

Bargaining for Prestige: The Ambiguous Relationship between Economic and Non-Economic Capital in the *Hide/Seek* Exhibition

Wiebke Kartheus

ABSTRACT: In 2010, the National Portrait Gallery removed David Wojnarowicz's video *A Fire in My Belly* (1987) from their *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* exhibition. By gauging the reactions to the removal, this article discusses transactions that illustrate the tenuous relationship between economic and non-economic capital within the art world; a field that constantly disavows the existence of capitalist modes of operation. Based on an unwavering belief in the validity and legitimacy of its own practices, the artistic field tirelessly reproduces its value and continues to determine the value and meaning of art. My analysis of the system, which draws on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of the field, disavowal, and different forms of capital, aims at showing that anxiety is a driving force within the artistic field that motivates the practices of the field's agents and thus becomes an influential structuring impetus for the system as a whole.

KEYWORDS: *Hide/Seek*, Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic capital, economic capital, disavowal, anxiety, art exhibition.

The “controversy that launched a hundred discussion panels”:¹ Removing David Wojnarowicz's *A Fire in My Belly* (1987)

On October 30, 2010, the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) in Washington DC opened the first federally funded high-profile LGBT art exhibition called *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution. Even though the exhibition proved to be a great success among critics and audiences alike, it is mostly known for the controversy surrounding it: On November 30, one month after its opening, *Hide/Seek* made international headlines when David Wojnarowicz's video *A Fire in My Belly* (1987) was removed from the exhibition at the behest of public criticism by a few conservative voices, which condemned the use of Christian iconography in the video.

Upon its opening, many media outlets praised *Hide/Seek* for being “the first major museum exhibition to address gay and lesbian identity in the arts” (Judkis) and shared the opinion that it was “one of the best thematic exhibitions in years” (Gopnik). Especially the fact that the art show was presented at a federal institution and in cooperation with the renowned

¹ Mintcheva, Svetlana. “Hide/Seek: Museums, Ethics, and the Press: A Symposium Report.” CAA. College Art Association, 26 Apr. 2011. Web. 23 Dec. 2014.

yet frequently cautious Smithsonian Institution (c.f. Saslow), was conceived as a “momentous” (Katz, “At Last” 18) decision and “a landmark achievement” (Ulaby). Critics noted that by offering a large-scale platform for aspects within art and art history previously neglected, *Hide/Seek* contributed in a “wonderful and groundbreaking” way to increase the visibility and impact of LGBT and queer artists as well as their art and subjects (Green, “Q & A”). In fact, the lay audience as well as the art world were so impressed with the exhibition that it not only became one of the most successful shows the NPG ever housed in terms of visitor numbers but was also awarded several prizes for best thematic show (cf. Trescott, “National Portrait”; Trescott, “Portrait Gallery”).²

The removal of the video, despite sparking heated debates in “a hundred discussion panels” (Mintcheva), increased the visibility of both the video and the content of the exhibition as a whole as it “not only helped make *Hide/Seek* one of the most popular shows ever mounted at the National Portrait Gallery, it continue[d] to bring new audiences from around the country” (Kennicott, “A Year”). The incident initiated a number of museums, galleries, and art spaces in the US and Europe to show the video out of solidarity (c.f. Green, “Could SFMOMA’s”; Taylor). AA Bronson, whose artworks were an important part of the exhibition, commented on the enormous visibility of the video, facilitated by its removal: “Since the Wojnarowicz was pulled from the show, many, many, many, thousands of people have seen the video who wouldn’t otherwise” (Green, “Q & A”). Most importantly, the immense interest permitted the exhibition to travel to the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the Tacoma Art Museum after it closed at the NPG—a development that was not planned by the Smithsonian because it initially had “no plans to create a traveling or joint exhibition” (Kennicott, “A Year”). Co-curator of the exhibition, David C. Ward, called the removal in his introduction to his colleague Jonathan D. Katz’s lecture at the Tacoma Art Museum in 2012 a “shrewd career move,” indicating that the removal drew more attention to the show and its art than it most likely would have gotten otherwise (Katz, “Co-Curator”). So in the end, more visibility and access were granted to the works in the exhibition as well as to the one work

² Among others *Hide/Seek* won the best thematic show award from the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC) in 2011 and from the US section of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) in 2012.

that was excluded from the exhibition, more visibility and access to the impact of sexuality on American art and art history were generated, and more critical debates around these topics were publicly held.

