

Cooptation and critique

Anna Stein Ankerstjerne

Introduction

In the foreword to the German anthology *Kreation und Depression*, the editors, Christoph Menke and Juliane Rebentisch question the relation between social transformation and aesthetical impulses; “wie ist der behauptete Zusammenhang zwischen sozialer Transformation und ästhetischen Impulsen genau zu verstehen?” while suggesting an affinity - a “Wahlverwandtschaft” - between “ästhetischer Freiheit” and “postdisziplinärer Flexibilisierung”.¹ Without proposing an answer, I wish to join the discussion by taking a look at what some of the contributors suggest. Especially Spanish sociologist Eve Chiapello’s conception of cooptation (in “Evolution and Co-optation”), suggests an interesting “Wahlverwandtschaft” between capitalism and critique – which she has also elaborated with French sociologist Luc Boltanski elsewhere.²

The type of critique that I will look into is the ‘artist critique’, a critique that demands freedom and flexibility, autonomy and authenticity. Accordingly, these demands have been successfully coopted by capitalism and are now well established – making both “ästhetischer Freiheit” and “postdisziplinärer Flexibilisierung” accessible to us all. Ironically, this successful cooptation has stripped the critique from its poignant potential, leaving it in a state of crises. When capitalism recuperates and coopts critique it adapts to the critique’s demands in its own, capitalist, way. This way is, however, not unproblematic: In the process of the forms of oppression that one critique points out, capitalism produces new forms of oppression that call for new artist critiques...

While expanding the concept of ‘artist critique’ to ‘artistic critique’ I will introduce the art project ‘Hornsleth Arms Investment Corporation’ by the Danish artist Kristian von Hornsleth. As we shall see, this is both a capitalistic and an artistic project whose artistic critique perhaps poses a way of criticizing cooptation through cooptation. My thesis is that the artistic critique at stake in Hornsleth’s project can reveal some of the double standards of cooptation at play in what, by then, will have been introduced as ‘the spirit of capitalism’.

¹ Menke, Christoph/ Rebentisch, Juliane (eds): *Kreation und Depression. Freiheit im gegenwärtigen Kapitalismus*, Berlin 2010, p 8

² Chiapello, Ève: “Evolution und Kooptation, die “Künstlerkritik” an Management und Kapitalismus”, in *ibid: Kreation und Depression...* ; idem: “Evolution and Co-optation: The ‘Artist Critique’ of Management and Capitalism” in: *Third Text*, vol. 18, Issue 6, 2004 (pp. 585-94); Boltanski, Luc/ Chiapello, Ève: “Die Arbeit der Kritik und der normative Wandel”, in *op cit: Kreation und Depression...* ; Boltanski, Luc/ Chiapello, Ève: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London & New York, 2005 (French ed. 1999). All are originally in French, and I will use the English and/or German translations respectively. I apologize the inconsistency of the referenced editions.

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With French sociologist Alain Ehrenberg's contribution to *Kreation und Depression*, "Depression: Unbehagen in der Kultur oder neue Formen der Sozialität",³ the consequences of the success of the coopted artist critique can be unfolded. As the title of his contribution suggests, the successful cooptation has paved the way for new - pathological - forms of oppression. As Boltanski and Chiapello have shown, the concepts of *critique - cooptation - crises* are interrelated and almost make out an equation where the discourse of social pathological conditions, although different, leaks out from the hyphens that connects them.

Questioning, hand in glove, with Boltanski and Chiapello, what artistic critique should criticize today (given that the the 1968-artist critique has been recuperated and coopted), I will thus let Alain Ehrenberg propose one answer. Moreover, hand in glove with Hornsleth, I will ask and answer *how* an artistic critique can perform its critique, discussing the (im)possibilities of contemporary art to form anti-capitalist critique.

Two crises and two paradoxes are introduced and investigated: the crises of the artist critique and the crises of the individual. Both involve 'ästhetischer Freiheit' and both involve the concept of cooptation, and both share the paradox of failure due to success.

The absurdity of capitalism

Capitalism is absurd. All it wants to do is to accumulate. Unlimited.⁴ Yet it has an astounding success and great survival skills. And its dynamic and transformative power and capability to increase capital is something that doesn't cease to fascinate even the most critical of observers.⁵ Capitalism has ceaselessly extended its empire and made it appear acceptable and desirable, and "the best of all possible orders."⁶ It is this paradox, the simultaneity of being absurd yet making sense enough to survive and thrive, that Luc Boltansky, and his Spanish associate, Chiapello, questions in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999): How can a system, not based on equality, safety, freedom, progress, but instead on accumulation seem legitimate? How does it do it?

³ Ehrenberg, Alain: "Depression: Unbehagen in der Kultur oder neue Formen der Sozialität", in *ibid: Kreation und Depression...*

⁴ Boltanski, Luc/ Chiapello, Eve: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, p 4; Boltanski, Luc/ Chiapello, Eve: "Die Arbeit der Kritik...", p 18

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp xxxviii and 5

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 10

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The 'spirit' of capitalism refers to a set of motivations - individual reasons coupled with 'for the common good'-reasons that contribute to the ongoing accumulation of capitalism, in a self-evident way.⁷ The justifications that motivate must, of course, be based on such strong arguments, that they can be accepted as self-evident by enough people to be maintained and reproduced.⁸ But capitalism has a lot of training and is sly as a fox when it comes down to organizing and coordinating action and the lived world in such a self-evident way that even critique can be converted.⁹ Of course, capitalism cannot justify our commitment to it by pointing to itself and its skills in accumulating capital— as mentioned; that is absurd. It cannot have accumulation as an end in itself.¹⁰ This means that the 'spirit' of capitalism necessarily incorporates other schemas than the economical ones in order to appear legitimate, and draw on contemporaneous beliefs and ideologies that, at a given moment in time, possess skilled powers of persuasion: "Faced with the demand for justification, capitalism mobilizes 'already-existing' things whose legitimacy is guaranteed, to which it is going to give a new twist by combining them with the exigency of accumulation."¹¹ Abiding from listing all of these strategies of justification, capitalism's ability to incorporate and convert opponent criticism, is, however, on the top of the list and what makes it incredibly flexible and extremely difficult to oppose or destroy. In fact, as Boltanski and Chiapello write, "we are going to assign critique the role of a motor in changes in the spirit of capitalism."¹² This is why anti-capitalism is as old as capitalism and accompanies capitalism like a shadow.¹³ Capitalism needs its enemies and opponents in order to incorporate the mechanisms of justice that make it as adaptable as it is. For Boltanski and Chiapello this extraordinary capacity of incorporating and recuperating opponent criticism means that any critical move against capitalism is contained to serve it; capitalism is always-already coopting.¹⁴ This is why, with the visualized words (from Andrew Boyd's *Beautiful Trouble*) enough people agree that:

