

# Modulated Power Structures in the Arts and their Subjectivity-constituting Effects: An Exploration of the Ethical Self-relations of Performative Artists

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**Abstract:** This paper, conceptually mainly informed by Michel Foucault's notion of morality, ethics, and ethical practice, illustrates the power program and the moral codes which currently govern the professional field of the arts. Building on empirical material from the field of theatre, the paper discusses how the moral codes and subject ideals that are promoted through the 'culturepreneurial' program affect and shape the subjectivity of artists and their specific modes of organizing ethical relations to self and others (Foucault 1984, 1986). The insights of the study emphasize that subjectification presents a dynamic and precarious process. Discursively promoted moral codes are used by the artists in a variety of ways; they are accepted, undermined, and re-created. While doing so, artistic professionals contribute to both their own subjectification and in-subordination.

**Key Words:** artistic subjectivity, culturepreneurial power program, ethical self-formation, moral codes, practice of critique, precarity, subjection

## Introduction

The paper at hand is interested in the question of how artistic practices of organizing work, life, and self are affected by recent transformations in the power structures of the art field, exemplified through the political concept of 'creative industries'. Following a Foucauldian (1982, 1984) conceptualization of power,

morality and the subject, the paper particularly discusses the processes of ethical self-formation of artists engaged in the theatre field. In doing so, it illustrates the creative and conscious responses artists give to the “power technologies” (Foucault 1988) and “moral codes” (Foucault 1984) that currently infuse their field of activity. Through empirical material stemming from an ethnographic study conducted in the independent Austrian theatre scene, it will be shown that artists criticize and resist some of these moral codes, such as the marketization and commercialization of artistic practice. Simultaneously, however, they subject themselves to codes like individualization, which are in line with their specific ascetic and disciplined self-understanding. In this vein, artists tend to contribute to their own marginalization and precarization. To some extent they, thus, sustain the structural power inequalities that nowadays characterize the art and cultural field (Loacker 2013; Lorey 2007).

On the whole, the paper, mainly informed by Foucault’s later works on morality and the moral subject (Foucault 1984, 1986, 1997), intends to contribute to the emerging field of subjectivity- and practice-based conceptualizations of ethics that provide an alternative to rule- and code-oriented business ethics (e.g., Clegg, Kornberger, and Rhodes 2007; Crane, Knights, and Starkey 2008; Cummings 2000; Jones, Parker, and ten Bos 2005). Despite the growing interest in the latter, empirical explorations of the ethical relations that individuals develop in response to the morals and moral codes they are confronted with are, within the field of management and organization studies and business ethics, more specifically, still rare (for an exception, see Kelly, Allender, and Colquhoun 2007). Through the investigation of the self-formation processes of performative artists, the paper at hand thus aspires to contribute to a better understanding of how Foucault’s later works can be applied within particular institutional and professional fields of practice.<sup>1</sup>

The paper is structured as follows: Section two, providing the conceptual frame of the paper, discusses Foucault’s notions of power/knowledge, subjectivity, moral and ethics. On this basis, section three analyzes the ‘culturepreneurial’ power program, the power technologies and the moral codes that increasingly regulate the arts and its actors. In section four, the study’s research design and methodology are presented. The empirical section then illustrates central ambivalences that performative artists face in their everyday work and explores, in particular, the self-relations that the artists elaborate in practice. In section six, the concluding discussion, the subjectivity-constituting effects and thus the effectiveness of the culturepreneurial power program are discussed. Additionally,

the paper's conceptual interests, empirical findings, and main contributions will be summarized and reiterated.

### **Power/knowledge, the Subject and Morality**

In Foucault's work, power and knowledge are understood as being mutually constitutive of each other and as irreducibly intertwined through practices (Foucault [1977] 1994, 39). Above all, Foucault conceptualizes power as "mobile, reversible and unstable" (Foucault 1997, 292). This means that power presents a complex and precarious strategic situation, rather than an abstract and fixed structure or determining institution (Bardon and Josserand 2010, 502; Foucault 1982). Like discourses, simultaneously effects and instruments of power,<sup>2</sup> power is seen as productive, and not as wholly repressive (Foucault 1978). Power produces: it produces a particular order of knowledge, truth and reality (Butler 2005a, 13). Moreover, "the individual and the knowledge that may be gained by him belong to this production" (Foucault [1977] 1994, 194). That implies that, due to the productive nature of power and the discourses it promotes, the Foucauldian subject is not seen as being given by nature or as "being fixed in its expression" (Clegg 1998, 29). Instead, this kind of subject emerges in the interstices of power/knowledge, truth, and the self (Foucault [1977] 1994). It is discursively constituted and continuously invented within heterogeneous historic-cultural power/knowledge relations (Butler 2005b, 113; Clegg 1998). More precisely, following Foucault, the subject is produced in the process of subjectification, namely in two senses: first, in the sense of being "subjected to someone else by control and dependence" (Foucault 1982, 212) and second, in the sense of being "tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault 1982, 212). Whereas Foucault's early works (e.g., 1972, [1977] 1994) focussed on the 'disciplined subject' and, so, the first sense or aspect of subjectivity formation (Sewell and Wilkinson 1992; Townley 1994), in his later works (e.g., 1982, 1988), Foucault ceased to equal subjectification with subjection.<sup>3</sup>

With the introduction of the concept of *governmentality*, Foucault (1982, 1991) extended and partly revised his view on power and the subject. Within this concept, power is considered as a 'mode of action' (Foucault 1982) that governs, instead of dominating and determining the activities of individuals (Foucault 2007b, 2008; also Barratt 2008; Weiskopf and Munro 2012). However, the idea of governmentality includes not only the regulation of the actions and choices of individuals; it rather includes both the 'governance of others' and the 'governance of the self' (Crane, Knights, and Starkey 2008, 306). On this basis, Foucault (1984, 1997) began to see subjectivity and subjectification processes in the light of

possibilities of subjugation *and* possibilities of self-creation. The latter may now not be associated with an autonomous individual that fully constitutes oneself. Instead, the subject is considered as a precarious, “contingent mode of organization” (O’Leary 2002, 117) that is produced in-between “technologies of power” which “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination” (Foucault 1988, 18), and “technologies of the self”. These, again, are practices which are not “invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group” (Foucault 1997, 291). Though, even if the “subject can recognize itself, and others, only within a specific regime of truth” (Butler 2005b, 116), the use of technologies or practices of the self presents an active form of ‘identity work’. Technologies of the self illustrate how an individual acts upon him/herself in order to ensure that power is “played out with the minimum of domination” (Barratt 2008, 523; Crane, Knights, and Starkey 2008, 304–305). To a certain extent, they thus enable the individual to distance him/herself from established power relations and, while doing so, to consciously transform him/herself as a—moral—subject (Foucault 1988, 18).