While most critical and scholarly responses to the museum's decision to pull the installation from the show so far have argued that the removal was an act of censorship and read it as an indicator for the return of the culture wars (Kennicott, "On the Return"; Lord 48; Judkis; Katz, "Statement"), I do not read the removal as an act of censorship but rather as an act of self-censorship.³ I focus on addressing and analyzing the underlying structural power mechanisms that this system-destabilizing event made apparent rather than the event itself. Even though I am aware that the events surrounding *Hide/Seek* as well as its content are highly politically charged, I take this out-of-order occurrence as a diagnostic opportunity to assess the actions of the agents of the field, who were forced to position themselves publicly in response to the removal. I will do so in order to draw conclusions about the system in which these agents operate.

For the purpose of this article, I consider the art world an enclave that is caught in a circle of self-legitimization and preservation. The video's removal, then, constitutes a disturbance of the usual course of events that allows for insights into the self-understanding of this largely closed-off system. Consequently, it is possible to shed light on three aspects of the system: Firstly, retracing the reactions to the removal of the video shows how the agents connected to the exhibition engaged in a multitude of transactions to gain and/or maintain prestige and reputation in the art world. Secondly, these transactions reveal the ambiguous relationship between economic and cultural capital, which is, in turn, responsible for the ways in which anxiety becomes a driving force for the agents within the artistic field⁴. Thirdly, these

³ I am cautious to read the events at *Hide/Seek* in direct connection to the culture wars of the 1990s. It is not surprising that the return of the culture wars, a period of governmental censorship due to strong conservative influences in politics, was one of the most prominent rhetorical themes in the public debate around the video's removal from the NPG. One only needs to think of the *Sensation* exhibition (1999/2000) or *The Perfect Moment* exhibition (1989) and the heavy protests surrounding them. However, in this article, I want to focus on the structural workings of the system rather than the political implications of the content and context of *Hide/Seek*.

⁴ Whenever I use the term artistic field, it refers directly to the theoretical model as laid out by Bourdieu and should be understood as a sub-field to the field of cultural production, with which it shares all qualities except for its set of rules. Whenever I use the term art world, I refer to a structure that exists

transactions, especially when they are incomplete, expose how the field itself, by means of the validity of its strict agreed-upon set of rules,⁵ compels its agents to reproduce these rules and the (values of) the system.

Understanding the Art World within Bourdieu's Conceptual Framework

For my discussion of two exemplary transactions of capital in the aftermath of the removal of Wojnarowicz's video, Pierre Bourdieu's approach to cultural practices and specific theoretical models such as the field and different forms of capital, as well as his notion of disavowal provide a productive conceptual framework. I employ his notions in the context of *Hide/Seek* to analyze the workings of the art world in a more abstract way rather than to evaluate the political and/or ideological dimensions of these specific events. In his work *The Field of Cultural Production* Bourdieu considers

not only the direct producers of the work in its materiality [...] but also the producers of the meaning and value of the work—critics, publishers, gallery directors and a whole set of agents whose combined efforts produce consumers capable of knowing and recognizing the work of art as such. (37)

In this passage, Bourdieu goes beyond traditionalist/modernist approaches to art and its production, which tend to highlight the aesthetic values of the artwork or the intentions of the art producer.⁶ Bourdieu extends the focus of talking about cultural and artistic practices

within the artistic field and that only selected agents are considered to be a part of. The art world is a known frame that one knows to be a part of, whereas the field is to be understood as the overarching system that remains invisible.

⁵ In talking about the field, its agents, and its rules it is crucial to underline that I am not interested in the specific rules per se, but in how these rules function within the system. Even though disavowal of economic capital can be seen as one of the artistic field's rules, it is paramount to rather look at the set of rules as a structuring system that ensures the "preservation or improvement" of the field (Johnson 6). Every member of the field is (unconsciously) aware of these rules and, as another rule maybe, acknowledges the validity and importance of them and abides by them. Key rules remain fixed because of the way they have become institutionalized and naturalized over time, but the set of rules is ultimately dynamic. The rules of the field are axioms and the belief in them as well as acting according to them are already rules; hence, talking about specific rules in more detail goes beyond my objective at this point. For a more in-depth discussion of the set of rules, see Pierre Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art* (1992) and Michael Grenfell and Cheryl Hardy's *Art Rules* (2007).