⁷ Ibid., pp 11, 9-10, 13. "The new spirit of capitalism purports to fulfill the need of the individual as well as the missions of the corporate world." (quoted in book review by Mohanty, Tanaya: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, in: *Capital & Class*, vol. 34, issue 2, Jun 2010

⁸ Boltanski, Luc/ Chiapello, Eve: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, p 10

⁹ Ibid., p 12

¹⁰ Ibid., p 487: "Unable to discover a moral basis in the logic of the insatiable accumulation process (which in itself, on its own, is amoral), capitalism must borrow the legitimating principles it lacks from orders of justification external to it"

¹¹ Ibid., p 20. In other words, by Boltanski and Chiapello: "[W]hereas capitalism, by its very nature, is an insatiable process, people are satiable, so that they require justifications for getting involved in an insatiable process." Ibid., p 486

¹² Ibid., p 27

¹³ Ibid., p 36 ; "Mann kann die These...unterstützen dass der Antikapitalismus im Laufe der Geschichte der wichtigste Ausdruck des Kapitalismus gewesen ist." Boltanski, Luc / Chiapello, Eve: "Die Arbeit der Kritik..." p 29

¹⁴ A trope used by Prof. in literature and cultural studies, Christopher Connery. Noys, Benjamin: "The Art of Capital: Artistic Identity and the Paradox of Valorisation", presented at "(self)-valorization methodologies in arts&politics", Center for Drama Art (CDU), MaMa, Zagreb (20 June 2011)

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(Andrew Boyd: *Beautiful Trouble. A Toolbox for Revolution* , London & New York 2012)

The cooptation of critique and its crises

Looking up cooptation in the dictionary, one will find parallels in its applicability in different domains. To the biologist, the term recalls an evolutionist theory to the point where the transferability of the concept to capitalism's socio-economic survival history becomes obvious: In evolutionary biology, cooptation describes the adaptation of an existing biological feature for a new purpose.¹⁵ 'Translated' to capitalism this means the ability of adapting to the surrounding environment and surviving - being the fittest. This is a skill that capitalism master well, but it is also a skill that we all must master well, given the successful cooptation of the 1968-artist critique's demand for flexibility: The term 'adaptability' has been much used in the field of organizational theory (accompanied by 'mobility' and 'flexibility' etc) to describe the meritocratic and network-based composition of organizations and individuals, as well as the competences that the

[http://www.academia.edu/689156/The Art of Capital Artistic Identity and the Paradox of Valorisation#outer page 20](http://www.academia.edu/689156/The_Art_of_Capital_Artistic_Identity_and_the_Paradox_of_Valorisation#outer_page_20) ; see also Boltanski, Luc/ Chiapello, Eve: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, p 27

¹⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Co-option>

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landscape demands from both parties. Needless to say, this is the field that Boltanski and Chiapello write themselves into and base their analyses upon in the form of management literature.

The biologist definition thus anticipates the more sociological definition of cooptation that in various ways has to do with appropriation. Examples: A trend or idea being incorporated into mainstream culture, a member elected into a group, or not dealing the stakeholders out of the game but dealing them new cards and thus transforming them from opponents to supporters. In any case, cooptation suggests a way of managing opposition and so preserving stability, neutralizing criticism or winning over through assimilation - all aimed at guaranteeing stability for an authority in the face of a threat.¹⁶ This 'fuel' is what drives forward the evolution of capitalism – namely its ability to coopt.¹⁷

In "Evolution and Co-optation", Chiapello describes a type of critique that capitalism and the business world has done an especially good job at coopting, in fact leaving the critique in a state of crises. This critique is the 'artist critique'; a critique that began to take shape in the late 18th century in relatively small artistic circles but was loaded with dignity by the new philosophical, romanticist, conception of Art/the Artist (capitalized!) that came about at that time, giving a platform to the critique.¹⁸ The critique, Chiapello writes "stems from what artists interpreted as society's refusal to grant them the *freedom* to live the only life deemed worthy of living – a life of *authenticity*."¹⁹ Chiapello understands the artist critique as an umbrella term that synthesizes many forms of critique against industrial, capitalist and bourgeois society over the last two centuries in the name of freedom (freed from the constraints of commodities) and individual fulfillment, and sees 1968 as the year of culmination.²⁰ Mainly, capitalism is criticized "(a) as a source of disenchantment and of inauthentic goods, persons, and lifestyles; (b) as a source of oppression that is opposed²¹ to freedom, autonomy, and creativity."