Following this line, it is on the whole assumed that, even if “there is no ‘I’ that can stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence and no ‘I’ that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms” (Butler 2005b, 7), subjectivity can, in spite of multiple regulating power practices and technologies, never be completely calculated and regulated. Resistance is in Foucault’s understanding “never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault 1978, 95); rather, it is immanent in dynamic and modifiable power relations (Foucault 1978). There is subsequently always a relation to oneself, which can subvert discursive moral codes and transgress the limitations that power structures constitute (Bardon and Josserand 2010, 498; Deleuze 1995, 103–104). This idea of undermining limitations now explicitly refers to the *ethical* dimension that is inherent in Foucault’s later understanding of the subject (O’Leary 2002).

Basically, Foucault argued that “freedom is the ontological condition of ethics” (Foucault 1997, 284) whereas “ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection” (Foucault 1997, 284). This definition points out that Foucault’s ethics goes beyond abstract, externally imposed rules and codes (Jones 2002, 231). Indeed, this form of ethics is expressed by the way in which individuals reflect on normative codes and seemingly rational rules and, thus, by the way in which they use their freedom and make choices, even or exactly under conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity (ten Bos 1997). In this

vein, ethics also refers to a ‘practice of critique’ (Foucault 1992). *Critique* is a practice involving the attempt to problematize moral codes and what is taken for granted and considered as true within specific discursive and social contexts (Crane, Knights, and Starkey 2008, 303). By engaging with the power relations, the rationalities and truths promoted at a time (Bardon and Josserand 2010, 502), the practice of critique also becomes involved in the ‘politics of truth’. It is exactly within this politics that morals and moral codes are negotiated, organized and contested (Butler 2005a, 16; Foucault 1992, 2001).

More specifically, the Foucauldian conception of morality implies three interrelated dimensions (Foucault 1984).<sup>4</sup> First, it requires the identification of the particular *moral codes* that define which form of conduct is desirable, morally correct and ‘appropriate’. These moral codes are inscribed in social, institutional, or organizational power/knowledge structures and discourses, and shape individual and collective conduct (Clegg, Kornberger, and Rhodes 2007, 118). Second, the approach asks for the investigation of the *moral conduct* and thus the concrete behaviour that individuals or groups of individuals show with regard to prescribing moral codes, rules, and norms. Finally, and most importantly, the Foucauldian conceptualization of morality requires the investigation of the context-specific *practices of the self*, through which subjects critically relate discursive moral codes to themselves and, by this means, try to constitute themselves as agents of moral conduct (Foucault 1984, 25; Jones, Parker, and ten Bos 2005). Following Foucault (1984, 25–30), this third dimension, moreover, entails an exploration of the specific *ethical substance*, the *modes of subjection*, the forms of elaboration that one performs on oneself (*travail éthique*) and finally the *telos of self-formation*. Each of these four planes of analysis refers, again, to a different question that must be posed in the empirical exploration of ethical self-relations. They are as follows: What are the specific ways in which the individual has to constitute this or that part of him/herself as the prime material of his/her moral conduct, and what part(s) of the self is/are the object of the ethical self-forming (ethical substance)?<sup>5</sup> What are the ways in which the individual establishes his/her relation to a rule, and how is the self constituted in relation to the moral codes that are immanent in institutional or professional practices (mode of subjection)? What are the self-practices and ‘care for the self’-practices (Foucault 1986) that are used in the specific field in order to shape one’s conduct and elaborate an ethical mode of being (*travail éthique*)? And what are the targets and purposes of the self-forming and ‘self-care’-practices that can be identified (telos of self-formation) (Bardon and Josserand 2010, 506–507; Crane, Knights, and Starkey 2008)?

In the paper's empirical section, these four analytical questions that are at the heart of Foucault's subjectivity- and practice-based ethics will be studied in more detail. In this vein, it can be illustrated how moral codes and rules infuse the activities, judgements and subjectivities of members of a particular social group and profession. Furthermore, it can be illustrated how these members use and, while doing so, also recreate specific moral codes and discursive categorization devices (Clegg, Kornberger, and Rhodes 2007, 114). However, for a better understanding of the particular institutional and professional context investigated, first the power program, the power technologies, and moral codes that frame and redefine the art field as 'creative industries' and artists as 'self-entrepreneurs' will be presented. The basis of the following analysis is a literature review of a variety of Austrian and Central European cultural and art policy documents.

### **Power Structures, Moral Codes, and Subject Ideals within the Arts**

At first sight, the recent 'entrepreneurial' transformation of the power structures of the arts does not fit into the Western European cultural tradition (Kulturdocumentation, Mediacult, and Wifo 2004, 11). Modernity's idea that the purpose of art is not more—or less—than 'art for art's sake' (Adorno 1973) and that, following this, the world of art and the world of economics constitute a polar opposite (Chiapello 2006), still infused the European cultural policy in the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1970s and 1980s this policy was, especially in the German-speaking context, characterized by a strong social democratic and participative orientation; cultural diversity, plurality and autonomy of the arts were, besides, publically encouraged (Mayerhofer and Mokre 2007, 299; Menger 2006).

However, the development that the economic significance of 'creativity' is positioned in the middle of international cultural policy debates seems to have had its origin in Great Britain (Mayerhofer and Mokre 2007, 293). In the 1990s the redefinition of the arts was here at first expressed through concepts such as 'cultural industries' and 'creative industries' (Department for Culture, Media and Sports, 1998; Hesmondalgh 2007). These political concepts, established under the government of Tony Blair and the 'creative Britain' campaign, more specifically, defined the art and cultural field as "part of our core script" (Blair 2007) and as "new white hope of socio-political, cultural and economic progress" (Blair 2007) that has to be involved in all areas of social life (Mörsch 2003, 62). Blair's argument that "a nation that cares about the arts will not just be a better nation; in the early twenty-first century it will be a more successful one" (Blair 2007) also

highlights the re-evaluation of the cultural sector as an economic domain that is to contribute to the mobilization of the general welfare and growth of Western society (Hesmondalgh 2007, 12; Loacker 2013, 127–128).