⁶ In this way Bourdieu distinguishes himself, for example, from the highly canonized Kantian notions such as the 'pure gaze' and the universal aesthetic that have become naturalized and institutionalized forms of art appreciation and that remain highly influential within discourses of art. See Grenfell and

to include the modes and politics of production—of the artwork itself as well as its meaning—and the distribution of knowledge and power. Thus he offers a way to grasp the intricate inherent processes of the art world as well as art's value within society and its relation to capitalism.

The Field: Governed by Competition

Reading the incident at *Hide/Seek* in the context of Bourdieu's concept of the field allows for an analysis of the systemic workings of the artistic field and, more specifically, of how different agents connected to the exhibition act to maintain their own position within the field and what motivates them to do so. Bourdieu's general concept of the field can be understood as "a social arena within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them" (Jenkins 52). The inherent structure of a field is always defined "in terms of power relations" (Jenkins 53) between the agents or in relation to other fields. Bourdieu conceptualizes the field as "a system of social positions" in which each agent strives for access to the capital(s) at stake and acts within a system that is governed by a hierarchical top-down model (Jenkins 53): Those agents within the field with the most amount of relevant capital and/or access to it, gain the most amount of power and are thus able to position themselves above others and control inherent processes. Subsequently, the struggle for control and power marks all fields alike but finds expression in various forms depending on the "defining content" of a field (Jenkins 52). Or as Bourdieu states in an interview with Loïc J. D. Wacquant: "Each [field] has its dominant and its dominated, its struggles for usurpation or exclusion, its mechanisms of reproduction, and so on. But every one of these characteristics takes on a specific, irreducible, form in each field" (qtd. in Wacquant 41). According to this understanding, fields share their overall structure but differ vehemently in the particular shape these dynamics take on.

In the top-down system of the field, competition between agents for resources and capital is one of its main markers and governs all practices within it. In this hierarchical construct, "power is always *used*; it is not simply and impersonally systemic" (Calhoun 64; emphasis in original). Put differently, power is always already there and, what is more, actively utilized in

Hardy 41-43; Bourdieu, *Field* 257.

order to gain more power and/or (access to) capital. This has severe consequences for the way in which a field's agents and their actions influence the mechanisms of the field: "A field is a dynamic concept in that a change in agents' positions necessarily entails a change in the field's structure" (Johnson 6). Johnson points to another key factor in approaching agents within Bourdieu's model of the field when pointing out that "[a]gents do not act in isolation" (6), but always in relation to and with consequences for other agents within fields. Competition and struggle between agents produce an environment in which power is not only continually exercised but in which power is interdependent since all agents are connected and the actions of one affect the positions of others. Bourdieu's concept of the field thus offers a relational approach that favors complexity and simultaneity over simplification and singularity. Talking about *Hide/Seek*, this means that the actions of the agents working for the museum have immediate consequences for other agents affiliated with the museum and their respective reputation, i.e., the guest-curators, other museums, the artists included, foundations that sponsored the exhibition, etc. The position of the NPG, which is based on its cultural and symbolic capital, is in jeopardy because the removal of the video was harmful to its integrity as an independently working institution. Its actions have immediate repercussions for other agents and their integrity because it is based (among other things) on their connection to the museum. What this entails is a chain reaction into different directions simultaneously since every agent is driven by their individual urge to perform well in their struggle for capital and is again connected to other (lower-positioned) agents who also strive for capital.