As this short description already insinuates, Chiapello's point is that at the root of this critique lies the intuitive opposition between business worlds and art worlds, between profit imperatives and those of artistic creation.²² With capitalism's cooptation of the artist critique, this opposition is severely deflated. An example of how capitalism has coopted the critique, is capitalism's "commodification of difference"²³- the

¹⁶ Ibid; <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/co-optation>; <http://eprints.rhul.ac.uk/440>;
<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O88-cooptation.html>

¹⁷ Boltanski, Luc/ Chiapello, Eve: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, p 36

¹⁸ Chiapello, Eve: "Evolution and Co-optation", p 588

¹⁹ Ibid., p 587

²⁰ Ibid., p 585

²¹ Ibid., p 587

²² Ibid., p 585

²³ Boltanski, Luc/ Chiapello, Eve: *The New Spirit of Capitalism Spirit*, pp 438, 439, 445, and 470: "the age of commodification of difference"

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incorporation of the critique's dislike of standardization and massification by production of more varied, customized and 'authentic' goods.²⁴ Another example is the replacement of assembly-line-work conditions with post-Fordistic management forms and individualization. So now, it can come as no surprise that the question that Chiapello (2004) along with Boltanski (1999) rises, is whether the artist critique, because critique normally is in the position of distance to its criticized object, has not falling into crises, being coopted in the spirit of capitalism - its distant position being severely decreased.²⁵

Boltanski and Chiapello document the transformations of capitalism and its cooptation of the artist critique in post-60s' management forms that stress creative and autonomous labor that overall resembles an artistic lifestyle. In keywords, the business world's cooptation of the themes involves a change that goes: from bureaucratic to adhocratic (with connexionistic 'networks' or 'rhizomes' as metaphors), from heteronomy to autonomy, from fixed to temporary positions, and the individualization of jobs, projects and performance replacing a high-to-low control.²⁶ In this regime, the conception goes under the term 'employability', which is something that we increase by continually engage in new projects and making sure that we are 'life-long-learning'.²⁷ Chiapello and Boltanski call this project-based regime for "the projective city"²⁸ – and find that it responds to the demand for self-fulfillment, creativity and authenticity etc. of the artistic critique. The new management forms opens for individual creativity and self-realization *in* the business system, fusing the chiasm between art world and business world, rubbing the critique from its poignancy, its distanced criticizing position, and leaving it in crises.²⁹

The cooptation is evident: Capitalism has turned static structures into flexible ones, assessing mobility and adaptability as positive traits on the market - making each one of us, in the German words of Alain Ehrenberg, "Hauptverantwortliche seiner eigenen Handlung, Agent seiner eigenen Veränderung,

²⁴ From the thesis that human beings lose all particularity when standardized, capitalism recuperated and produced more varied goods that drew authenticity in from domains (tourism, cultural activities, leisure etc.) that had hitherto been external to commodity circulation, because "to earn the label 'authentic' these goods must be drawn from outside the commodity sphere, from what might be called 'sources of authenticity'." Boltanski, Luc/ Chiapello, Eve: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, pp 441-42

²⁵ Chiapello, Eve: "Evolution and Co-optation", p 586

²⁶ Ibid., p 593

²⁷ Boltanski, Luc / Chiapello, Eve: "Die Arbeit der Kritik...", p 25: "Das Leben wird als einer Folge von Projekten aufgefasst."

²⁸ In French: "La cité par projets" . In "Die Arbeit der Kritik..." they write: "Eine neue an Bedeutung gewinnende Rechtfertigungslogik schien uns am Werk. Nach dieser wurde die Mobilität, die Verfügbarkeit, die Vielzahl an Kontakten ausgezeichnet...die "Cité par projets". Diese bezeichnet eine Form der Gerechtigkeit, die einer vernetzten Welt entspricht." p 24.

²⁹ Rendtorff, Jacob Dahl <http://nome.unak.is/nm-marzo-2012/vol-7-n-3-2012/54-conference-paper/349-the-economic-sociology-of-late-capitalism-the-contributions-from-boltanski-thevenot-and-chiapello-2> ;Chiapello, Eve: "Evolution and Co-optation", p 585

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Unternehmer seiner eigenen Lebens".³⁰ The success with recuperation has, however, paved the way for new forms of suffering, 'Unbehagen', and oppression that calls for new forms of critique.³¹

Die Forderung nach Autonomie and its crises

The artist critique involves a feeling of meaninglessness and loss of what is beautiful and valuable by standardization and commodification, counter posed by artists and intellectuals (originally in the figure of the dandy) with unattached freedom and mobility.³² Thinking about the romanticist conception of the creative singular artist with unique and transcendent skills, it is not hard to see why Chiapello (and Boltanski) links this conception to modernity's conception of individualism.³³ In its favorization of liberation and individualism (autonomy, self-organization and creativity – suppressed by capitalism's instrumental rationality) the artist critique is highly modernist, they write.³⁴ Furthermore, when Chiapello writes that "Artist critique", which started out as the product of extremely specific historical conditions and the rallying cry of a very small band of artists and writers marked by the peculiar nature of their position in the field of cultural production, came to be copied by other types of actors – that is, by people who think of themselves as having a lifestyle similar to that of artists"³⁵ the question imposes itself: Do we not all think that today?

"The signature characteristic of genius is the single-mindedness with which certain artists engage in their activity (and even their life as a whole, in case of dandies)."³⁶ It is this quest for singularity and autonomy that is also the very basis of individualism.³⁷ Today, we all want to be 'artists', or dandies, in a way and the mainstreaming of this type is so self-evident that we don't even have a 'dandy'-name for it but simply talk about all of us being 'individuals'. The paradox is that the success of the artist critique - that its platform through cooptation grew into becoming a mainstream success - was simultaneously its downfall. On the one hand it gave artists and the like a platform to speak from that privileged them over others that tried to raise their voices from below in the mud. On the other hand, the platform was adopted and coopted to

³⁰ Ehrenberg, Alain: op cit, p 59. Work psychologists also talks about 'Intrinsic motivation' and commitment (For a good description, see ie Marylène Gagné og Edward L. Deci: "Self-determination theory and work motivation", in: *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, vol 26, 2005, pp 334-35)

³¹ Boltanski and Chiapello says in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* p 424. They ask: "Having reached this point in the history of demands for liberation and their recuperation by capitalism, can it be shown that the promises have once again not been kept, and that new forms of oppression have emerged?" p 429