The primary definition of the creative industries seems to make the socio-political re-positioning of the arts even clearer: the creative industries include “all branches and activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (Department for Culture, Media and Sports 1998, 3). This definition emphasizes the individuality of creative capabilities, their possibilities for commercial marketization and potentials for employment increase (KMU Forschung Austria, and Institut für Kulturmanagement der Universität für darstellende Kunst 2003, 3–6). That the material value of symbolic forms and ‘goods’ is accentuated, also illustrates that it is no longer any form of creativity that is required, but a form of creativity that can be made useful according to market ideals and customer demands (DeFillippi 2009, 16). Through the creative-industries policy, which was taken over by most European nations during the last ten years, the economic potential of cultural and artistic practice is thus focussed upon at the expense of the critical, aesthetic and emancipatory potentials of the arts (Kulturdokumentation, Mediacult, and Wifo 2004, 21).

The concept of creative industries, however, subsumes a variety of cultural professions under one governmental program (Mayerhofer and Mokre 2007). Power technologies that currently structure these different professional fields are, for instance, self-responsibilization and individualization, the promotion of self-management and -marketing activities, the promotion of ongoing market-evaluation and standardized competition procedures, the promotion of immaterial value orientation, as well as the flexibilization and general activation of the cultural field and its actors (Loacker 2013, 129; Enquete-Kommission Kultur in Deutschland 2007). On balance, the creative-industries concept makes evident that art is increasingly judged in terms of its market-defined ‘exchange value’ (Ribera and Sieber 2009). Here, the subsidization of the arts tends to be understood as an ‘investment’ that must be efficient and pay off, in the form of direct or indirect financial returns (Mörsch 2003, 63; Hesmondalgh 2007). The culturepreneurial power program hence does not only focus on the direct economic contributions but also on the indirect benefits—like innovation, diversity, employability, social inclusion and regeneration—that the art field has to provide (Blair 2007; Böhm and Land 2009). Put differently, it intends to advance both the economization of culture and the arts *and* the culturalization of business and the economy (Chiappello 2006).

These briefly described power structures and technologies also constitute new knowledge, truth and, so, a new discursive profile of the artist: the subject model of the 'culturepreneur' (Davies and Ford 1998). During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was part of the idea of man to see the artist as an autonomous genius, as romanticist, individualist and nonconformist, who is in strict opposition to the rational 'homo economicus' and calculative business man of civil Western society (Loacker 2013, 130). The culturepreneurial program, by contrast, no longer isolates the artist; instead, it positions the artist in the centre of society (Enquete-Kommission Kultur in Deutschland 2007; Virno 2005).<sup>6</sup> The model of the culturepreneur now indicates the alignment of economic, entrepreneurial *and* artistic, aesthetic demands, as well as the alignment of generous, idealistic moral ideals *and* calculating, materialistic codes (Menger 2006, 10). In the twenty-first century, a hybrid character is thus attributed to the artist: s/he is asked to integrate creativity, authenticity and individuality, on the one hand, with dynamic market needs, economic demands and compliance, on the other hand (Böhm and Land 2009, 86). Altogether, the discursive model of the culturepreneur constructs the artist as (self)responsible, entrepreneurial subject of its own creative-cultural, social and symbolic capital (DeFillippi 2009, 8; Schroeder 2005). Yet, the artist is defined as a kind of creative entrepreneur that is not only obliged to his/her own human capital (Foucault 2008, 226). S/he is also considered as being willing to, by tendency selflessly, provide and share his/her polyvalent skills and talents with society at large (Eikhof and Haunschild 2006, 235).

However, the subject model of the culturepreneur, which broadens the image of the strategic 'entrepreneur of the self' (du Gay, Salaman, and Rees 1996), confronts artists with a variety of new normative codes and expectations. In the following section, it will be illustrated how artists respond to, interpret and enact these codes within the context of theatre work (Clegg, Kornberger, and Rhodes 2007, 109). By this means, it will be discussed how the modulated power structures of the arts govern the specific practices of organizing work, life and self. Beforehand, however, the research setting of the qualitative study is introduced.

### **Empirical Research Setting**

The empirical insights presented below stem from an ethnographic study that was conducted at an independent professional theatre in the West of Austria (Innsbruck) between March and October 2007. As alluded to, marketization, measurement and managerialization tendencies currently infuse the practices and performances of cultural organizations, groups and projects. Over the last decade,

public subsidies have been greatly reduced within the arts. Most cultural organizations are, as a consequence, increasingly asked to engage with self-marketing and branding activities to solicit funding (Schroeder 2005). Artistic and cultural performances that are, in the Austrian context, financially still supported tend to be either traditional-conservative art projects or mass-oriented events such as musicals (Mörsch 2006, 72; Schelepa, Wetzel, and Wohlfahrt 2008). Compared to the relatively high subsidies that the established, institutionalized Austrian or Viennese opera and theatre houses still receive (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur 2006), the support of the independent art and theatre scene has to be referred to as marginal; its actors permanently have to act amongst different political, economic, professional, and artistic demands in order to be able to persist (Kock 2009).<sup>7</sup> These uncertain and generally precarious conditions under which artistic and, more precisely, theatre organizations recently have been asked to operate and organize also affect the particular programmatic orientation chosen. In the context at hand it became, for instance, evident that overly 'risky' and 'experimental' artistic projects were hardly performed; the theatre management was keen to rather strictly calculate and control the costs of its productions (Ribera and Sieber 2009).

