eISSN 2783-6843 | ISSN 1392-0316 | 10.37522/aaav.118.2025.308

Critical Dance in/as Contemporary Art: Labour, Commodity and Value in Alexandra Pirici's *Encyclopaedia of Relations*

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Since the early 2000s, dance has increasingly been presented within contemporary art exhibitions. Whereas some have interpreted this trend primarily as a symptom of capitalism's tightening grip on art and its institutions, this article argues for understanding dance in the exhibition space as a novel critical artistic form. It does so by drawing on a long tradition—from Baudelaire and Benjamin to John Roberts and Sianne Ngai—that views art as in a dialectical relationship with capitalism, and thus with categories such as commodification, labour, and value. Departing from Marx's concept of value as a specific historical social form, and from what Patrick Murray has described as "practically abstract labour," the article argues: a) that dance in art exhibitions should be understood dialectically in relation to the commodity form; b) that this specific status must be mediated through each dance work's particular artistic form; and c) that this does not exclude the possibility that dance works presented in contemporary art exhibitions may still contribute to an experience-based capitalist economy, or that the labour conditions of the dancers may be questioned.

Keywords: critical dance, dance as art, Alexandra Pirici, value, social form, labour.

Introduction[1]

Since the early 1990s, contemporary art has been characterised by a parallel movement.[2] On the one hand, there has been an expansion and disintegration of the art object, giving rise to post-object, socially engaged, ethnographic, community based, and activist art practices. On the other, the institution of art has similarly expanded and disintegrated beyond the art gallery and the museum towards the exhibiting of art in community centres, other non-art institutional spaces, and increasingly within the contested field of artistic research in universities.[3] As has been well documented in recent decades within art theory, this post-conceptual contemporary art has its roots in the major transformations of modern art that took place between the 1950s and the 1970s. They marked a turn away from medium-specificity and medium-specific crafts, and led to the emergence of post-medial genres such as performance, sound and action-based art. This transformation, in turn, can be traced back to the Dadaists' invention of the readymade, the Futurists' and Surrealists' experiments with music, dance, and performance; and the Soviet Constructivists' work on abstraction and structure.[4]

1 This article is a slightly revised version of a keynote presented at the conference *The Art–Labour Relationship in Contemporary Art in Central and Eastern Europe, 1991–Present* (Vilnius, May 9–10, 2024).

2 By "contemporary art," I refer to art that is post-medial and was established after the Second World War (although the term only came into use in the early 1990s), and that is also post-conceptual in the sense of being "the speculative realization of conceptual art," as Peter Osborne puts it. I also follow Osborne's understanding of contemporary art as distinct from the temporality of the modern, describing it as "a new, internally disjunctive global historical-temporal form, a totalizing (but not thereby "total," since it is open to not more than a distributive unification), radically disjunctive contemporaneity." Peter Osborne, "The Postconceptual Condition: Or, the Cultural Logic of High Capitalism Today," *Radical Philosophy* 184 (2014): 23, 25.

3 John Roberts, *Art and Emancipation* (Brill Books, 2024); Grant H. Kester, *Beyond the Sovereign Self: Aesthetic Autonomy from the Avant-Garde to Socially Engaged Art* (Duke University Press, 2023); Tom Holert, *Knowledge Beside Itself: Contemporary Art's Epistemic Politics* (Sternberg Press, 2020); Claire Bishop, *Disordered Attention: How We Look at Art and Performance Today* (Verso, 2024).

4 For different accounts and perspectives on this shift, see Erin Brannigan, *Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental Composition 1950s–1970s* (Routledge, 2022); Rose-Lee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (Thames and Hudson, 2011); Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (University of California Press, 2011); Liz Kotz, *Words to be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (MIT Press, 2010); and Branden W. Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts After Cage* (Zone Books, 2008).

Another way of describing the past four decades of general expansion and disintegration of the art object and its institutions is to frame this tendency as a general movement within contemporary art towards performativity—and even more specifically, as a shift *from* performance art *to* the performativity of art in general.[5] This shift becomes especially apparent when we juxtapose the two cover images of performance curators RoseLee Goldberg's and Catherine Wood's surveys of *performance art* and performance *in* art from the 1970s and 2020s, respectively.[6] Goldberg's book features a theatrical performance on a stage by Bauhaus-affiliated artist Oscar Schlemmer, while the cover of Wood's book shows German artist Anne Imhof's much-discussed installation performance at the German pavilion during the Venice Biennale in 2017. Placed side by side, the images clearly signal a shift from performance art (in the sense of theatre and spectacle) to performance *in* art. A similar shift is also revealed when comparing, for example, the Dadaists' cabarets from the early 1900s with Tino Sehgal's constructed situations from the early 2000s. While Emmy Hennings and Hugo Ball used popular and recognizable genres such as the cabaret to produce avant-garde performances, Sehgal's constructed situations take place within the white cube, performed by dancers and performers without a clear beginning and end, having broken with many of the theatre's parameters, such as dramaturgy and a fictive timeline. This shift becomes even more pronounced when the notion of performance *in* art is connected to performativity with its post-structuralist theoretical context.[7] If *performance* points to the theatrical meaning of the term—as a show and a spectacle—then *performance in art*, or rather the performativisation of art in general, refers to the repetitive strategies embedded in the ever expanded meaning

5 For an art historical and theoretical account of this tendency, see Josefine Wikström, *Practices of Relations in Task-Dance and the Event-Score: A Critique of Performance* (Routledge, 2021). See also André Lepecki, ed., *Dance: Documents of Contemporary Art* (Whitechapel Publishing, 2012); Stephanie Rosenthal, ed., *Move: Choreographing You: Art and Dance Since the 1960s* (The MIT Press, 2011); and Christine Macel and Emma Lavigne, *Danser sa vie: Art et danse de 1900 à nos jours* (Éditions du centre Pompidou, 2011).