³² Ibid., p 38

³³ Ibid., p 39

³⁴ Ibid., p 40; Chiapello, Eve: "Evolution and Co-optation", pp 588-89

³⁵ Ibid., p 589

³⁶ Ibid., p 588

³⁷ Ibid., pp 588-89

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such an extent that we might even argue that the contemporary individualism; the tendency towards 'ästetisierung', self-realization and differentiation can be traced to this origin. To recall the dictionary definition, cooptation implicates the transformation and managing of opposition and the neutralization and stabilizing of threats. A neutralization is therefore also a weakening of identity and a dispersion of an antagonistic core. What might have started out as a communality of artists, ironically, united in solidarity to support an individualistic cause, has later on become so 'algemein' through the general cooptation of the artist critique, that the communality aspect of the critique has dispersed, leaving the individualistic self-fulfilling prophesy of the artist critique as a self-evident demand for the individual in the 'projective city' to fulfill. This contemporary aspect doubles the crises from sociology to psychology, so to speak. The crises of the artist critique has now become the crises of the individual because the freedom and autonomy to self-realization is so individualized that it has become a cultural epidemic for the individuals to 'fail' to fulfill this post. We call it social pathologies, or 'gesellschaftliche Pathologien', in order to have a diagnosis. This means that we are dealing here with two, but interrelated, crises; the crises of the artist critique due to its cooption by capitalism and management, and a secondary crises where the individual, paradoxically, suffers anxiety and anomie from its victory in the first.³⁸ Freedom and autonomy to 'employability' turned out to produce something contingent. Translated from French to German, Boltanski and Chiapello write: "Diese Veränderungen führen auf der einen Seite zu einem starken Anstieg unsicherer Arbeitsverhältnisse", which is for most people synonymous with "ein beangstigendes und absolut zerstörendes Leben".³⁹ This is an example of capitalism's cycle of recuperation: New forms of oppression are gradually unmasked, become the target of critique to the point where capitalism has to transform its 'modus operandi' and offer a liberation that is redefined under the influence of critique.⁴⁰

The Danish sociologist, Rasmus Willig, notices in a contribution to the Danish anthology *Sociale Patologier* (2005), that social pathologies are based on those same societal structures which are based on flexibility and the individual's quest for employability that is resulting in a range of individual illnesses. In this book, he says, "we found out that one collective demand characterize all the various individual illnesses; the demand of self-control and self-responsibility."⁴¹ It seems that what the French and Spanish sociologists call 'the projective city' produces structures and normative demands that counts for everyone but that

³⁸ Boltanski, Luc/ Chiapello, Eve: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, p 424

³⁹ Boltanski, Luc / Chiapello, Eve: "Die Arbeit der Kritik...", p 21; and they even mention Alain Ehrenberg in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* p 424

⁴⁰ Boltanski, Luc/ Chiapello, Eve: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, p 425: "Cycles of recuperation thus lead to a succession of periods of liberation by capitalism and periods of liberation from capitalism."

⁴¹ My own translation. Willig, Rasmus / Østergaard, Marie (eds): *Sociale Patologier*, Copenhagen 2005; interview with Jakobsen, Jonas: "Den nye kapitalisme og kritikens formalisering", in: *Turbulens*, 01.04.2006

<http://www.turbulens.net/temaer/kapitalismeoghumanisme/?article=224>

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everyone cannot cope with. As Ehrenberg remarks in “Depression: Unbehagen in der Kultur oder neue Formen der Sozialität”: “In einer disziplinarisch organisierten Gesellschaft lautete die Frage noch: “Darf ich das?” Wenn Autonomie zum beherrschenden Zug der Gesellschaft wird, lautet sie dagegen: “Kann ich das?”⁴² What is at stake, is an increased demand towards creative self-actualization, a “stehende Zwang zur kreativen Selbstverwirklichung”.⁴³The crises or the ‘Kehrseite’ is that: “Durch diese Entwicklung ist insbesondere ein Verständnis menschlicher Freiheit in die Krise geraten.”⁴⁴ In regard to the relation between the emancipation and the pathologicalization, Ehrenberg writes: “Man versteht sie entweder als Symptome einer Lockerung sozialer Bindungen, als ein Nachspiel der Ich-Emanzipation der sechziger und siebziger Jahre, oder als eine Folge neuer Formen des (zunehmend flexibilisierten und globalisierten) Kapitalismus, die sich seit den achtziger Jahren ausgebreitet und das Ideal der Emanzipation individueller Subjektivität in neue Zwänge und Ausbeutungsformen verkehrt haben.”⁴⁵ What can be suggested here is that the ‘Ich-Emanzipation’ that followed the cooptation of the artist critique qua 68 actually *caused* the new and flexible forms of capitalism that emerged in the 80s -turning Ehrenberg’s entweder/oder resonance into a relation of cause and effect – and further adding on (in the effect-part) the social pathological condition. When Ehrenberg says: “Depression werde durch Kapitalismus, Emanzipation und dergleichen verursacht”, this is nevertheless also what is suggested.⁴⁶ Social pathologies have become a permanent ‘state of exception’, so to speak, because “die zeitgenössische Form des Individualismus hat die Vorstellung des Ausnahmemenschen demokratisiert.”⁴⁷ In short, a social pathology is a “Krankheit der Verantwortlichkeit”⁴⁸ of the subject, a ‘Verantwortlichkeit’ that became a wide spread phenomenon in the ‘projective city’- regime due to the cooptation of the artist critique. No wonder that Boltanski and Chiapello call for a revived critique.⁴⁹

⁴² Ehrenberg, Alain: op cit, pp 54-55. In the foreword to the German anthology where Ehrenberg’s contribution appears, *Kreation und Depression* (2012), eds. Christoph Menke and Juliane Rebentisch writes: “Eigenverantwortung, Initiative, Flexibilität, Beweglichkeit, Kreativität sind heute entscheidenden gesellschaftlichen Forderungen, die die Individuel zu erfüllen haben, um an der Gesellschaft teilnehmen zu können.” p 7

⁴³ Ehrenberg, Alain: op cit, pp 54-55

⁴⁴ Loc cit

⁴⁵ Ehrenberg, Alain: op cit, p 52

⁴⁶ Ibid., p 53

⁴⁷ Loc cit

⁴⁸ Ibid, p 54

⁴⁹ Boltanski, Luc/ Chiapello, Eve: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, p 420

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From artist critique to artistic critique