However, the empirical research process was basically guided by an explorative, flexible, and methodologically multi-layered research strategy, which focussed upon the specific micro-practices of organizing work relations and, more broadly, relations to self and others (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000, 12). Apart from context- and document-analysis as regards the Austrian theatre scene, a central part of the ethnographic study consisted in the shadowing of a theatre rehearsal process over a four-month period (Lamnek 1995). The observation of the theatre production and other cultural and social events such as theatregoing or premiere celebrations was accompanied by the conduct of open, semi-structured interviews with a narrative focus (Czarniaswka 2004). During the five weeks in which the theatre play was performed on stage, fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted with all theatre and ensemble members shadowed. This was to develop a better understanding of the challenges, the subjectivity-constituting effects of the culture-preneurial program and the self-formation practices in which the artists participate (Eikhof and Haunschild 2006, 235). More precisely, the interview sample consists of the theatre's artistic and commercial managers, the ensemble's director and assistant director, of three actors and three actresses, one costume director, one stage designer, two stage managers, and one technician. The members of the ensemble are all self-employed artists who work on project-based engagements.

On average the interviews, conducted in German, lasted three hours; they were all tape-recorded and fully transcribed. They were then analysed according to both pre-defined and emerging themes and categories such as ambivalences of work organization, work and living practices, artistic self-understanding, or (non-)professional ideals and purposes. This thematic and theoretical structuring process allowed to sort and link common themes and to organize the presentation of the empirical material (Fleming and Sturdy 2011, 186). In the analysis of the material the concern, however, was to follow a “reflexive methodology” (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000). Following a reflexive methodology includes an awareness that theoretical and methodological concepts, pre-understandings and approaches are, like the interactive research process itself, deeply involved in the particular knowledge and truth (re)production of social inquiry (Law and Urry 2004, 290). Instead of assuming that empirical material can speak for itself, it is thus acknowledged that there are various ways of understanding, interpreting and framing case materials (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000, 8–12; Foucault [1977] 1994). Finally, the empirical insights of the study were communicatively and argumentatively validated with the study’s participants as well as with members of a large research project on organizing practices in the cultural field, of which the present study is a part (Lamnek 1995, 157).

### **Ethical Self-formation Processes of Actors and Theatre Makers**

The study basically supports assumptions that the art field is a ‘winner-take-all-market’, meaning that it is a market where income, risk, reputation, success—and power—are very unequally distributed (Abbing 2002, 280; Hesmondalgh 2007). The consequences of the highly competitive orientation of the field and its strong individualization are artists holding multiple jobs on a contractual, short-term basis, despite their generally high qualifications (Eikhof and Haunschild 2006). Besides, this orientation often results in chronic underemployment, very low and shifting income structures, and fragmented and incalculable professional trajectories (Menger 2006, 42). In other words, precarious working and living conditions and “creative impoverishment” (McRobbie 2005) seem to be the norm within the art field (Schelepa, Wetzel, and Wohlfahrt 2008, 165). The insights at hand highlight various institutional and organizational challenges accompanying recent deregulation and economization tendencies. According to the accounts given, it is, though, the singular artist that is mainly affected by these structural transformation processes; what is more, the current power restructurings shape the professional

biographies of female artists even more deeply and precariously than those of male actors and theatre makers (DeFillippi 2009; Kock 2009).

The findings suggest that the main ambivalences characterizing the organizing modes of the artists are: dependencies on network contacts and at the same time strongly pronounced competition for engagements; demands for self-organization despite uncertainties and incalculability of employment and careers patterns; large economic constraints running counter to artistic autonomy; requests to orientate on recent market demands *and* requests to present oneself as self-determined and unique; strong individualization of the field and yet demands to perform as ‘team-player’ within collaboration-oriented projects; and finally, delimitation tendencies of work, causing conflicts in balancing professional and personal targets and regularly resulting in childlessness of artists (Kock 2009, 7). These ambivalences underline the illustrated moral codes that the culturepreneurial power program promotes and sustains. Artists are these days ‘made up’ as autonomous, self-responsible, entrepreneurial, adaptable, cooperative and committed; as a consequence, they are expected to be able to successfully deal with the tensions outlined above (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005; Schroeder 2005).

Against the background of these challenges, we now want to focus on the question of how the singular artists respond and critically make sense of discursively established codes in their daily work and organizing practices—and by this means, try to form and constitute themselves as subjects of moral conduct. For this purpose, Foucault’s conceptualization of ethical self-relations is re-introduced as central frame of analysis. As previously mentioned, the *ethical substance* refers to the ‘moral material’ that is positioned in the centre of the particular self-creation attempts (Foucault 1984). In the context at hand, this seems to imply the following: within theatre work and acting, more specifically, thoughts, language, emotions, and body tend to be hardly separable or distinguishable from each other. As a consequence of this rather irreducible intertwining, it seems to be the self, the artistic personality as a whole, that is considered and constituted as the ethical substance by the artists. The main object of the ethical self-forming and self-‘mastering’ process is, by tendency, still the mind and thoughts of the artists: the target to work, develop and consciously transform one’s mind and thinking in order to reach a clearer and broader consciousness of one’s self, is a concern that is shared by all ensemble members. In this regard one of the actresses of the group explains:

This is finally the purpose of life—to mature, mentally, but then also emotionally, to mature in a certain form and mode.

Generally, the question of how to create oneself and one's life as a 'work of art' is one the artists seem to actively engage with. Neither theatre work/life nor private, personal life are considered to be a given. Here the director's assistant states:

I think it is not fate or coincidence if one conducts a good and full life. I think one can contribute a lot to the development of the conditions surrounding a fulfilled life.

Indeed, the artists are keen to integrate and combine different aspects and areas of their (non-)professional life in a meaningful way (Eikhof and Haunschild 2006); related efforts thus build an important component in the artists' self-formation processes.

However, the *modes* in which artists relate, *subject* to or subvert the moral codes of the arts, make their ethical self-formation clearer. Primarily, all artists shadowed distance themselves from entrepreneurial codes or subject ideals that currently infuse their field of activity. One of the actors e.g., argues:

For sure it would help if you would have some sort of, let's say, 'strategic calculus' and entrepreneurial skills. But I don't have them; I am not interested in such things; that's awful to me. Well, what I think I have is will-power, discipline, courage and confidence. And this is probably quite important because . . . as artist you must go through tough times, again and again.