6 Catherine Wood, *Performance in Contemporary Art* (Tate Publishing, 2019); Goldberg, *Performance Art*.

7 This movement also coincided with the development of the term "performativity" in cultural theory from the 1990s onwards. It was also a period when performance studies became institutionalised as an academic field in the U.S. and elsewhere. See the introduction in Wikström, *Practices of Relations*.

of contemporary artworks. In this sense, the concept of performativity—as theorised from Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida to Judith Butler and Fred Moten—has become structurally integrated as a key aspect of contemporary artworks.[8]

At a more detailed level, a part of this general shift in contemporary art towards performance in art and/or, more broadly, the performativity of art, is the exhibiting of dance works over the past two decades within art museums, public and private galleries, biennales, and public spaces. Whereas this tendency, for example, has been referred to as the "dance-exhibition,"[9] I prefer the term dance *in* or *as* contemporary art. By this, I mean dance that is post-medial and thus situated within the category of contemporary art. Just as the mediums of painting, music, sculpture, and theatre broke down and were institutionalised in the 1960s under the banner of art in general, dance also became part of this expanded field—what would later be termed contemporary art and post-conceptual art.[10] In this context, dance in or as contemporary art is always self-critical with respect to its own medium. Historically, this form of medium-criticality in dance has its roots in North American minimalist dance of the 1960s (Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti, Trisha Brown, and others) as well as the European choreographic turn of the late 1990s and early 2000s (Xavier Le Roy, Mette Ingvartsen, and La Ribot among others).[11] Put differently, dance in/as contemporary dance implies a negation of medium-specificity. As a negation, it engaged

8 For an overview of the term "performatvity," see James Loxley, *Performativity* (Routledge, 2007). For examples of developments of the term after Derrida and Butler, see Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003); and Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Signs* 28, no. 3 (2003): 801–31, https://doi.org/10.1086/345321.

9 Claire Bishop, "Black Box, White Cube, Grey Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention," *TDR* 62, no. 2 (2018): 22–42. Erin Brannigan's term "dance as contemporary art medium" is more accurate in describing dance works, but I would not call dance a contemporary art medium per se. See Erin Brannigan, *The Persistence of Dance: Choreography as Concept and Material in Contemporary Art* (University of Michigan Press 2023), 3.

10 See footnote 2 for my account of this.

11 Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Wesleyan University Press, 1986); Erin Brannigan, *Choreography, Visual Art and Experimental Composition 1950s–1970s Roberts* (Routledge 2022); Bojana Cvéjic, *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in Contemporary Dance and Performance* (Palgrave McMillan, 2015); André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (Routledge, 2006).

critically with a certain historical legacy—one that includes the temporality of the Western proscenium stage theatre and specific dance techniques, among other conventions. What emerges from this negation are dance works that, from the beginning, understand themselves as contemporary art. Their specificity does not lie in their exhibition format but rather in the fact that they are exhibited *as art within* the exhibition format. The introduction of dance as a medium over the past decades should thus be understood in a double sense. On the one hand, it signals a longing for medium-specificity within the contemporary art context marked by the seemingly never-ending disintegration of both the artwork and the art institution. On the other hand, the dance works presented are post-medial—following the lineage of Rainer, Lucinda Childs, Eszter Salamon, and Jérôme Bel—and are exhibited as post-conceptual and post-medial art. This is the central tension that characterises most dance works shown over the past three to four decades. It is evident in a number of examples from the early 2000s. In 2003, Tate Modern in London staged a new work by the then 84-year-old North American choreographer Merce Cunningham in the Turbine Hall. In 2012, the same venue hosted a retrospective presentation of Belgian choreographer Anne Theresa de Kaersmaeker's 1982 canonical work *Fase: Four Movements to the Music of Steve Reich*. That same year, the Tapei Foundation in Barcelona showcased French choreographer Le Roy's *Retrospective*, a major exhibition of his works from 1994 to 2010s "adapted" for the exhibition format.[12] In 2016, Raven Row Gallery in London staged the first major retrospective of some of Rainer's key works, and in 2015, Galleri Index in Stockholm held a solo exhibition of Forti's major dance works. Important group and historical shows of this period also include *Danser sa Vie* at Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2011 and Hayward Gallery's *Move: Choreographing You* in London in the same year.[13]

12 "Based on solo works by Xavier Le Roy created between 1994 and 2010, the work unfolds in three time axes: the duration of the visit composed by each visitor, the daily basis of labor time of 16 performers and the time of the growth of a new composition during the length of the exhibition." "Retrospective," *Xavier Le Roy*, accessed September 13, 2024, https://www.xavierleroy.com/page.php?sp=2d6b21a02b428a09f2ebd3d6cbaf2f-6be1e3848d&lg=en.

13 Although this general tendency can now be observed at all levels of the contemporary art world—from biennales and major museums to smaller galleries, artist-run spaces, and arts organisations—it should be understood as part of the broader performativisation of contemporary art that has taken place at least since the early 1960s. However, when it is dance that is exhibited, medium-specific questions are raised.

The growing literature on this phenomenon—dance in art—can be divided into two major camps. On the one hand, there are those who are largely critical of this tendency. This position stands in stark contrast to both art critic Lucy Lippard's 1970s claim that the dematerialised artwork cannot be commodified and to performance scholar Peggy Phelan's 1990s argument that performance—because it takes place in the present and, according to her, is irreproducible—resists commodification.[14] More recently, however, the prevailing argument is that dance in art should primarily be understood as a *further* commodification of dance within the so called neo-liberalisation of the art institution. Hence, the inclusion of performance and dance is understood to contribute to contemporary art's event-based economy and the increasing precarity and worsening working conditions faced by dancers. The focus of this critique of dance in the museum is on the poor labour conditions under which these dance- and performance-based exhibitions are often produced.[15] On the other hand, a more historically grounded perspective emphasises that the legacy of dance as a critical form has been integral to the general modern concept of art—at least since the early 1900s, with increased focus beginning in the 1960s.[16] While I align myself with this second position, I argue that neither of these perspectives has sufficiently examined dance in the exhibition space through the lens of categories such as commodity, labour, and value. Whereas the first tends to focus on the working conditions of dancers or interprets dance in the exhibition space as an intensification of the creative economy, the second engages with dance as a form, but without considering its historically ontological status as art and, by extension, as a capitalist commodity.

14 Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (University of California Press, 1997); Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Routledge 1993).

15 See, e.g., Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider, "Precarity and Performance: An Introduction," *TDR* 56, no. 4 (2012): 5–9, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23362768; and Sarah Wokey and Siobhan Davies, eds., *Who Cares? Dance in the Gallery and Museum* (Siobhan Davies Dance, 2015). See also the research project *Precarious Movements: Choreography & the Museum*, led by Erin Brannigan at the University of Sidney between 2021 and 2024, which aimed to develop best practices for working conditions when dance is presented in museums.