Taking this relational approach as a lens through which to look at the art world's modus operandi reveals the workings of the field of cultural production and the artistic field in particular and allows us to talk about it in a more systemic way. Bourdieu writes:

In defining the literary and artistic field as, inseparably, a field of positions and a field of position-takings we also escape from the usual dilemma of internal [...] reading of the work (taken in isolation or within the system of works to which it belongs) and external [...] analysis, i.e. analysis of the social conditions of production of the producers and consumers [...]. And by the same token we escape from the correlative dilemma of the charismatic image of artistic activity as pure, disinterested creation by

an isolated artist, and the reductionist vision which claims to explain the act of production and its product in terms of their conscious or unconscious external functions, by referring them, for example to the interests of the dominant class or, more subtly, to the ethical or aesthetic values of one or another of its fractions, from which the patrons or audiences are drawn. (Bourdieu, *Field* 34)

When reading artistic/cultural processes, the concept of the field and struggles between agents offer a view on producers and products that is primarily concerned with the ways in which meaning is ascribed to them. In going beyond considering the form and content of artworks and what they mean one is more apt to ask meta-questions about how the system creates meaning in the first place and how agents engage in these processes in order to legitimize themselves and the system. To further explore the workings of the artistic field I want to discuss more fully the different forms of capital that have already been mentioned and some of the rules that determine how they operate and are operated.

The Forms of Capital, Convertibility and Disavowal

In his essays “What Makes a Social Class?” and “The Forms of Capital,” Bourdieu distinguishes between four different forms of capital that are competed for and that can be accumulated and converted by agents in a particular field such as the artistic one:

1. “*economic capital* [...] [that] is immediately and directly convertible into money” (“Forms” 82);
2. “*cultural capital* or better, informational capital” (“What Makes” 4) that “is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital” and that “can be acquired, to a varying extent, [...] in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously” (“Forms” 82, 84);
3. “*social capital*, which consists of resources based on connections and group membership” (“What Makes” 4) and
4. “*symbolic capital*, which is the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate,” e.g. honor or reputation (4; “Forms” 91; all emphases in original).

The specific forms these types of capital take on in different fields vary according to what is desired and deemed valuable. Their status as “resources of power” is not only upheld by competition for them but more importantly by their “convertibility” (Calhoun 68). Craig Calhoun states that “Bourdieu’s key original insights are that there are immaterial forms of capital [...] as well as a material or economic form and that with varying levels of difficulty it is possible to convert one of these forms into the other” (69). Reputation, for example, can earn you money, and, more difficultly, money can earn you reputation. These transactions, necessary to make material and/or immaterial profit, lie at the heart of my discussion, because in the artistic field transactions including money—due to the rule to disavow economic capital altogether—are especially charged. Analyzing these transactions, with a focus on the relation between immaterial and material capital, reveals how the field compels its agents to disavow the existence of economic capital and ‘interested’ *modi operandi*. My discussions of AA Bronson’s reaction to the removal as well as the actions taken by the sponsoring foundations illustrate this.

To cope with this difficult relationship between capitals, power, and positions, practitioners in the artistic field follow specific institutionalized rules that ensure not only the functioning of the field but cause it to constantly “reproduce” its own structures and their validity (Bourdieu, “Forms” 90). One of the major rules agents have to follow if they wish to continue to be accepted by the field and its other members is the disavowal of economic capital, as Bourdieu explains in his essay “Production of Belief”:

The art business, a trade in things that have no price, belongs to the class of practices in which the logic of the pre-capitalist lives on. [...] These practices, functioning as practical negations, can only work by pretending not to be doing what they are doing. [...] [T]hey function, and can function [...] only by virtue of a constant, collective repression of ‘narrowly’ economic interest and of the real nature of the practices [...]. In this economic universe, whose very functioning is defined by a ‘refusal’ of the ‘commercial’ which is in fact a collective disavowal of commercial interests and profits, the most ‘anti-economic’ and most visibly ‘disinterested’ behaviours [...] contain a form of economic rationality. (261)

In the artistic field, economic capital as well as capitalist practices are constantly disavowed. What is more, the artistic field has established practices that are based on this economic rationale and can thus only function by upholding these practices. “[B]y pretending not to be doing what they are doing” agents ensure their continuous success within the system. And by perpetuating the rules of the system time and again it is ensured that the system remains stable. In this loop of self-perpetuation, as Bourdieu theorizes, there is only one “legitimate capital”:

the only usable, effective capital is the (mis)recognized, legitimate capital called ‘prestige’ or ‘authority,’ the economic capital that cultural undertakings generally require cannot secure the specific profits produced by the field [unless] it is reconverted into symbolic capital. (262)

Even though economic capital enables the artistic field and undergirds all processes of cultural and artistic production, as Bourdieu suggests above, it does not generate power in the art world in the same way as it does in capitalist markets. In the artistic field economic capital needs cultural and symbolic capital in order to be legitimate. Only those agents who know and honor the laws of the field can ultimately turn symbolic capital into economic profits and at the same time keep their status and access to power. Practicing disavowal means that the agents “[invest] [...] prestige” rather than money and “[offer] as security [...] the symbolic capital [they have] [...] accumulated” which they are “liable to forfeit” if the investment fails (Bourdieu, “Production of Belief” 263). If the transaction between symbolic and economic capital fails, they might forfeit their symbolic capital and be unable to participate in legitimate practices.

