

## A few thoughts on building

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One cliché about artistic production is that it “brings something new into the world.” Yet isn’t this just an ambiguous justification for “artiness” and hidden beneath it is the prevalent suspicion of our society that artists are unproductive or worse, irrelevant? It is from this subjugated position of market autonomy that the artist typically operates. Artists today, if they have sufficiently porous skin, feel the importance of this cultural moment and choose to respond with strategies to overcome this enforced autonomy.

One clear model of radical invention in the midst of social upheaval comes from the Russian Constructivists’ transformations of artmaking and production, the advent of industrial design. It was a moment when the role of the artist in society was questioned, re-imagined, and could serve to denature the present. In her book on the Constructivists, “The Artist as Producer” art historian Maria Gough characterizes their motivation as,

“For the Constructivists, the question of their role and efficacy has tremendous urgency, given that the essentially bourgeois conception of the artist with which they came of age - the artist defined as an individual committed to the expression of the self - is now under extraordinary pressure, if it is not simply rejected altogether. This question is given further urgency by the Constructivists’ commitment to the struggle to *abolish the division of mental and manual labor* - a struggle that tends to undermine the vanguard artists’ traditional and exclusive claim on the realm of radical cultural production.”

Constructivism in its later forms sought an objective basis for its experiments, a logical system that would produce an irrefutably resultant art. This was expressed in Constructivism as the battle between “composition”, the arranging of elements in relation (to their eyes superfluously) and “construction” the organic creation of a necessary object from a logical system. This unease with their subjective experience in search of the tautological artwork has largely been discredited in the intervening years and marks one difference between them and the artists of the exhibition *Garden Party*.

It seems strange in retrospect that in looking for a revolutionary, socially efficacious artwork the Constructivist’s threw out the idea of relationality that existed in composition. What else but that the sympathetic arrangement of parts in relation to each other could be important metaphor for social re-imagination? The area of continuity between the artists of *Garden Party* and the Constructivists lies more in the combination of mental and manual labor. This is accomplished in a number of ways; through adopting the practices of another social context, like the garden center; through embracing the collaborative effort as a performative artwork; and through direct combination of physical effort with mental structure.

The artists of *Garden Party* also live in a politically volatile moment, since the 2008 global financial crisis, global warming and many other insistent crises. The imperative of the moment calls for another reimagining of the artist's role, one where functionality and relationality are in play, and subjectivity isn't seen as superfluous. This enterprise embraces the role of the subjective experience, while not valorizing it as genius nor banishing it as essentially corrupt within a collective project. This project embraces the play of the pointless within the creation of the functional. It addresses social concerns not through polemics but through generosity and invitation. By acknowledging human limitations it shifts society's relationship to the environment from one of technological mastery to one of community. As such it places value on the ease of transportation and reuse.

The artist would still take cues from the material's qualities not in order to assure a logical basis for the artwork but instead to choose humble limit to guide formal decisions. The results are playful and interactive works that embrace tactility and surface treatment. And these workers labor to investigate the possibilities inside of labor, to find the unnamed within the regular. Their motivation is social engagement with objects and experiences, with epistemological humility but rejecting agnosticism in order to find and then build a new trajectory.