16 Brannigan, *The Persistence of Dance*; and Bishop, *Disordered Attention*. This scholarship also emphasises how current dance in the visual arts fosters new forms of spectatorship mediated by technologies such as the smartphone.

One way to determine whether the inclusion of dance into the exhibition space over the past twenty years (again) is merely a consequence of art museums' increasing integration with the event- and creative industries economy, or whether it retains a degree of criticality, is to ask some of the following questions: What kind of commodity is a dance work in an exhibition space? What labour relations does it entail? How does the wage relation function here? To pose such questions is to begin from the assumption that the artwork has a dialectical relationship with commodification—an idea articulated by Walter Benjamin already in the early 1900s and later developed by Theodor Adorno, who saw commodification as one of art's conditions of possibility. More recently, contemporary theorist John Roberts has elaborated on this through a distinction between artistic and productive labour in contemporary art. Yet none of these thinkers seem to have asked: How does dance *in* art relate to this framework? I want to make three arguments in response. First, I understand dance in art dialectically with regard to the commodity form and to forms of labour.[17] As I will show, artworks in general are not commodities in the same way as "ordinary" commodities. Dance works—whether presented in the theatre or the art institution—follow the same logic as other art commodities. As such, they do not contain what Marx terms productive or abstract labour in the same way that regular commodities do. Second, this specific status of dance as art must be mediated through each dance/artwork's particular form and cannot be taken for granted. For this reason, it is impossible to argue either for or against dance in the art exhibition. Each dance work must assert its speculative autonomy and sustain a critical status.[18] Third, and in relation

17 I follow here a long tradition extending from Baudelaire and Benjamin to contemporary thinkers like Peter Osborne, Nicholas Brown, Claire Leigh La Berge, Sianne Ngai, Dave Beech, and John Roberts. See, e.g., Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (Verso 2011); Nicholas Brown, *Autonomy: The Social Ontology of Art Under Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 2020); Leigh Claire La Berge, *Wages Against Artwork: Decommodified Labour and the Claims of Socially Engaged Art* (Duke University Press, 2019); Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form* (Harvard UP 2022); Roberts, *Art and Emancipation; and John Roberts, The Intangibilities of Form: Deskilling and Reskilling in Art After the Readymade* (Verso 2008).

18 For a discussion of the fictive aspect of art's autonomy, see Josefine Wikström, "The Social Form of Contemporary Art's Autonomy," *Third Text* 38, no. 6 (2024): 677–691, https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2025.2504830, and Josefine Wikström, "An Art for Art's Sake or a Critical Concept of Art's Autonomy? Autonomy, Arm's Length Distance, and

to current debates, this does not mean that dance exhibitions indirectly cannot contribute to an experience-based capitalist economy, nor that the working conditions of dancers cannot be critically examined.[19] The mass reproduction of certain dance works in the recent decades can be seen as a reflection of the diminishing institutional autonomy of art galleries and museums and their increased involvement with commodification, whether mediated by the state or the market. As I will argue, this does not mean that the dance-/artworks are produced under the same conditions needed for them to function as capitalist commodities. I begin by outlining the historical entanglement of dance and art since the emergence of modern art, to show that their relationship is not new with regard to contemporary capitalism. Then I offer a critique of the common contextualisation of the latest phase of dance in the exhibition space. Finally, I present an alternative reading of dance in the exhibition space through the lens of the social form of capital, which will culminate in a critical analysis of Alexandra Pirici's work *Encyclopaedia of Relations*, shown at the Venice Biennale in 2022.

Dance as art and its "neoliberal" context

As has been noted, the interest of museums and art galleries in modern dance has been present ever since the birth of modern dance itself in the early 1900s.[20] Claire Bishop distinguishes three periods in which three

Art's Freedom," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 32, no. 66 (2023): 74–99, https://doi.org/10.7146/nja.v32i65-66.140120.

19 For a detailed account of the history of the creative economies paradigm and its impact on cultural policy, see Gustav Strandberg, "The Paradigm of the Creative Industries: Cultural Policy in the Neoliberal Welfare State," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 32, no. 66 (2023): 50–73, https://doi.org/10.7146/nja.v32i65-66.140119.

20 For an account of modern dance and its break from ballet and entertainment dance forms, see John Martin, *The Modern Dance* (Princeton N.J. [1933] 1989); Louis Horst and Carroll Russel, *Modern Dance Forms: In Relation to the Other Modern Arts* (Princeton Book Company [1961] 1987); and Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (Verso, 2013). For accounts of modern art's interest in dance since the early 1900s, see Claire Bishop, "The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum: Tate, MoMA, and Whitney," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (2014): 63–76; Claire Bishop, "Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone: Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention, *TDR* 62, no. 2 (2018): 22–42; Brannigan, *The Persistence of Dance*; Christine Macel and Emma Lavigne, *Danser sa Vie: Art et danse de 1900 à nos jours* (Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2011); and Carlos Basualdo et al., eds., *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg and Duchamp* (Yale UP, 2013).

major art museums—The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), Tate Modern, and Whitney Museum of Modern Art—have shown a particular interest in dance. The first period dates back to the beginnings of modern dance and is evident in early collaborations between dancers and visual artists, as well as in major art institutions' presentations of dance, such as MoMA's presentation of Isadora Duncan's notes and set designs in the early 1900s.[21] The second period emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, marked by well-known collaborations such as those between John Cage and Merce Cunningham, and between Yvonne Rainer and Robert Morris.[22] The current, third period began in the early 2000s, characterised by the exhibiting and presentation of works by artists such as Jérôme Bel, Boris Charmatz, and William Forsythe. This historical trajectory shows the sustained and evolving interrelationship of dance and art.

If we focus on the most recent of these three periods, we can identify three to four distinct ways in which dance has been included into the art institution over the past two decades. First, there is the exhibiting of both newly produced and restaged retrospective dance works by choreographers in the exhibition space. In these cases, dance is presented in the white cube but retains the temporal setting of the theatre: scheduled performances, a seated audience, and works that often contain institutional critique and self-reflection, primarily concerning the history of dance and/or theatre rather than art in general. The re-staging of works by Cunningham and Rainer are both examples of this tendency.[23] Second, we have seen visual artists presenting dance and/or performance works in museums and galleries that involve dancers. This tendency aligns with what Bishop has termed "delegated performance," and reflects a broader performativisation of art, in which dancers' skills and knowledge are employed by artists to execute performance and dance works in the exhibition space.[24] Third, over the past two decades, a number of choreographers and dancers have created

21 Bishop, "The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum."

22 Rosenthal, *Move Choreographing You*.

23 The re-staging of choreographers like Cunningham also represents a retrospective institutionalisation of dance into art in general. For a discussion of this, see Wikström, *Practices of Relations*.