Introducing the term 'artist critique' in "Evolution and Co-optation", Chiapello argues: "Whereas many artists expressed this critique forcefully, they were not alone in doing so, which is why I prefer to speak of 'artist critique' rather than 'artistic critique'."⁵⁰ This is a terminological choice.⁵¹ A choice that, according to her own argument, Chiapello uses to broaden out the artists' artistic form of criticizing, and a choice that avoids inscription into an 'avantgarde'-discourse. What I am suggesting is a correlation between the socio-economical cooptation-story and the art-historical discourse about the institutionalized avantgarde, first told by the German literary historian, Peter Bürger in his 1974 *Theorie der Avantgarde*. According to this story, the post-war institutionalization of the avantgarde, disarmed the avantgarde of its revolutionary potential and completely neutralized its artistic critique.⁵² When this critique was institutionalized, in Chiapello's sociological narrative, by new management and the business world, and in Bürger's art theoretical narrative, by the art institution, the criticism lost much of its poignancy. Nothing was 'neo' about the neo-avantgarde any longer (cf. Hal Foster), and like capitalism, the art institution only welcomed with clapping hands any new attempts from the so-called-avantgarde to make critical avantgarde art (in the antagonistic sense of the word) because of its high exhibition value. In art historical terminology, the crises of the coopted artistic critique goes under 'the failure' of the neo-avantgarde.⁵³ Where management has coopted the artist critique, the art institution has coopted the artistic one. So here we have three stories that all involves three crises that are somehow interrelated; a sociological one, a psychological one and an art historical one; the crises of the artist critique, the pathological crises of personal illnesses, and the crises of the avantgarde. Paradoxically, in all three cases it is success of cooptation that ultimately and simultaneously caused the failures.

Capitalism and cooptation goes hand in hand. With the Danish artist, Kristian von Hornsleth, and his project 'Hornsleth Arms Investment Corporation' (HAIC) I will look into their ways of holding hands; at cooptation in relation to artistic critique. If capitalism has punctuated an artist critique by means of cooptation, maybe art can be critical by coopting back this very strategy. It seems that with capitalism's capability to coopt artistic criticism, the latter is that one step ahead where the former would like to be; in the front position of being avant-garde. With HAIC I will pose the question: Can an artist(ic) critique profit from the same source

⁵⁰ Chiapello, Eve: "Evolution and Co-optation", pp 585-86

⁵¹ It should be noticed that in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Boltanski and Chiapello actually uses the term "artistic critique". I have a point with making a differentiation here, however.

⁵² Bürger, Peter: *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Minnesota 1984 (1974)

⁵³ Ibid; Foster, Hal: "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?", in: *October*, vol 70, Autumn 1994 (pp 5-32); et al..

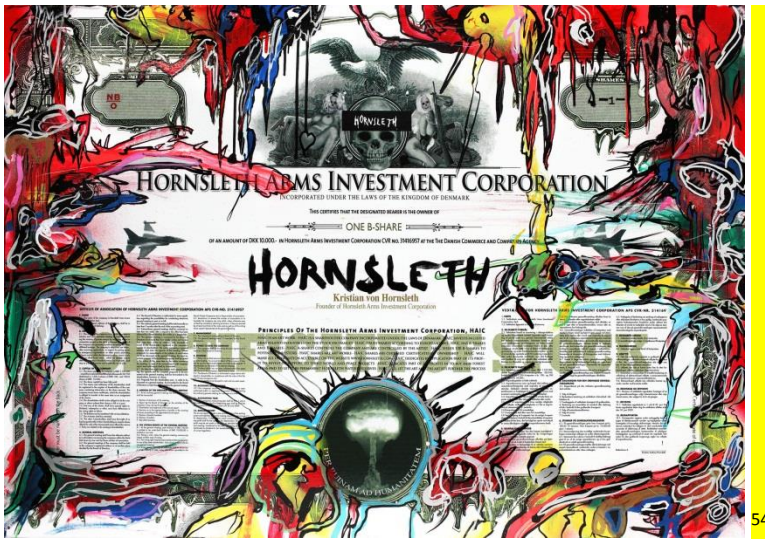
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that caused its crises namely the cooptation of capitalism? If art can master the art of cooptation like capitalism does, perhaps it can be in a front-troop position after all.

The 'spirit' of Hornsleth Arms Investment Corporation

Let me introduce: The Hornsleth Arms Investment Corporation (HAIC) is a company, founded in 2008, whose goal is to invest in the weapon industry with the Danish artist Kristian von Hornsleth as the managing director. One can invest in shares and become a shareholder in the company. HAIC shares are actual works of art and genuine certificates of ownership:



(Source: <http://www.hornsletharmsinvestment.com/Arms-investment/Hornsleth-Arms-Investment-Corp->)

The object of the Investment Corporation is "1) to invest in arms production and other war-related industries, including the supply of private armies, etc., via listed companies in the arms industry 2) to earn profits from these investments and related activities 3) to provide funding in the form of investments for idealistic projects, upon application."⁵⁴ This third point is elaborated in the "Articles of association" by HAIC Aps:

2. OBJECT

⁵⁴ In HAIC there are A and B shares. Hornsleth owns all of the A shares (there are 1250 A shares, at a value of 100 Dkk each), anyone can invest in B shares (there are 100 at 10.000 Dkk each) – all sold as genuine pieces of art for prices ranging between 3000-20.000 Pounds, depending on the size. "Don't be a hypocrite, be a peace investor in arms and art love", Hornsleth says. Press Release: <http://www.hornsletharmsinvestment.com/Arms-investment/Press/Press-release-May-6th-2008>

⁵⁵ "Principles" <http://www.hornsletharmsinvestment.com/Arms-investment/Principles>

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2.1. The object of the company is to invest the weapons industry and other industries relating to warfare, including the running of private army's by acquiring shares in companies quoted on the stock exchanges. The object of the company is to generate a profit by investing and other affiliated business. The company's objectives are futher ,[sic] after receiving applications, to support by giving grants to emergency organisations or other peace promoting projects and to utilise the obtained profit to invest in rain forest or other forest areas , which for eternity, named after the company's founder Kristian von Hornsleth, shall stay as a natural reserve and a naturally art of work.⁵⁶