The pressure to constantly engage in legitimate practices that keep the involvement of economic capital hidden, however, is strenuous. Bourdieu describes how these practices of converting one form of capital into another always bear in them the possibility to lose it all:

The convertibility of the different types of capital is the basis of the strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction of capital (and the position occupied in social space) [...]. The different types of capital can be distinguished according to their reproducibility or, more precisely, according to how easily they are transmitted [...]. Everything which helps to disguise the economic aspect also tends to increase the risk of loss [...]. Thus

the (apparent) incommensurability of the different types of capital introduces a high degree of *uncertainty* into all transactions between holders of different types. (“Forms” 89-90; my emphasis)

The rigid enforcement of these rules, especially “disguis[ing] the economic aspect” in every transaction, ensures that the field’s value continues to remain high and, moreover, ensures the field’s relative autonomy from the capitalist field of power. As I will show in my discussion below, the “uncertainty” to lose not just capital but one’s access to power, which Bourdieu mentions here on the side, becomes an anxious impetus for art agents intending to stabilize their own position. This, of course, becomes more difficult in a system in which every agent is connected to other agents and in which power is interdependent. The constant threat to lose everything—accumulated economic capital, social, and cultural capital, as well as symbolic capital—leads, in my view, not just to “uncertainty” about one agent’s future within the field but to an existential fear to become stripped of everything that is deemed substantial. Through its rules that ensure the reproduction of capital and practices alike and that keep the system stable, the field not only constantly presents its agents with the threat to lose it all but compels them to assume—and cherish—this vulnerable position in the first place. This “position occupied in social space” has to be kept, because outside of that social space, the agents cannot exist (Bourdieu, “Forms” 89).

These considerations permit us to read the events and the agents’ actions surrounding *Hide/Seek* in a more systemic and relational manner rather than focusing on the purely event-related context of this specific exhibition. It is now possible to understand the mechanisms in a more complex manner that extends questions of “why” to questions of “how.” In this way, the analyses conducted in this article contribute to a deeper understanding of the workings of the artistic field in which the reactions of the specific agents can be put in a broader context. I want to convey a more abstract view on the events that possibly helps to understand not just this one specific event but other incidents in the artistic field and the art world.

“A Hand Dropping Coins”: The Conflation of Economic and Content-Related Power

On November 29, 2010, an article titled “Smithsonian Christmas-Season Exhibition Features Ant-Covered Jesus, Naked Brothers Kissing, Genitalia, and Ellen DeGeneres Grabbing Her Breasts” was published on the website of the conservative news outlet *Cybercast News Service* (CNS). In this article, author Penny Starr took issue with the exhibition at large and one exhibit in particular: A four-minute version of David Wojnarowicz’s video installation *A Fire in My Belly*. Starr’s description of the video reads as follows:

The four-minute version of the video shown in the exhibit at the National Portrait Gallery shows, among other images, ants crawling over the image of Jesus on a crucifix, two halves of a loaf of bread being sewn together, the bloody mouth of a man being sewn shut, a hand dropping coins, a man undressing, a man’s genitals, a bowl of blood, and mummified humans. (Starr)