24 Examples of such artists include Pablo Bronstein, Cally Spooner, and Tino Sehgal. See also Claire Bishop, "Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity," *October* 140 (2012): 91–112.

dance works specifically for the exhibition space—works that do not adopt the temporality of the theatre but instead unfold *within* the temporality of the gallery space. These choreographers and dancers often come from what I term a context of critical dance—a milieu of post-dramatic theatre and a post-conceptual dance tradition that critique the representation of both dance as entertainment and of the dancing body as an essential container of movement. These practices form a direct lineage from minimalist dance of the 1960s.[25] Artists such as Sehgal, Maria Hassibi, Le Roy, Boris Charmatz, and Alexandra Pirici are representative of this approach. Their work occupies a space between the finite, linear temporality of the theatre and the infinite and open-ended temporality of the exhibition space. These artists question the subjectivity of the individual spectator and uphold the previous critique that once targeted the institution of theatre onto the institution of art, since this critique is concerned with how bodies are represented and what ontologies of dance are made visible. In these cases, dance is brought into the exhibition space as dance, yet without the institution of the theatre. Rather, dance's medium-specificity becomes part of its critical potential precisely because it is placed within the category of contemporary art, understood as post-medium and post-conceptual. This point is central to the discussion that follows, where I examine the dance work as a commodity and explore its potential for maintaining a critical form.

One reason why the most recent period of dance in the museum has been criticised for contributing to capitalism's event economy lies in the broader period in which this third phase has appeared. The past twenty to thirty years are frequently described as neoliberal—a period characterised by the de-regulation of finance, the disintegration of the Keynesian welfare state, and a crisis in reproduction.[26] This period has also been characterised by stagnation in Western economies, beginning with the 1973 oil crisis and continuing through what has been termed the "long downturn

25 Benjamin Buchloh insightfully critiques this in his review of the 2017 Venice Biennale. See Benjamin Buchloh, "Rock Paper Scissors," *Artforum*, September 2017, https://www.artforum.com/features/benjamin-h-d-buchloh-on-some-means-and-ends-of-sculpture-at-venice-munster-and-documenta-235366/.

26 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford UP, 2007); Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End: Essays on a Failing System* (Verso, 2008); and Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," *New Left Review* 100 (2016): 99–117.

of capitalism." This has coincided with the rise of surplus populations and a general decline in wages.[27] Furthermore, this same period of dance in the exhibition space—especially since the 2008 financial crisis—has also been interpreted in relation to increasing economic and social instability. Departing from Marx's idea of the tendency of the profit rate to fall—outlined in Volume 3 of *Capital*—some thinkers argue that the ongoing economic crisis since 2008 is a sign of the capitalist system's disintegration and collapse from within.[28]

From the standpoint of performance studies and art theory, the first two characterisations of this period have been dominant.[29] This has resulted in an understanding of the recent surge of dance in exhibitions and the associated labour conditions as part of the neo-liberalisation of the contemporary art institution, alongside the broader dismantling of the welfare state and the collapse of workers' movements. Whilst this diagnosis accurately reflects the general state of society and its institutions, it does not address more fundamental questions regarding the dialectical relationship of dance (considered as artworks) and capitalism, which is inherent to their social ontology. Like all modern art, modern dance became art precisely because it achieved a particular status as a commodity.[30] Rather than focusing solely on the critique of labour conditions under contemporary capitalism and its alienating effects, which can be seen as a reformist move insufficient to the demands of art, I suggest that we begin by critically examining how dance as art functions in capitalism from the standpoint of the present. This approach aligns with a strand of Marxism described as Dialectical Hegelianism, New Dialectics, and value-form theory, which ultimately views capitalism as a

27 The period from the 1970s onward is understood as distinct from the "golden years of the 1950s–1970s"—a key avant-garde period in which the performativisation of contemporary post-conceptual art was established. For an account of that period and its downturn, see Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945–2000* (Verso, 2006).

28 For one account of this debate, see Aaron Benanav, "We're all Stagnationists Now," *Jacobin*, September 29, 2023, https://jacobin.com/2023/09/robert-brenner-long-downturn-rate-of-profit-capitalism-stagnation-seth-ackerman-reply.

29 For an emblematic account of this issue, see Nicholas Ridout and Rebecca Schneider, eds., *Precarity and Performance: Special Consortium Issue* (2012).

30 For a useful historical account of how dance came to be considered an art form rather than entertainment, see Jacques Rancière, *The Dance of Light in Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Zakir Paul (Verso, 2014).

social form of human relations. While this approach is not new—it reflects how Marx himself, as well as later value-form theorists such as Illich Rubin in his 1924 *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, and Adorno, whose late 1960s seminars on Marx contributed to the Frankfurt School's development of value-form theory[31]—understood the specificity of capitalist production. However, it does mark a departure from how dance and culture in general have been approached since the 1930s, and with a resurged force in the 1970s, as objects standing outside the social relations of capitalism. In contrast to this approach, art in general and dance in contemporary art in particular must be understood in relation to the commodity and to the value-form in contemporary capitalism.

Social form of capitalism

I take the notion of capitalism as a social form from North American thinker Patrick Murray who in 2016 published *The Mismeasure of Wealth: Essays on Marx and Social Form*. Murray draws on recent decades' renewed readings of Marx that emphasise Marx's writings as a critique of the capitalist mode of production, understood as a specific historical form. Following such interpretations, the idea that the capitalist system is a social form means, for Murray, that it encompasses a "distinctive way of life"[32] that is specific to the capitalist mode of production. Drawing on Marx and Engels' *German Ideology* (1845–1846 [1932]), Murray further emphasises that whereas all production involves the appropriation of nature, the capitalist mode of production is historically specific. Its specificity lies in creating an abstract equivalence between different forms of labour and labourers in ways unprecedented in history. The lesson of historical materialism, Murray writes, is that "there is no production in general; production always has a specific social form and purpose."[33] This constituted the core "critique" of political economy that Marx pursued and that differentiated him from all

31 While many thinkers within the value-form theory offer useful critiques of capitalist production as a social form, I choose here to focus on Murray because of his elaboration of this concept as well as his development of the term "practically abstract labour"—two notions I find particularly valuable for analysing dance in the exhibition space.