This object involves a fundamental (con)fusion; the investment in arms industries and the support of idealistic and peace promoting projects such as nature conservation. This, however, is an important point, that points to the absurdity of capitalism. Not because it accumulates unlimited, but because the grounds of legitimation of the spirit of capitalism often also conceals very illegitimate grounds. In an interview about his weapon company, Hornsleth points this out by saying that the investment in arms are used to destroy the planet and cause death, while the taxes that pays off from those big industries are used to build up hospitals and educate doctors to fix up the damages that the weapons caused in the first place.⁵⁷ People dedicated to world peace organizations can apply for weapon money in HAIC to realize their projects, he says. This puts them in a moral dilemma when they have to decide if they want blood on their hands while saving the world.⁵⁸ Siding weapons and peace, Hornsleth makes us wonder about the opposition between peace and warfare, between humanitarian aid and profit, and, of course, relativizes severely the opposition between the art world and the business world, "showing the dirty way of global capitalism and confront it with the humane and ethic aid and art."⁵⁹ This is a paradoxical gesture that is a part of the work. It tells about the absurdity of capitalism and how it is fueled by the 'spirit' of capitalism, and it tells about capitalism's way of recuperation – where the circle of cooptation of critique goes hand in hand with dialectical forms of oppression.

Weapon investment has always been big business. According to artist and sociologist, Sebastian Lasinger, and philosopher and economist, Michael G. Kraft, nowadays it has even become a precondition for the functioning of global economy. About HAIC, they write: "Whether you want to make safe investments in oil

⁵⁶ "Articles of Association" <http://www.hornsletharmsinvestment.com/Arms-investment/Information/Articles-of-Association>. Pay attention to the double meaning of the English "to invest", meaning both to investigate something and to invest in something. In HAIC, this is funny because the object of the project is both to investigate the weapons industry and to invest – acquiring shares – in the weapon industry.

⁵⁷ Interview: Reestorff, Camilla Møhring: "Signaturen og den globale kapitalisme", in: *Kulturo Magazine*, vol 16, issue 30, 2010

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ (Own translation from Danish) Anonymous: "Hornsleth: Danish Artist and Ugandan Village", in: *bulletsandhoney*, November 9, 2006 <http://bulletsandhoney.wordpress.com/2006/11/09/hornsleth-danish-artist-and-ugandan-village/>

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exploitation in civil war areas or you want to get your fair share of the cocaine plantation in Colombia, investing in “The Hornsleth Arms Investment Corporation” (HAIC) represents the last resort of transcendentalism of humanity by truly inhuman means.”⁶⁰ The confusion about the (con)fusion of art and arms business is evident, and this is what epitomizes the absurdity of capitalism and its endless accumulation. In regard to the shares sold as art works, Hornsleth makes himself clear that Art is no exception in the processes of value accumulation: “Art is actually – like stocks – valued items, which will rise and fall based on psychological factors. Stocks and art both reflect reality, but at the same time have independent lives of their own. That’s why I for a long time wanted to make a project, which represents the equal values between the world of stocks and the world of art”, Kristian von Hornsleth says in a press release.⁶¹ In another interview (where Hornsleth does the interviewing part), with the Danish philosopher, Ole Fogh Kirkeby, Hornsleth asks:

But with the stock you show, that you are proud of being share holder of a weapons company?

*Kirkeby: In reality it is just an illustrated expression, because you are also part of all the other accidents that happen around the world. You just write off your responsibility, because you’re not formally to blame. But you are just as much part of other accidents around the world. Unless you use your whole life to prevent everything bad thing, shit just happens. It’s just the top of the iceberg or the worst case scenario, of what you actually do, because you are already a share holder in all the arms factories, without having a stock.*⁶²

Kirkeby’s investment in the company is obviously a philosopher’s way of making a statement about world capitalist affairs. But his last point, that we are in fact all share-holders, anticipates a relevant point about how the spirit of capitalism works: Generally accepted investment associations, venture capital funds and pension funds regularly invest in the arms industry and are thereby the direct cause of a far too early death for some people, while others, thanks to these investments, can be secured a long and comfortable old age, unaware that their savings sometimes lead to a peculiarly unethical existence. “We’re used to the narrative of how weapons companies support lobby groups such as the National Rifle Association, but we’re seldom encouraged to think about who funds the weapons companies themselves.”⁶³ HAIC poses this question.

The Danish sociologist Rasmus Willig certainly thinks so when he says that: “Hornsleth Arms Investment

⁶⁰ Lasinger, Sebastian / Kraft, Michael G.: “The Kairos of Humanity” <http://www.hornsletharmsinvestment.com/Arms-investment/Texts/The-kairos-of-humanity>. In the press release of HAIC, it says: “Per ruinam ad humanitatem” meaning “true destruction through humanity” <http://www.hornsletharmsinvestment.com/Arms-investment/Press/Press-release-May-6th-2008>

⁶¹ <http://www.hornsletharmsinvestment.com/Arms-investment/Press/Press-release-May-6th-2008>

⁶² Danish philosopher Ole Fogh Kirkeby interviewed by Kristian von Hornsleth about the Hornsleth Arms Investment Corporation <http://www.hornsletharmsinvestment.com/Arms-investment/Texts/Ole-Fogh-Kirkeby-and-H-A-I-C->

⁶³ Scott, Brett: “Check your pension fund’s investments – they may include firearms companies”, in: *The Guardian*, 20.12.2012 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/dec/20/pension-fund-investments-firearm-companies>

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Corporation does only what hundreds of companies do every day, with the knowledge of their customers. The difference, however, is that the investments are not hidden away and wrapped in declarations of Corporate Social Responsibility or Sustainable Growth. The insulating and blurring 'ethical' layer has been removed, and what remains is the true reflection of the investment portfolios of the western public."⁶⁴

Hornsleth's project is woven into capitalistic processes. With its ambivalence in objects of support, it can be used as an example of how the spirit of capitalism is at work, how the business world and the art world can be (con)fused where they, traditionally would diverge radically, because of the former's cooptation, and how this fusion has produced new forms of oppression.