In the present context calculative acting is, often with reference to "missing genes" (actress), refused, in a similar way as self-marketing demands, rivalry and competitive codes are rejected and transgressed within the specific work and organizing practices. Moreover, the singular artists present themselves as very resistant towards external attempts to 'capitalize' on their creativity or creative talents and to commercialize artistic practice. To be considered as part of the 'cultural industries' field brings about denial:

I was never accused of being a creative industry. I would find that very inappropriate . . . and insulting. (artistic manager)

Yet whereas the artists refuse to follow the 'spirit of entrepreneurialism', they tend to appreciate normative codes such as individualization and self-responsibilization, which are also deeply embedded within the current power structures of the arts. For instance, the performative artists do not expect somebody else to represent their interests or to generally support them. One of the actors explains in this regard:

If the actor is on stage and he doesn't get enough money to survive, then he shall become a carpenter. It is his responsibility. You are only an artist if somebody pays you. I don't like actors that are financed by the state, like magistrates. They can hang around and do not have to care. I don't like this attitude; I wouldn't support that. If you have the certainty you start to become lethargic. The artistic profession is different than others. I think artists are outsiders of society. They should be in misery, they must have the passion and confidence that they must do what they do; otherwise one is not a good actor. (actor)

Such narratives refer to a very archaic and self-critical image of the artist. Self-accounts like "the artist must not have security, which would run contrary to the artistic profession" (actress), also illustrate that the profession-specific social and economic risks and precarities are hardly questioned. The very low pay, the lack of social insurance and, basically, the general structural inequalities of the field are, in contrast, accepted by the majority of the artists, often relying on family support on a regular basis (Menger 2006). Still, the theatre makers are keen to speak of a "self-chosen" subjection to self-responsibilization demands. In fact, they show a critical attitude towards all those moral codes and prescriptions that they do not consider as comprehensive and reasonable. This is expressed in the following account of the ensemble's costume designer:

I am very critical towards external codes which want to define what is good and right. And I am not willing to accept all the rules of the current economy; I am not willing to sacrifice my creativity and ideals. I think one must not. The significant question is what is or should be your own ethics. This is the essential point—to what extent do you adapt to others and external demands, and when is it necessary to start to fight and say: 'sorry, that's no longer me. That's no longer a path I can support.'

The attempt "to remain true to oneself, one's beliefs and ideals" (artistic manager), is shared by all the theatre and ensemble members. This attempt also shapes theatre work and practice, as illustrated below:

Even if theatres are nowadays no longer supported like they were in the seventies, I think the effort must still be not to be corruptible. The concern must be to do good theatre work. There are groups that curry favour to get supported, but there are others as well. I think the concept must still be to be independent, as far as possible. Also at the price that you will always move or stay within a small context or scale. If you do that consciously, if this is

your way, then I see it also as a political act against the homogenization, normalization and conservation that currently take place within our field. (actor)

Altogether, it is occasionally difficult to judge which moral codes the artists comply with and which codes they reject. Codes such as ‘be self-organized, initiative and spontaneous’, for instance, are on the one hand confirmed, and on the other hand problematized. This implies that the line of division between subordination and in-subordination to established moral codes is in parts diffuse and, at any rate, dynamic.

If we now focus on Foucault’s third plane of analysis as regards ethical self-relations—the *travail éthique*—the following can be suggested: the actors and theatre makers consciously work on their selves and identity/ies, not least because of the variety, the challenges and pressures characterizing their work and, more broadly, their professional field. Most of the artists work on their mind, body, and soul on a daily basis. For some this form of ‘care for the self’ (Foucault 1986) tends to develop as an imperative:

I can never be calm, always always always I have to move, I cannot let myself go. I have to train and exercise, with my body, my mind, my language, again and again. (actor)

Movement, which is in particular defined as an aspired ‘state of mind’, thus makes a few artists appear ‘restless’ (Eikhof and Haunschild 2006, 238). However, the artistic practice seems to offer several chances to continuously (re)create and transform the self and, while doing so, to subvert the routinization of work and life. Therefore theatre work can also be identified *as* a ‘work on the self’ (Foucault 1984). In this context one of the actresses, endeavouring to constantly achieve at least minor variations in her work and living practices, explains:

This work demands the readiness to start over again and again, regardless of what one has done before. It is essential to open up yourself for each production, and to encounter yourself and your colleagues anew. However, it is also part of my life philosophy to exercise—even if I have done a particular exercise one hundred times—I try to do it each time a bit differently, so that I can experience and learn something new.

In order to elaborate themselves as moral subjects, the artists follow various ethical *self-practices*—ranging from spiritual meditation techniques, yoga retreats, different forms of dancing and playing music, to speech and writing practices. Many of

these self-practices focus on self-disciplinary and self-control aspects, since these aspects and abilities are judged as being central to the acting profession (Foucault 1988). Besides, the practices are aimed to “expose to the unknown” (actress), and “to open up and see things differently”, as e.g., the director of the ensemble states:

One must always be careful not to become lethargic, as group and as singular human being. Therefore, one must question one’s own practices and assumptions. One must be able and willing to change ideas and concepts, even if one is used to them. Stolidity and idleness are bad for the creative process and for the personal development. The courage to problematize one’s own doing is very important, I think.

In the context at hand, ethical self-practices thus tend to be oriented towards both individual and sometimes collective improvisation and experimentation, as well as consciously chosen (self-)disciplinary ideals.

However, if one finally asks more explicitly about the artists’ *telos of self-formation* and, thus, the kind of subjectivity they want to develop, one can claim two major issues: one of the aims they are applying to their professional and non-professional life spheres is, as already hinted at, personal development and learning. The assistant director, for instance, elaborates on the purpose of learning as follows:

I don’t have or follow one big goal. Instead my aim is to do each task as good as I can. My own demand is to involve and really engage in every new story and project and to face the unfamiliar with openness, attentiveness and joy. I try to see everything as a chance, even if an endeavour fails. So my aim is to learn from every experience and to develop myself in this vein; this is something that applies for every single project in which I am involved.