32 Patrick Murray, *The Mismeasure of Wealth: Essays on Marx and Social Form* (Brill Books, 2016), 1.

33 Ibid., 1.

other neoclassical and socialist economists of his time.[34] Whereas classical political economy—as exemplified in the writings of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, and still dominant in many contemporary economic studies—presumes the social form of capitalist production as "natural," Marx criticised this social form itself. This mode of critique is not dissimilar from Immanuel Kant's critique of metaphysics and his establishment of transcendental critique, undertaken a century before.[35]

At the centre of this social form is the capitalist commodity. Although commodity production has existed in many pre-capitalist societies, the capitalist commodity is specific, and capitalism is the first society in which wealth is predominantly expressed through commodities. In contrast to previous commodity-producing societies, the specificity of the capitalist commodity does not lie simply in its exchangeability, but rather in the emergence of a third element—value—when commodities are exchanged. In capitalist societies, production is organized around the creation of such commodities. Murray writes: "[…] Marx identifies value as a strange, suprasensible and strictly social objectivity that is the consequence of a specific social form of labour, namely commodity-producing labour."[36] For something appropriated from nature to become a commodity, it must have what Marx calls a use-value—that is, it must be useful to the buyer. When exchanged with other commodities, it acquires exchange-value. Yet, as Chris Arthur notes, the specificity of the capitalist commodity lies not merely in the dominance of the exchange-principle but in the fact that capitalist commodities are primarily produced to be exchanged.[37] Furthermore, for Marx, the commodity is composed of two kinds of labour: concrete labour (specific labour that constitutes the use-value of the commodity) and abstract labour (labour that becomes apparent as soon as the commodity is exchanged). Within capitalist commodity production, concrete labour *also always* serves as the possible bearer of abstract labour exchangeable for

34 See, e.g., Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, trans. Alexander Locascio (Monthly Review Press, 2012); and Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

35 See the first introduction to Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2000): 1–52.

36 Murray, *The Mismeasure of Wealth*, 13.

37 See Chapter 3 in Chris Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital* (Brill Books, 2004).

any other form of abstract labour. Value thus appears as commodities are exchanged or produced, or even conceived as exchangeable with other capitalist commodities. This is why value becomes a strange entity, seemingly independent of both the commodity itself and its use-value.

> We have seen that when commodities are in the relation of exchange, their exchange-value-manifests itself as something totally independent of their use-value. But if we abstract from their use-value, there remains their value, as it has just been defined. The common factor in the exchange relation, or in the exchange value of the commodity, is therefore its value. The progress of the investigation will lead us back to exchange-value as the necessary mode of expression, or form of appearance, of value.[38]

The consequence of the capitalist mode of production is that commodity exchange produces a social objectivity—a social objectivity that, for Murray, becomes real only in practice, that is, through practical exchange. This is why Murray refers to abstract labour as "practically abstract labour": it is abstract, but only through the practice of commodity production. In other words, value becomes a social relation that manifests as a social objectivity, through which all social relations in capitalist production become visible. By social objectivity, Murray means that the practical exchange of commodities—the foundation of capitalist production—appears as the genuine social objectivity. Through exchange (or, following Arthur, production for exchange), the concrete, specific labour embedded in a commodity becomes abstracted and equated with the labour embodied in all other commodities. Consequently, the capitalist mode of production is the first social system in which abstract labour is realised in practice.

An important aspect of Murray's and other thinkers' reading of Marx's critique of the capitalist mode of production from the standpoint of social form concerns political struggle. Whereas Western Marxism, following György Lukács and his theory of reification, focuses on labour alienation and the improvement of workers' conditions, the social form approach shifts the focus, as Roberts articulates, towards the supersession of

38 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin Books, 1990), 128.

the value-form.[39] What follows is an overview of thinkers within art theory who have successfully analysed contemporary art from the standpoint of Murray and related value-form theorists. Since this perspective has been absent from performance and dance studies, I then proceed to a close reading of Alexandra Pirici's work in light of this theoretical framework.[40]

Art's dialectical relationship to the commodity form

As stated above, much art-theoretical discussion around contemporary art's exhibiting of dance over the past twenty to thirty years has been marked by many looming diagnoses that art under contemporary capitalist conditions is fully subsumed—particularly within the creative industries' paradigm and the attention economy that govern biennales, galleries, and museums. Whereas art theory in general has often echoed this analysis, there is, in contrast, a branch of thinkers who maintain the idea of art as, what Dave Beech has termed, "an exceptional" commodity in the capitalist economy.[41] Although these theorists approach the subject from slightly different angles and work with different kinds of contemporary art and culture—ranging from socially engaged art to literature and popular culture—they converge recognising that despite the transformations in the recent decades, for example the establishment of the creative industries, and the general precarisation of labour globally, contemporary artworks still have the potential to retain a specific status in the capitalist economy. Most of these thinkers also draw on the same reading of Marx as that proposed by Murray. A brief exploration of some of these perspectives provides a lens through which a similar analysis can be applied to dance works in the exhibition space.

In her 2019 book *Wages Against Artwork: Decommodified Labor and the Claims of Socially Engaged Art,* Claire Leigh La Berge argues that

39 Roberts, *Art and Emancipation*, 68.

40 Like Tino Sehgal, who refuses to see his works as performance art, Alexandra Pirici also resists the term. In a 2018 interview, she states: "I prefer terms like *ongoing action*, *performative exhibition*, or *performative environment*." Elvia Wilk, "How Alexandra Pirici Telegraphs Big Ideas through Small Gestures," *Art Basel*, accessed June 23, 2025, https://www.artbasel.com/news/how-alexandra-pirici-telegraphs-big-ideas-through-small-gestures.

41 Dave Beech, *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics* (Brill, 2015).

"artists and artworks circulate in strange economies."[42] She analyses North American socially engaged artists who work with unwaged groups such as students, animals, and children, exploring their relationship to the wage form. La Berge's central claim is that the labour involved in these art practices should be seen as what she terms "decommodified labour." By this, she means labour that is neither compensated through a wage nor made available via market transactions, nor is it connected to the intimate spheres of care, labour love, or reproductive labour. Instead, decommodified labour is performed by artists engaged in community work who neither sell their work nor receive wages. La Berge further argues that this form of labour was previously commodified during what she calls the "golden age of the 1950s and 1970s," a period marked by "a deluge of grants and array of agencies which led to a rapid expansion of the art-labour force."[43] However, beginning with the 1973 oil crisis, she contends, global economic stagnation and wage suppression have made an impact on socially engaged art practices that rarely receive renumeration in the form of wages.