In "Hornsleth Arms Investment Corporation", as in many of his projects, Hornsleth uses his own name (at times with the signature "Horn\$leth", replacing the s with a dollar sign) as a way of branding and 'capitalizing' his art (in the literal and economical sense). In his notoriously famous 'Uganda project' called "We want to help you, but we want to own you", he pays 300 villagers with pigs and goats in Uganda to permanently take the name "Hornsleth", resulting in a whole village of Hornsleths.⁶⁵ Each person went through the official legal name change process, and got a national Uganda ID card issued, showing their new 'Hornsleth' name. But as Hornsleth says: "Don't worry, this is art!"⁶⁶ "The word is 'Hornsleth'", German art historian, Wolf-Günter Thiel, writes; a word that questions "the beauty of manipulation in an often countercultural manner".⁶⁷ In contrast to the artist critique that opposes commodification and standardization, well, that is exactly what Hornsleth does not – massification in contrast to commodification of difference. He even commodifies and standardizes peoples themselves – something that, of course, also negates the whole western concept of individualism and personal uniqueness that the cooptation of the artist critique post 1968 capitalized into a mainstream norm.⁶⁸ In relation to the we-want-to-both-help-you-and-own-you project, the sometimes grotesque aspects of certain kinds of trade is

⁶⁴ Willig, Rasmus: "Criticism as a Weapon" <http://www.hornsletharmsinvestment.com/Arms-investment/Texts/Criticism-as-weapon>. In the project's press release, HAIC is introduced as a "CSR-project with a twist" <http://www.hornsletharmsinvestment.com/Arms-investment/Press/Press-release-May-6th-2008>

⁶⁵ See <http://www.hornslethvillageproject.com/> In HAIC the forests that are conserved are also to be named Hornsleth. "Articles of Association": <http://www.hornsletharmsinvestment.com/Arms-investment/Information/Articles-of-Association>

⁶⁶ Hornsleth, Kristian von: *Hornsleth Village Project Uganda*, 2007, p 9

⁶⁷ Thiel, Wolf-Günter: "Art versus Capital" <http://www.hornsletharmsinvestment.com/Arms-investment/Texts/art-versus-capital> From the A shares Hornsleth himself is entitled to 10 votes for each share, from the B shares one is entitled to 1 vote per share– making it quite difficult for him to be voted down – a possible commentary to how the stockmarket works: you might be able to buy shares but you don't really have a say in anything. Furthermore in the "Articles of Association" one can read in § 7.1 – 7.2 that the company has a board of directors, the director is Hornsleth, and at the yearly general meeting 1-3 members are elected, which means that he elects himself as the board of directors – a possible commentary to bureaucratic ways of working – that, as we know, was a topic of the artist critique.

⁶⁸ "The name shift seemed to be the most provocative element of the project as it was not temporarily staged, but a real change, proven by the documented identity cards." Thiel, Wolf-Günter: "Art versus Capital" p 230

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displayed and magnified – because that is what art can do having a form and a frame. Rasmus Willig writes that when that which is ridiculed or tyrannized by criticism is magnified and exaggerated, it can clearly underline its grotesque and illogical aspects, which is what HAIC does.⁶⁹ And so: “When everyone in Africa acquires the surname von Hornsleth, hunger will have been eradicated.”⁷⁰ The magnifying method in HAIC is, however, rather sly I would say, because it coopts the very industry that is its object of critique, the arms industry, – in a reversed but comparable movement to the way capitalism coopts its critiques.

Cooptation in HAIC

The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, once said, with reference to Karl Marx, that it was his conviction that criticism does not acquire its true strength through “criticism of weapons”, but rather through the use of “criticism as a weapon”.⁷¹ What kind of critique is at stake in Hornsleth Arms Investment Corporation? As a weapon investment corporation, surely it is not criticism of weapons that is at stake, nor can it be criticism used as a weapon, since Hornsleth is not placing himself in the opposite humanitarian peace-advocate position ‘shooting’ his critique at dirty global capitalism’s involvement with war-arms and weapons, but rather placing himself in the limbo-like zone between the two pointing at their interconnection. Once again we can recall the definition of cooptation. In this position, the critique of the project is directed at investments in weapons. Not by opposing and criticizing arms investments from an autonomous antagonistic angle where signifier (the art work) and signified (the arms industry) are clearly separated, but by coopting the very corporate means of investing in arms and criticizing it from there. HAIC is both launched as art and as active part of the global capitalism’s structures.⁷² In this way, Hornsleth juxtaposes art, “which has always been borne by anti-capitalist and anti-militarist claims, alongside the most extreme form of capitalism, namely that capital which, not just in a metaphorical sense, but also quite literally, capitalises on and produces death and destruction,” Rasmus Willig writes, pointing to the project’s combination of “artistic capital” and actual “capitalist capital”.⁷³ In this way, HAIC draws attention to the

⁶⁹ Willig, Rasmus: op cit

⁷⁰ Ørjasæter, Kristin: “Art, Aid, and Negotiated Identity: The Family Pictures of Hornsleth Village Project Uganda” http://www.hornsleth.com/public_site/webroot/cache/media/file/Kristin_oerjasaeter_2.pdf In the book, *Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution* by Andrew Boyd, the tactic called “Identity correction” proposes a comparable way of working: “exposing an entity’s inner workings to public scrutiny.” pp 60-61

⁷¹ Referenced in Willig, Rasmus: op cit

⁷² Reestorff, Camilla Møhring: op cit

⁷³ Willig, Rasmus: op cit

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entirely perverse social pathological societal relations.⁷⁴ A paradoxical pathological relation, produced by the spirit of capitalism and its skills in cooptation, that resembles the socio-psychological pathologies that the contingency produced by the successful cooptation of the artist critique's claim for autonomy and freedom has also implicated. At this point, the stories overlap.

HAIC is, of course, not alone in problematizing war and weapons through art. It is its method of criticizing through cooptation that is distinguishable. Let me give an example - to illustrate how art can be criticized for trying to be critical - that stands in contrast to the internalization, the cooptation, of the object of critique in HAIC.