Generally, the artists are concerned to highlight the processual character of self-developmental ideals. They consider ethical self-formation and maturity as a continuous ‘project’ that can and should never be fully achieved. It is the ‘small wins’ that are intended:

I never want to arrive somewhere. If I had the feeling of having arrived, then I would become self-satisfied, self-pleased. And that would be awful to me. I think I am only alive as long as I move . . . and then I want to touch others with what I am doing, and this is also something I can only do when I am in movement. (actor)

Apart from their purpose to continuously invent and work on their selves and their mental and emotional strength, more precisely, the artists formulate self-governance and—relative—independency from external political or economic demands as central telos of their professional and non-professional life (Foucault 1997). Many of them intend to live a ‘nomadic life’ that subverts outer appearances, calculative thinking, and materialistic ideals. Basically, the artists follow the concern of “not being governed like that and at that cost” (Foucault 1992, 12). For some of them, this purpose can only be reached through positioning oneself ‘outside the power game’: in other words, through segregating and marginalizing oneself. However, all of the artists acknowledge that the idea of self-governance and self-determination is also an idea(l) *in becoming*:

It is self-evident that I am not really independent, but I would like to be so, and I am working hard to increase my independence. And I see this work produces its effects, even if they are rather small. I have recognized that it is not possible to fulfil all expectations, so I try to reduce this external pressure and invest a lot of effort to become more focussed on what I consider as important and valuable. This is a vitally important aim of mine. (actress)

The strong relevance the artists attribute to self-orientation and self-consciousness also seems to refer to the fact that especially actors are constantly visible and “asked to give and show the absolute” (actor). In this connection the ensemble’s assistant director explains:

I think the fact that artists are permanently assessed and judged by the public makes their strong concern to be self-focussed understandable. They try to cut their own path because they are permanently evaluated from the outside.

The insights at hand show that some of the artists are more effective than others with their efforts of counteracting external standards and, thus, their efforts of being governed by subjective ethical-aesthetic ideals and values. This, e.g., means that a few of the more established and experienced actors are, due to long and intense engagements with the question of who they are and want to be(come), able to not be overly affected by public evaluation procedures and instruments, such as theatre reviews or critics. Generally, those actors who are no longer willing to be assessed by unknown external critics stopped to read or engage with reviews. Others, though, admit that they cannot fully detach themselves from such evaluations, even if they would certainly like to be entirely oriented towards their own standards and criteria.

Yet, the examples given illustrate that the ‘self-exposure’ that is an immanent element of the world of theatre does not only constrain but in parts also enable and encourage the achievement of self-governance ideals.

On balance, however, the insights show that the artists’ ethical subjectivity is created in-between subjection to discursive codes and active self-creation, involving critical reflections upon the former. The partly shifting or multiple attitudes and positions taken in also illustrate that subjectification presents a precarious process, including both acceptance and rejection of the moral codes promoted by the culturepreneurial power program (Loacker 2013, 137–138). In the paper’s final section, the (de)subjectifying effects of this power program are discussed and reflected on in greater depth. The paper’s main insights are also summarized.

### **Discussion and Concluding Remarks: Artistic Subjectification In-between Subjection and Considered Self-formation**

The present ethnographic study was interested in the question of how performative artists use their scopes and freedom, accompanied by the contemporary power program of the arts, in order to constitute, transform, and correct themselves as subjects of moral conduct (Foucault 1984, 1986). Amongst other things, the exploration of the artists’ ethical self-relations illustrates that dynamics and heterogeneity are part of artistic subjectivities, and that ‘subjectivities at work’ occasionally differ from the particular self-narrations and -presentations given. Following their accounts, the artists clearly reject the creative-industries policy and the normative codes it promotes. Nonetheless, in regard to certain moral codes—for instance, self-organization or self-responsibility—some of the artists show a rather inconsistent or, like in the event of individualization, a rather affirmative attitude. However, other codes, especially those obviously shaped by entrepreneurial rationalities, are rejected, transgressed, and subverted as e.g. the artists’ attitude towards marketization of the self and the arts or towards competition and rivalry demonstrates. Moreover, most artists claim to apply the same values and ideals to their professional and private life spheres; yet the insights draw a somewhat different picture—the specific *practices* of organizing work, life, and self point out that several artists separate, at least in parts, their professional from their personal identity. What goes for their artistic practice does, hence, not necessarily go for their general living practices. The artists’ intention to ‘practice critique’ and question what is taken for granted illustrates this idea. While critique and (self-)problematization are considered as an essential function and component of theatre and ‘theatrical identity’, they are, as regards the specific working and

living conditions of the artists, often missed. Put differently, whereas the artists ‘care for the art’, they hardly care for their own social and economic position/ing (Loacker 2013, 138).

The majority of the artists show a willingness to accept uncertain, fragmented and individualized work, employment and living conditions (DeFillippi 2009, 9–10), which is not least revealed by their lack of interest in profession-related advocacy. Indeed, they tend to appreciate the discursively promoted equation—“precarity and poverty are the price artists have to pay for their freedom and artistic self-determination.” The particular self-understanding followed is often rooted in the idea “to be sufficient to oneself” (actress), and, hence, in immaterial ideals that the artists develop and formulate in relation to *theatre*-specific codes and resources. Against this background, it seems that the artists’ self-understanding and self-positioning are in different respects still shaped by the mythic image of the ‘poor artist’, committed to the arts only for its own sake (Loacker 2013, 139). This image is commonly supported to increase independence and self-governance; precariously, though, by rejecting wealth and security, the artists shadowed tend to contribute to their own exploitation, marginalization, and vulnerable socio-economic position (Lorey 2007). Thus, to some extent they also ‘conserve’ established power structures and inequalities characterizing their field of practice.

As alluded to in the empirical section, several of the artists are keen to position themselves ‘outside’ the current political economy in order to not be infused by its rationalities and intents. However, parts of the artistic self-understanding seem to be more in line with the intents of social and political governmentality than generally assumed (Menger 2006, 27). In this regard, it first has to be reiterated that, at present, art and economy are no longer to be understood as antithetic (Chiapello 2006; Schroeder 2005). On the contrary, ideals and values such as self-control, asceticism, curiosity, improvisation, and passion—forming central elements of the artistic ethics—are meanwhile also approved, absorbed, and promoted by governmental programs beyond the sphere of the arts (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 142). Indeed, to ‘make up’ and transform individuals into ‘creative and social self-entrepreneurs’ seems to be one of the central interests of contemporary governmentality, which is composed of dynamic and complex power technologies and practices that are targeted on the indirect, rather than the direct regulation of human conduct (Foucault 2007b, 107; Loacker 2013). Amongst other things, this explains the dissolving of oppositions between the aesthetization, moralization, and marketization of work and subjectivity (Böhm and Land 2009). In recent times, it has been the art profession that tends to develop as an attractive standard

of the free, autonomous working subject that is motivated, also in the absence of paid compensation, and not bound to any routines or stable structures but only obliged to self-actualization and self-development interests and, more broadly, a 'creative' life (Menger 2006, 53). In other words, these days artists tend to become a new model of the flexibilized, individualized and economized professional subject, acting in a deregulated, precarious—but 'playful and liberated'—world of work (Loacker 2013, 140–141; Mörsch 2003).