La Berge is correct in conceiving art "as a strange commodity" precisely because it is neither produced nor sold like conventional commodities. By understanding art as a specific commodity, she also effectively critiques the late Foucauldian analysis of neo-liberalism and the post-operaist idea of real subsumption—the idea that all human labour is inherently commodified—which underpins some of the more pessimistic diagnoses regarding dance in the exhibition space. However, I am less convinced by her reliance on economic periodisations—drawing on thinkers like Robert Brenner and others—to explain why socially engaged art practices can be categorised as de-commodified labour. La Berge argues that socially engaged art was once remunerated, particularly through state arts grants, and was therefore commodified. Yet this analysis overlooks a key point: remuneration via wages does not make labour a capitalist commodity in Marx's sense. Even if cultural policies in the US during the Keynesian era meant that artists were remunerated, this did not transform artists into productive labourers. Rather, they were beneficiaries of a reformist third way welfare state—an arrangement that has since withered away.

42 La Berge, *Wages Against Artwork*,1.

43 Ibid., 4.

I argue that the socially engaged and activist art practices of the past thirty years—particularly those engaging with non-traditional materials such as social relations—should be understood as a continuation of what Roberts has termed artistic or art labour. For Roberts, this form of labour has always existed in a dialectic relationship with capitalist production, productive labour, and the commodity form since the general concept of art itself was established. Following Adorno, Roberts posits that art's commodification is one of its conditions of possibility. Since the introduction of the ready-made, Roberts argues, such artistic labour is characterised by a dialectic between skilled and de-skilled labour, where cognitive abilities as well as "performative skills and prosthetic devices" have replaced painterly skills.[44] In his 2007 book *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Ready-Made*, Roberts emphasises that "it is only waged labour exchanged for capital that produces commodities." Accordingly, "an artist is a productive labourer if he or she enriches a gallery or publisher and not because he or she is a hard-working fount of creative ideas."[45] In his more recent *Art and Emancipation* (2024), Roberts further extends this argument. He writes:

> It seems to me fundamental and axiomatic that artworks are not subject to the value-form; that is, subject to socially necessary labour time (as a matter of life and death as Marx puts it). Artist's labour-inputs into the production of their work are not governed by the socially necessary labour time for the production of all artworks at a given point in time.[46]

Yet Roberts also contends that artworks are part of the broader system of capitalist production in which commodity production and exchange are dominant. This means, he writes, that artworks can indirectly contribute to capitalist production and that no clear-cut separation can be drawn between productive/commodity producing and artistic labour. He states: "In this respect, under these conditions, artworks are in a crucial sense 'incomplete commodities."[47]

44 John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Ready-Made* (Verso Books, 2007), 14.

45 Ibid., 27.

46 John Roberts, *Art and Emancipation* (Brill Books, 2024), 73.

47 Ibid., 74.

Similar arguments have been advanced by theorists such as Dave Beech, who posits that art must be understood as an exceptional commodity—that is, one not fully subsumed under the same processes as productive labour. Similarly, with a focus on literature, popular culture, and photography from the 1970s onward, Nicholas Brown argues that art production is not entirely subsumed under capitalist production. Earlier, Stewart Martin drew on Adorno's phrase that "the absolute artwork meets the absolute commodity," while Sianne Ngai has identified the gimmick as the main mediating form of art and culture since the 1970s.[48] These thinkers challenge the thesis that, since the 1990s, art has entered a new phase of subsumption to commodity production. Yet, none of these perspectives have thoroughly investigated these questions in relation to dance works in exhibition contexts. This raises critical questions: Has the "neo-liberalisation" of labour and of the creative industries altered this dynamic? Is dance in the exhibition a special case, as some argue? Is dance in the exhibition space a commodity—and if so, what kind? Is the labour involved abstract?

Social form of critical dance: The case of Pirici's *Encyclopaedia of Relations*

Romanian born artist Alexandra Pirici has a background in dance and choreography, yet over the past two decades she has predominantly presented her work in exhibition spaces such as galleries and museums. As such, she belongs to what I have earlier distinguished as the second and third strands of dance in art. Specifically, she comes from a tradition of dance that critically interrogates dance and its modes of representation—a tradition that traces back to pioneers like Cunningham and continues through figures such as Rainer and Simone Forti. This tradition further developed during the 1990s as a phase of critical dance, exemplified by choreographers such as La Ribot, Salomon, Le Roy, and Bel. This lineage is particularly evident in Pirici's collaborations with choreographer and dancer Manuel Pelmus, who explicitly comes from this European critical dance tradition as it developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s. What distinguishes Pirici from Pelmus and Le Roy is that she has never primarily produced works for the

48 Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick*; and Stewart Martin, "The Absolute Artwork Meets the Absolute Commodity," *Radical Philosophy* 146 (2007): 15–25.

theatre and thus does not engage with the theatre's specific timeframe and audience seating. Yet, she employs similar choreographic strategies—such as scoring, tasks, and actions—but her works are exhibited primarily within the art institution.[49]

Her work *Encyclopaedia of Relations* was produced for and presented at the 2022 Venice Biennale as part of the main exhibition *The Milk of Dreams*, curated by Italian curator Cecilia Alemani. In contrast to previous years, it was one of the few performative works featured in that exhibition. The piece involved six dancers—casually clothed and wearing colourful masks due to the ongoing pandemic—who moved into various loosely assembled shapes or what Benjamin might have termed *constellations*.[50] These shapes, constellations, constructions, or models stand in stark contrast to tightly unified sculptures. Rather than solid, fixed forms, they sprawl as forms in the process of formation. Sometimes all dancers cluster closely, sometimes one stands aside, seemingly observing the others. At times, movements are synchronous, but more often they appear delayed, making it impossible for the viewer to identify who is the "first" in the formation. The dancers' arms often rise above their heads, hands spreading outward. There is a systematic structure underpinning this work, yet it remains difficult to grasp fully. The shapes and relations of formations flow seamlessly in Pirici's work, reminiscent of Trisha Brown's *Accumulation* series, in which