"Pink Army" is a Danish activist group that works within Denmark, Europe and the United States. Their mission is this: "All weapons in the world has to be destructed and Re-melted into to toys... All the wars in the world must come to an immediate end...military facilities in the world has to be demolished or rebuild into art museums... All Ministrys of Defences has to either dissolve completely or submit under the administration of the Cultural ministrys."⁷⁵ They place little pink soldiers in urban city scapes to symbolize this war against war. It doesn't take much art theoretical reading to realize how art critics and experts so often have laughed at art's pathetic attempts to be revolutionary (while on the other hand bemoaning the 'failure' of the avantgarde, and wrinkling noses at non-antagonistic 'feel-good'-relational aesthetics).⁷⁶ Reminiscent of 'guerilla gardening' and other popular art projects that write manifests and missions and organize sociable events reminiscent of Rirkrit Tiravanija's so-called 'supper times', Pink Army must be what these critics sometimes find hopelessly non-avantgardistic - and indeed it seems like the Pink Army people themselves most of all are armed with humor in their hyper-utopian mission of ending all bad stuff on earth. In his reflections on HAIC, Rasmus Willig ends with hesitating ponderings upon whether it is a good idea or not that an artist invests in arms: "Perhaps Hornsleth Arms Investment Corporation should instead invest in toy guns", he suggests.⁷⁷ It is an open question whether HAIC should be 'disarmed'. It seems, though, like the harmless humor of toy arms don't do much antagonistic 'disarming' or artistic critique, coming out of the same hat that today's cultural industrial society, that is filled with pink plastic soldiers and toy arms, wears.

⁷⁴ Loc cit

⁷⁵ http://www.pinkarmy.net/Pink_army/Mission.html

⁷⁶ Bishop, Claire: "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", in: *October*, vol 110, Fall 2004 (pp 51-79); Jackson, Shannon: *Social works*, London and New York, 2011, (ie pp 45-49); et al

⁷⁷ Willig, Rasmus: op cit

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(Source: www.pinkarmy.net)

There is something fundamentally immoral about investing in weapons, and about the idea that success, progress, safety, freedom – which the spirit of capitalism must show that it can produce not to appear absurd – should simultaneously come from investments in arms industries. This is exactly what HAIC highlights through its double humanitarian/weapon investment object. Even the basis of the spirit of capitalism's legitimization; the idea that investment and economic growth are the foundation of social and societal progress, that, as we recall it, is not sufficient grounds of legitimization, collapses when the economic growth is shown to be due to the success of the arms industry. With this strategy, the 'Hornsleth Arms Investment Corporation' perhaps opens up the possibility of criticizing capitalism from the inside (as opposed to how the artistic critique performed from the outside in 1968, and how Pink Army-projects pose critique). Perhaps, this is quite avantgarde. On the one hand, HAIC incorporates capitalism's way of recuperating and coopting, on the other it puts forth capitalism's absurd tendency toward accumulation which is where it departs from its spirit and ideological justifications.

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Conclusion

In his *Politics of Aesthetics* Jacques Rancière writes, that the main procedure of critical art consists in setting out an encounter and a clash of heterogeneous elements that provoke a break that enlightens: “It points to some secret of power and violence.”⁷⁸ The cooptation of the arms industry in HAIC; the lining up together of art and arms, humanitarianism and capitalism, the art world and the business world, not only invokes a clash of heterogeneous elements, it points to the secret of power and violence that is not always visible but always at work in the spirit of capitalism. It questions the relation between humanitarianism and capitalism as the latter’s way of legitimizing its way of working. Elaborating on the ‘clash-effect’ of critical art, Ranciere convinces that it ought to “disclose the connections of high art or politics with capitalist domination.”⁷⁹ As argued, this is exactly what HAIC does – in its quite literal antagonism of combining art and arms. Thus, it can be argued that HAIC also problematizes the very notion of authenticity and freedom that is at stake in the artist critique. Placing itself on the border line between art and industry, the forms of cooptation at stake in HAIC are therefore two-fold: HAIC not only coopts the arms industry itself, it also coopts capitalism’s very way of legitimizing itself by coopting critique. The cooptation is done by the doing of business in the weapon industry legitimized through art and humanitarian peace. This is an artistic critique that I have found capable of placing HAIC on the right side of the parenthesis when I have discussed the (im)possibilities of contemporary art to form anti-capitalist critique.

Informed by the anthology, *Kreation und Depression*, and by the work of Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski, I have tried to look at the concept of cooptation and some of the crises that it has caused – from the thesis that the crises were somehow interrelated. The landscape is complex, of course – yet it is interesting that the crises of the artist(ic) critique and the crises of social pathologies are both inflicted by the spirit of capitalism, through cooptation. Failure of individuals to cope with the demand for authenticity and new forms of management, and failure of art to create antagonistic critique are both, somehow, related to their success in getting coopted.

Boltanski and Chiapello suggest that “perhaps the artistic critique should, to a greater extent than is currently the case, take the time to reformulate the issues of liberation and authenticity, starting from the new forms of oppression it unwillingly helped to make possible.”⁸⁰ With Ehrenberg I have looked at such new forms of oppression and suffering that is the unintended aftermath of the success of the cooptation of the artist critique. To this topic, I have not dared suggesting what an artist critique should do to efficiently

⁷⁸ Rancière, Jacques: *The Politics of Aesthetics*, London and New York, 2004, pp 41 - 42

⁷⁹ Ibid p 43

⁸⁰ Boltanski, Luc/ Chiapello, Eve: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, p 468

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criticize the socio-pathological condition that followed its tragical success. As far as I know, neither have Boltanski and Chiapello. I have, however, dared to propose an answer as to how an artistic critique can perform by doing what capitalism does best - coopting. I have suggested that art doesn't have to 'fail' in its criticizing function, and, with HAIC, used an example of how art can contribute with a critique that can criticize capitalism's ways of recuperation and cooptation without being coopted itself.

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