Returning to the artists themselves, and the central interest of the paper at hand—the question of how powerful the current culturepreneurial program is—makes us realize that it is difficult to provide a clear answer. As shown, political programs such as creative industries are rejected by the artists, and yet there lacks a systematic engagement with these policies—just as an engagement with the conditions of society and economy at large. Simultaneously, however, the practices investigated, through which the actors try to constitute themselves as moral, self-governed subjects, exemplify that they consciously strive to undermine prescribing subjectivities and their normalizing forces; this applies in particular for those prescribing codes that run counter or target to interfere with their subjective and artistic convictions (codes such as individualization or responsabilization they acknowledge are, for them, less related to culturepreneurial programs than to the 'art worlds' themselves). The anti-managerial or anti-entrepreneurial language the actors use also points out that their artistic identity is hardly infused by the subject ideal of the culturepreneur that the creative-industries policy promotes. The exploration of the artists' ethical self-relations, thus, shows that efforts to subvert and re-create promoted codes *can* turn out to be fruitful too.

Above all, it seems to be their 'calling' that makes the artists both governable—since most see 'no alternative' to (*this*) artistic practice—and ungovernable, insofar as they are very uncompromising in the process of translating artistic and aesthetic ideas or positions (Eikhof and Haunschild 2006, 238). Here the study exemplifies that artistic scopes and the critical and subversive potentials of the arts are, also under a culturepreneurial governmental program, not to close. This means that even if artistic forms and materials are discursively transformed into commodities (Böhm and Land 2009, 91), art and its practice create their worth not primarily from their 'exchange value'. They rather attain it from their 'use value' and, thus, their immaterial, aesthetic character which cannot be completely controlled or reduced to economic rationalities (Virno 2005, 77). This assumption, or hope, is shared by all artists. They present themselves as convinced that the economy can never suppress art, its uniqueness, vitality and 'difference'. Compared to

other social spheres, the arts work and engage with more ephemeral, dynamic, and non-classifiable materials or forms of expressions that often go beyond the pronounceable plane. As the study has shown, critique is an immanent part of *artistic* practice, and creativity, at the centre of art work, is a ‘resource’ that in regard to its unfolding is never entirely calculable. Also within the culturepreneurial ‘era’ creativity is and remains both a source of aspiration and ‘value’, and a potential source of ‘risk and danger’ (Adorno and Horkheimer 1977).

Finally, the latter idea and the general insights of the study raise the question what the conditions are under which critique can *effectively* develop and, that way, also spill over to the broader social sphere. Referring back to Foucault (1997), the practice of critique is seen as an, always provisional, ethical-aesthetic act. It is seen as an art of considered non-compliance that intends to reduce domination to a minimum (Bardon and Josserand 2010, 508). In order to fulfil this purpose it demands, following Foucault, “local political creativity” (Barratt 2008, 527), public speech and “truth telling” (Foucault 1982, 2001). The study at hand illustrated that the performative artists define local critique as a central component of artistic practice; yet they tend to hardly problematize, in private or public spheres, their obligations, (non-)commitments and truths *about their selves* they “rely upon and reinforce in the process of doing so” (Hamann 2009, 58). Within the context studied, it thus seems that a reflexive practice of critique demands, first of all, an engaged questioning of the discursive truths and assumptions about artistic working and living circumstances. Furthermore, it requires that artists no longer consider the creation of their self and self-relations as a primarily individualized activity or ‘project’ (Foucault 1986). Following Foucault (1988), relationships with others deeply affect the modes of how we form ethical self-practices. Thus, reflections on oneself, one’s ‘care for the self’ and, generally, one’s subjectivity formation inherently include the ‘care for the other’ (Foucault 1986, 1988). This implies that they entail considerations upon one’s direct social and professional environment or network, one’s community and tradition; basically, ethical reflections on oneself involve the acknowledgement of a responsibility to the community—even if it might be a fragmented and heterogeneous one, as in the context at hand (Cummings 2000, 222). Against this background, self-practices are understood as an attempt to elaborate a personal ethics in relation and response to others, and by this means, as a practice of developing and intensifying complex social and personal relations (Butler 2005a, 157–160; Foucault 1997). Since subjectification always occurs within a specific cultural and social formation, it seems that a considered work on oneself simply asks for reflections on the other and the specific conditions s/he lives in

(Loacker and Muhr 2009, 268); because if we understand the practices of the self as isolated exercises, then we are likely just to reproduce individualizing power relations that bind individuals closer to dominant power programs and, while doing so, make them (more) governable (Foucault 2008).

In summary, the paper at hand, intending to contribute to practice-based conceptions of ethics that go beyond normativity and the consideration of universal social or institutional codes only (Crane, Knights, and Starkey 2008; ten Bos 1997), illustrated how subjectification takes place in-between subjection and active self-formation. It revealed that performative artists often work and live within precarious, uncertain conditions. It simultaneously showed, though, that precarity—in terms of contingency—is an immanent element of power relations and subjectification processes (Butler 2005a; Foucault 1982). The latter aspect also brings to mind that precarious working and living circumstances do not only and not necessarily constitute domination and subjection. Put differently, the fact that artists live with precarity does not fully oppress chances to problematize established power relations and moral codes; hence, it does not foreclose the practice of considered refusal or ‘experimental’ critique, even if it is played out from a subordinate position (Bardon and Josserand 2010, 507; Foucault 1992). With that said, precarity can also be seen to operate as a creative force that reminds us of the convertibility of truth and the political nature, the non-universality, non-exclusivity and historicity of any power/knowledge program, social order and discourse (Foucault 1982, 140). Within contemporary governmentality, this fragility of cultural and social conditions and relations seems to become eminently evident (Butler 2005a). As illustrated, governmental power programs frame and regulate individual autonomies, judgements, and activities (Clegg, Kornberger, and Rhodes 2007, 114; Barratt 2008); nevertheless, they also promote codes such as self-activation and responsabilization and are thus far from determining subjectivity, reality and truth (Foucault 1978, 2008).