Starr’s seemingly objective assessment of the video strictly stays on the content level. It disregards aesthetic, contextual, and formal qualities of the artwork and thus prevents the possibility for a constructive discussion about its artistic value. Upon being “first alerted” to the video by Starr’s article, Republican politicians John Boehner and Eric Cantor voiced strong objections toward the exhibition (Wilkie). One day after Starr published her review of the exhibition, Kevin Smith, Boehner’s spokesperson, stated that “Smithsonian officials should either acknowledge the mistake and correct it, or be prepared to face tough scrutiny” concerning the institution’s budget (Wilkie). In a similar vein, Cantor announced that the exhibition’s display of explicit and religious imagery was “an outrageous use of taxpayer money and an obvious attempt to offend Christians during the Christmas season” (Wilkie). The tone quickly got sharper when *Foxnews.com* published the article “Smithsonian to Remove Ant-Covered Jesus on Cross Video from Exhibit” the next day, in which they quote Republican politician Jack Kingston in saying that displaying this artwork in a public institution was an “in-your-face perversion paid for by tax dollars” (“Smithsonian to Remove”). In the same article Catholic League president Bill Donahue declared not only that the video was “clearly designed to offend” but even called it “hate speech” in the so-called war on Christmas.

Confronted with these statements that were not enforced by other actions, the NPG yielded to the demand to “pull the exhibit” (Cantor qtd. in Wilkie). On the afternoon of November 30, 2010, a statement of the then director of the NPG, Martin Sullivan, was released which announced the museum’s decision to remove the video:

One work, a four-minute video portrait by artist David Wojnarowicz (1987), shows images that may be offensive to some. [...] I regret that some reports about the exhibit have created an impression that the video is intentionally sacrilegious. In fact, the artist’s intention was to depict the suffering of an AIDS victim. It was not the museum’s intention to offend. We have removed the video. (“Statement on *Hide/Seek*”)

As became clear later in the controversy, it was not Sullivan who called the shots in this decision, but Smithsonian Secretary G. Wayne Clough, who “made the final decision to take down the video” (Green, “After MAN”; cf. Green, “Only on MAN”). Clough justified his surprising decision to remove the video in an email to the museum’s staff that was later leaked: “it was clear that this video was detracting from the entirety of the exhibition” (Green, “After MAN”).

Reactions to the Smithsonian’s decision strongly resonated in national and international media as well as the art world. The removal of the video was quickly treated as a matter of censorship, a stifling of artistic expression, and a restriction of freedom of speech. The decision was viewed as uncalled for since there were no immediate threats or other events, such as public protests or indictments, in the twenty-four hours between Penny Starr’s article and the removal that would have called for such a hasty extraction of the artwork.⁷

Penny Starr’s article is worth a closer look not only because it provoked this strong reaction, but also because of its rhetoric and underlying assumptions about the influence of economic capital in the artistic field. The way in which Penny Starr conflates economic power with content-related decision-making illustrates how practitioners outside of the artistic field project the mechanisms of the free market onto the artistic field. She sets the tone of her article by linking the source of the NPG’s funding to the artworks shown in its exhibition.

⁷ This is one way in which the circumstances around *Hide/Seek* differ from the circumstances around *Sensation* and *The Perfect Moment* as indicated earlier.

Starr directs the readers' attention immediately to the allegedly offensive content of the artworks, which she affirms with minute descriptions of the art on display. Further, she draws attention to the fact that the Smithsonian Institution as well as the NPG are "federally funded" (Starr).

To make her case that both institutions are financially dependent on "federal funding" and thus indebted to the taxpayers, Starr breaks down their annual budget (Starr). Strengthening this line of argumentation, Starr not only underlines that *Hide/Seek* was with an overall volume of "\$750,000, the most expensive exhibition to date [Oct. 2010] at the National Portrait Gallery" but also presents a commentary by expert Chris Edwards, the "director of tax policy studies at the Cato Institute" (Starr). After noting that the expenses directly related to the artworks were covered by private donors and foundations only, Edwards concludes his assessment of the situation as follows: "If the Smithsonian didn't have the taxpayer-funded building, they would have no space to present the exhibit [...] [thus] the taxpayers own the platform and so the taxpayers should decide what is presented on that platform" (qtd. in Starr). Republican politician Cantor, who objected to the art exhibited just as forcefully, repeated Edward's rhetoric: "When a museum receives taxpayer money, the taxpayers have a right to expect that the museum will uphold common standards of decency. The museum should pull the exhibit and be prepared for serious questions come budget time" (Cantor qtd. in Wilkie). In this way, Penny Starr's article is not only a prime example of conservative argumentation but also illustrates how the art world does not work.