49 As I point out in my book *Practices of Relations in Task-Dance and the Event-Score*, scores and tasks have their roots in dance and performance practices originating with Cunningham—via Cage—and beyond. See Wikström, *Practices of Relations*. While a major monograph on Pirici's work is still forthcoming, there are some writings addressing her work. Most of these, however, approach it from the perspective of post-humanist theories that emphasise the embodiment of non-human agents, or through the lens of post-communist performance art histories. While both perspectives, especially the latter, are central to understanding her work, none has so far explored it through the categories of labour and value. For examples of the above-mentioned perspectives, see Daiana Şargan, "Encyclopedia of Relations: Observing through Embodiment and Movement Research," *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 9, no. 2 (2023): 66–83, https://doi.org/10.24193/mjcst.2023.16.05; Stefanie Proksch-Weilguni, "Performing Art History: Continuities of Romanian Art Practices in Post-Communist Performance," *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 27, no. 1 (2019): 99–120, https://doi.org/10.1080/25739638.2019.1643076; and Georgina Guy, "Visible Object to Reported Action," *Theatre Journal* 69, no. 3 (2017): 339–59.

50 Andrea Krauss, "Constellations: A Brief introduction," *MLN 126*, no. 3 (2011): 439–45.

movements accumulate without obvious punctuation.[51] At times, the dancers sing or speak aloud some references to the work, juxtaposing the moving imagery of bodies with titles and spoken language.

The title *Encyclopaedia of Relations* refers to encyclopaedic knowledge and—as with much of Pirici's recent work—the piece is grounded in what she terms "other life-forms." The dancers embody non-human life forms such as two pigeons cuddling, plants swaying in the wind, rocks, as well as technological patterns from AI systems.[52] Similar to earlier task-dances by Forti and Rainer, the dancers move relatively freely between different formations, which Pirici calls "embodiments." But rather than embodiments, they strike me as abstractions—diagrams, schematic representations, or scientific images that represent data in an abstracted form. This specific form of abstraction—science mediated through bodily formations—serves to indirectly embody another abstraction: the social objectivity of value, what Murray termed *practically abstract labour*, which produces a certain kind of objectivity through the abstraction of movements.

As an artist, Pirici does not produce commodities in the sense that Murray—following Marx—holds necessary for the reproduction of capitalism. First, *Encyclopaedia of Relations* is not primarily created for exchange. Nevertheless, Pirici does sell her work as live performances—without tangible objects—to institutions such as museums.[53] As is typical with all artwork sales, she is not paid a wage for her work but receives a one-time payment for the sale of her work. Consequently, the price of the artwork does not correspond to the socially necessary labour embodied in its production. The time invested by both Pirici and the dancers is not directly reflected in the artwork's price in the way typical commodities are priced. Second, beyond their status as artworks, her works are non-reproducible in the sense that they cannot be exchanged for other commodities. *Encyclopaedia of Relations* is not directly exchangeable with, say, *This Progress* (2006) or any other artwork.

51 Josefine Wikström, "Can the Structuralist Subject Dance? Trisha Brown, Gilles Deleuze, and the Performative Structure-Object," *Dance Chronicle* 47, no. 3 (2024): 506–24, https://doi.org/10.1080/01472526.2024.2392357.

52 Alexandra Pirici, "CreaTures Festival 2022 Keynote," *CreaTures EU*, 4 October, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WERt6UY8FwEAlexandra Pirici.

53 Hili Perlson, "The Conjurer: How Romanian Dancer Alexandra Pirici Became Performance Art's Newest Rising Star," *ArtNet*, August 17, 2017, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/performance-artist-alexandra-pirici-political-narratives-1055345.

As noted earlier through insights of Ngai, Roberts and others, artworks are not produced for exchange, and their labour time cannot be measured or exchanged as with conventional capitalist commodities. They do not embody abstract labour, since their production time cannot be measured in necessary labour time. As contemporary thinker Daniel Spaulding have succinctly put it, the production process of art works cannot be reduced to socially necessary labour time: "… the labour-time required to produce any use-value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society."[54]

Regarding the wage-form, the dancers performing throughout the entire biennale are—unlike Pirici—wage labourers in the Marxian sense. They sell the only commodity they own—their labour-power—and their wages vary depending on contractual agreements.[55] Nevertheless, since what they produce is not a complete commodity but rather what Roberts terms an "incomplete commodity," their labour is not practically abstract labour in Murray's terms. The commodity produced does not produce surplus value exchangeable for any other commodity. Instead, what is sold is the specificity and concreteness of their labour. While their specific skills might be transferrable to other kinds of work—complete or incomplete commodities—in this instance, they are not. Pirici's work is no more or less a commodity than any sculpture or painting in the exhibition. As Dave Beech succinctly critiques cultural theorist Diedrich Diedrichsen: "The assertion that performative art produces more surplus value because it consists of 'living labour' is idiotic."[56] However, like any other tourist event, an art biennale contributes to the broader economy, and Pirici's work participates in that contribution indirectly and not more so than any other part of the event. Crucially, Pirici's work, like art in general, functions as an image of labour performed in capitalism that is not fully subsumed under the value-form.

54 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin Classics, 1990), 129. See also Daniel Spaulding, "Art, Value and the Freedom Fetish," *MUTE*, 2015, https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/art-value-and-freedom-fetish-0.

55 I have not been able to find out the exact pay for the dancers in this specific piece. However, it is not essential to my argument. The point is that being an artist is to work without a wage, whereas being a performer in someone else's work is to be a wage-labourer—regardless of the hourly rate.

56 Beech, *Art and Value*, 21.

Furthermore, at the level of form, Pirici's *Encyclopedia of Relations* demonstrates a criticality that engages abstraction in two ways. First, it mediates how science as a field and scientific thinking is based on abstractions. The title signals a willingness to rethink what an encyclopaedia represents. Rooted in the French Enlightenment, the encyclopaedia—since its inception—has aimed to present abstract knowledge and science as complete and whole. However, Pirici seems to question this by proposing that knowledge is a dynamic, relational process and the human being is not necessarily the main agent of such abstracted knowledge. As she has underlined in several interviews and lectures, one of her core interests lies in quantum physics and the idea that "everything is relational."[57] In *Encyclopaedia of Relations* this is partially expressed through animalistic and nature-inspired shapes, images, or patterns—for example, two pigeons cuddling or sharing food—embodied by the six dancers. Sometimes the dancers make statements aloud, referencing various sources for the material used in the work, such as: "Part of fantastic animals inspired by the works of the Ukrainian artist Maria Prymachenko rest into a new body." By translating knowledge from images and other sources into moving bodies, *Encyclopaedia of Relations* mediates the abstract character of knowledge and of science. At the same time, it conveys the view that such knowledge and science is fluid and relational, shifting between humans, animals, and nature.