However, whether the creative and dynamic forces, also immanent within the idea of precarity, can be unfolded within the arts and beyond, seems to be substantially dependent on the question to what extent one is capable and willing of becoming “critical of norms under which we are asked to act” (Butler 2005b, 24), and, so, critical of the forces, codes and technologies that define, individualize and normalize relations to self and others (Crane, Knights, and Starkey 2008, 303). Foucault’s thoughts on morality, ethics, and relational self-practices enrich established conceptions of business ethics exactly through undermining, resisting and intervening in the seemingly taken-for-grantedness of any institutional

or organizational power program. In other words, his approach enriches rule-determined ethics conceptions by asking us to consciously use our freedom while *engaging* with discursive moral codes, and ‘telling the truth’ (Foucault 2001). Although the paper at hand focussed upon performative artists and their ethical subject-formation, telling *our* truth starts—no matter to what social or professional group we belong—with practical, situation-related reflections on “what we are willing to accept in our worlds, . . . willing to refuse, and to change, both in ourselves and in our circumstances” (Foucault 1993, 223).

### Acknowledgements

The author extends special thanks to the editor and the three anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and feedback. The empirical research of this article was funded by a grant from the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) as ‘Re-creating organization’, Project number P19026-G11.

### Endnotes

1. Due to the openness and ‘dialogic orientation’ of Foucault’s work, it is, however, important to note that Foucault’s theoretical constructs and methodological approaches can be framed and applied in a variety of ways (Bardon and Josserand 2010, 508). Following his accounts, Foucault’s intention was to create a conceptual and methodical ‘tool-box’. Those interested in his work, he invited to creatively engage with and use the tools he offered (Foucault [1974] 1994). The various interpretations of his works that exist e.g., within the field of management and organization studies are to be understood as exemplary for the ‘experimental attitude’ in which many Foucault scholars approach his work (Barratt 2008). In line with Jones, it is thus assumed that there is “more than one Foucault” (Jones 2002, 228), implying, amongst other things, that there is no final or ‘true’ reading of Foucault (Bardon and Josserand 2010, 501). However, considering the development and modification of some of his central concepts such as power, discipline, discourse or the subject illustrates, that Foucault approached his own work with openness and ‘curiosity’ too (e.g., Foucault 1982).

2. Discourses are basically characterized by a certain systematicity and regularity in the production of written and/or spoken texts and statements (Foucault 1972, 1978).

3. As commonly known, Foucault’s work was developing along three axes—the first one is the axis of knowledge, language and discourse (e.g., Foucault 1970, 72), the second one is the axis of power/knowledge and discipline (e.g., Foucault [1977] 1994), and the third one is about the subject, ethics and government (e.g., Foucault

1984, 1986, 2008). Interestingly now, reflecting on how management and organization studies scholars referred or are referring to Foucault's work makes evident that all three axes of his work leave/left marks within the field (Jones 2002). The first studies engaging with Foucault focussed upon the repressive and constraining nature of discourse and power (management) programs, and, thus, understood the subject as an object of discipline and control (e.g., Knights 1990; Sewell and Wilkinson 1992; Townley 1994). Following studies started to take into consideration how groups of individuals or employees respond to certain power programs, practices and technologies (e.g., Knights and McCabe 2003; McCabe 2008). In recent years, though, it seems that the 'ethical turn' of Foucault's later works has found entrance into the field. The latest Foucault inspired studies thus increasingly focus on issues such as governmentality and biopolitical government (e.g., Barratt 2008; Weiskopf and Munro 2012), and on Foucault's conceptualization of morality, freedom and critique (e.g., Bardon and Jossierand 2011; Clegg, Kornberger, and Rhodes 2007; Crane, Knights, and Starkey 2008; McMurray, Pullen, and Rhodes 2011).

4. Originally, Foucault (1984, 1997) developed his notion of ethics from an analysis of the moral prescriptions (mainly in regard to the issue of sexuality) and the specific moral behaviour that the ancient Greeks elaborated in practice (Loacker and Muhr 2009, 267).

5. Following Foucault (1984), the 'ethical substance' varies depending on the particular historical and cultural context of which it is part. While Christianity considered concupiscence and desire as the main moral material we have to work on, the period of Enlightenment put a stronger emphasis on the individuals' subjective intentions and attitudes. In recent times Foucault (2007, 203) sees emotions and feelings as the part of ourselves that is most directly linked with morality.

6. Following Boltanski and Chiapello (2005, 144), in the late 1960s and in the 1970s the 'critique of the artists' (*Künstlerkritik*) movement emerged in Central Europe. This movement mainly problematized the standardization, routines, rigidity, control- and surveillance-intensity, as well as concomitant alienation tendencies of industrial work and production processes. According to the authors, this critique has by now be taken up by post-industrial forms of capitalism. Indeed, it seems to be part of the rationalities of recent governmental programs to sustain ideals such as individual creativity, authenticity, flexibility, self-expression and self-management, which promise to provide a more meaningful and 'artsy' (working) life than the conditions of industrial capitalism did (see also section six). The subject model of the 'creative entrepreneur', which does not only apply to the sphere of cultural work, can be seen as an instance, illustrating how recent power and governmental programs respond/ed to former critique coming from the arts (Menger 2006).

7. Austria's three most well-known theatre houses—the Viennese 'Staatsoper', the 'Volksoper', and 'Burgtheater'—are publically supported with about 130 million euros per year (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur 2006, 8). Furthermore, the nine institutionalized regional theatres are supported with an additional fourteen million euros. By comparison: Austria's eighty-five independent theatres receive public subsidies in the amount of about two million euros per year (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur 2006, 57). While all organizations complain about the poor public funding, the smaller, independent theatres are those most seriously hit by restrictive cultural policies and, more specifically, the distribution of the cultural budget (Kock 2009).

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