develops subversive textual interventions that dare the reader to think into new (artistic) realities. In his artistic practices he uses the premises handed over by his research into a range of political topics to develop so-called 'counter-systems' which are aesthetic infrastructures that attempt to intervene on the fabric of our reality. He does so by making 'art on batteries' – art that acts within the system it exists.

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*“Among the dangers of new art the most dire one is that it is harmless. [...] Historically, cubism anticipated something real, namely the photographs taken from airplanes showing bombed cities after the second world war.”*¹

*“In late capitalist society, the intentions of the historic avant-gardes become realised in reversed manner.”*²

*“The ultimate aim of an avant-garde is to give up being an avant-garde, as history comes to catch up with you [...] Art and life became deliriously confused, and art could now be fantastic simply by being realist, reflecting a surreal course of actual events.”*³

preface

99 % of talk on art is blabla. If this blabla is affirmative (celebratory, excited, commonsensical – from an artspeak-perspective), all is fine. If it is not, there arises a problem: it has to find arguments for what it claims. At the same time, the position of arguments within a world of blabla is already the position of a heretic. Hence let's be, for a change, part of the 1 % – let's be heretical. Let's write a polemic beyond blabla. Let's write about the birth of capitalist nihilism from the spirit of the death of art.