Encyclopaedia of Relations also mediates what Moishe Postone terms the quasi-objectivity produced by the value-form in capitalist societies. Following a tradition of dance—beginning with Cunningham and continuing onwards—in which dancers appear as speaking objects or "performative-structure-objects,"[58] Pirici's work reflects society's social objectivity in multiple ways. Through her artistic labour, she both negates capitalist economy in a general sense and reflects on its current forms—including the event-economy—by mirroring its pervasive social objectivity. Rather than viewing the latest "turn" to dance in the museum as further commodification and subsumption under capitalist production, we must understand that dance as art has always been a particular commodity. Pirici's most recent dance works or, as she herself describes them, "moving actions" reflect

57 Pirici, *Keynote*.

58 Wikström, "Can the Structuralist Subject Dance?"

contemporary capitalism's increasing reliance on knowledge and social relations.

As such, Pirici's *Encyclopedia of Relations* points to the tension present in all artworks produced in capitalist societies: they are commodities, yet not typical ones. This tension is especially evident in dance works presented in the exhibition space in general, and in Pirici's work in particular, perhaps more than in other works, because the dancers performing are wage-labourers, yet the work itself is not a fully realised commodity—it is not exchangeable for other commodities. In *Encyclopedia of Relations*, this tension is further mediated through the images or models performed—abstractions drawn from nature and scientific systems historically used by humans to understand nature. Together, they form an open system or non-totalitarian choreography—a kind of social objectivity, to borrow Murray's term—that invites reflection from the present perspective. In this way, Pirici's work mediates contemporary capitalist society without reproducing it. Finally, like all artworks in capitalist society, Pirici's pieces—like those of any other artist whose dance works are shown in the exhibition space—produce what Roberts calls "incomplete commodities," thereby participating, in a limited way, in capitalist production. However, this is neither unique to dance in the exhibition space over the past decades nor specific to art itself; rather, it is a condition of possibilities, even amid the neoliberal crisis of the present.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the two reviewers for their insightful and helpful comments on this manuscript.

Received —— 29 11 2024

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Santrauka

Kritinis šokis šiuolaikiniame mene: darbas, prekė ir vertė Alexandros Pirici *Santykių enciklopedijoje*

Josefine Wikström

Reikšminiai žodžiai: kritinis šokis, šokis kaip menas, Alexandra Pirici, vertė, socialinė forma, darbas.

Nuo XXI a. pradžios Vakarų pasaulyje šiuolaikinis šokis ir performansas vis dažniau pristatomi šiuolaikinio meno parodose: didžiosiose institucijose, tokiose kaip MoMA ir „Tate Modern“, tarptautinėse bienalėse – pavyzdžiui, Venecijos bienalėje – bei mažesnėse galerijose, tokiose kaip „Raven Row“ Londone ar „Index Gallery“ Stokholme. Kai kurie kritikai šią tendenciją vertina kaip platesnio meno pasaulio įsitraukimo į kapitalistines rinkas, ypač į renginių ir patirčių ekonomiką, simptomą.

Straipsnio autorė ginčija tokias interpretacijas ir teigia, kad šokio pristatymas parodų erdvėse – tai nauja kritinė meninė forma, kurios šaknys siekia XX a. 3 deš. ir moderniojo šokio atsiradimą (pvz., Loïe Fuller, Martha Graham, Mary Wigman). Šią liniją tęsia minimalistinis 7 deš. šokis (pvz., Merce Cunningham, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown) ir toliau formuoja 10 deš. Europos kritinio šokio tradicija (pvz., Xavier Le Roy, La Ribot, Jérôme Bel). Remdamasi šia tradicija, ji siūlo pastaruosius du dešimtmečius traktuoti kaip kritinio šokio šiuolaikiniame mene (kaip šiuolaikinis menas) reiškinį, suvokiamą kaip nauja kritinė šiuolaikinio meno forma.

Autorė pasitelkia plačią intelektinę tradiciją – nuo istorinių mąstytojų, tokių kaip Charles'is Baudelaire'as ir Walteris Benjaminas, iki šiuolaikinių teoretikų, pavyzdžiui, Sianne Ngai ir Johnas Robertsas, kurie meną apmąsto per dialektinį santykį su kapitalizmu ir tokiomis sąvokomis kaip komodifikacija, darbas ir vertė. Analizė grindžiama Karlo Marxo vertės formos teorija, suprantama kaip specifinė kapitalizmo istorinė socialinė forma, ir ekonomisto bei filosofo Patricko Murray'aus „praktiškai abstraktaus darbo“ sąvoka. Remiantis šiuo teoriniu pagrindu teigiama, kad: a) šokis meno parodose turi būti suvokiamas dialektiškai, per santykį su prekės forma; b) ši būsena privalo būti perteikiama per kiekvieno šokio kūrinio specifinę meninę formą; c) nors išlieka

galimybė, kad tokie kūriniai gali prisidėti prie patirčių ekonomikos, tai nereiškia, kad šokėjų darbo sąlygas reikia palikti be aptarimo.

Straipsnyje pagrindiniu pavyzdžiu pasitelkiama Rumunijos menininkė Alexandra Pirici, daugelį metų pristatanti tai, ką pati vadina „nenutrūkstamais veiksmais“ (*ongoing actions*), eksponuojamais parodų erdvėse. Dėmesys sutelkiamas į konkretų darbą – *Santykių enciklopediją* (*Encyclopedia of Relations*), pristatytą 2022 m. Venecijos bienalės *Sapnų pienas* (*The Milk of Dreams*) pagrindinėje ekspozicijoje. Šiame kūrinyje Pirici nagrinėja dvi abstrakcijos formas ir perkelia jas į judesiu grindžiamą praktiką: pirma, mokslines ir enciklopedines žinias kaip santykinę abstrakciją; antra, vertės abstrakciją per socialinius santykius. Šių dviejų dimensijų jungtis sukuria kritinę formą, kuri tuo pat metu yra ir menas, ir šokis parodos erdvėje.