The rhetoric Starr establishes here borrows from neoliberal capitalist discourses according to which paying taxes is not something that is done out of solidarity, but something that is done in order to exercise control. Starr evokes the institute's responsibility toward the public and stresses the impact of federal funding in fulfilling this work. With this in mind, Starr (and the ones who follow her argument) claims a position of authority that supposedly makes her the spokesperson of every US American taxpayer. This claimed position of authority cannot represent the majority of taxpayers—the supporters of the exhibition are taxpayers as well—but speaks from a neoliberal position. Starr's rhetoric hinges upon a conflation of economic capital and symbolic capital from which follows that monetary influence commands and regulates content-related influence. In this way, Starr links the content of the

Hide/Seek exhibition directly to the status of the museum as a public and educational institution that relies on federal funding. The rhetoric established in her article proved to be successful and gained immense traction, which ultimately led to the removal of David Wojnarowicz's video.

Bargaining for Prestige Surrounding the *Hide/Seek* Exhibition

Museums occupy an ambiguous position within the artistic field because they have different tasks and serve various factions of society. Therefore they have to negotiate between agents of the artistic field to which it belongs, the public which they are supposed to educate, the government by which they are financially supported, and the capitalist market in which they have to function. From a capitalist perspective, museums are rarely profitable ventures. Instead they rely on funding in order to be sustainable and fulfill their educational duty. Museums such as the NPG rely on outside funding yet they are heavily criticized by agents of the artistic field (and members of the art world) when they adopt capitalist modes of operation to be economically self-sufficient and to avoid (or minimize) conflicting loyalties that come with accepting outside money. At the same time, even if funding and financing is being accepted, it has to be constantly disavowed for the institution to remain a legitimate agent within the artistic field. Hans Belting put it in the following words:

The museum protects the treasures entrusted to it, but to an even greater extent, it also protects its own professional authority. If this were to be undermined, the reputation of people in positions of authority would suffer in the eyes of the state or municipal financiers. (81)

In this way, museums and the agents related to it have to follow the rules of the field in order to remain a valuable and accepted member of the field. They have to reproduce the rules of the field, e.g. disavowal, and the practices necessary to keep the system stable in which they hold a powerful and meaningful position. Every indicator that would link them to solely "interested" (Bourdieu, "Forms" 81) mechanisms would strip them of their cultural and symbolic capital, which is why the field, as described before, compels them to keep up a smokescreen to maintain their position.

At the intersection between museum, artistic field, and capitalist markets, two transactions between different forms of capital in the context of the *Hide/Seek* exhibition illustrate the artistic field's set of rules and the practices they require—and what happens when they are incomplete. Based on Bourdieu's relational approach, both transactions demonstrate the field's rigidity. Furthermore, both illustrate the agents' constant struggle to maintain their position within the field while under the constant threat posed by the system of losing it. Lastly, both transactions reveal that the actions of the field's agents are motivated by their anxiety to lose their cultural and symbolic capital and to become powerless and redundant within the field.

“To Accommodate [a] Request to Protest”: AA Bronson and the NPG

On December 16, 2010, almost three weeks after the removal of *A Fire in My Belly*, the Canadian artist AA Bronson, whose painting *Felix, June 5, 1994* (1994/99) was one of the most prominent works of the exhibition, demanded in protest that his work also be removed from the exhibition. In an email to the then NPG director Martin Sullivan, Bronson said that he had contacted the National Gallery of Canada, which owns the painting, and asked them to withdraw his work from the exhibition (Vartanian). One of Bronson's main motivations to protest in this way, besides the “censorship” conducted by the Smithsonian, was the way in which the removal of the video meant, in his view, “to edit queer history” in a “hurtful and disrespectful” way (Vartanian). As Bronson declared in an interview he gave art critic Tyler Green, he requested the removal of his painting also out of “solidarity” with Wojnarowicz's own history (“Q & A”).

The NPG, however, did not comply with Bronson's request and refused to take down his painting. Officials stated that the loan agreement they entered with the National Gallery of Canada was “a legally binding document” that they would honor (Vartanian). In the official statement of the NPG, director Martin Sullivan stated that he felt “great empathy” with the artist and his motives but that “visitors to the National Portrait Gallery [were] to experience the exhibition without further alteration” (National Portrait Gallery). In order to accommodate Bronson's request to protest, at least in a symbolic way, the NPG installed “a formal statement of his views [...] next to his work” in the exhibition (National Portrait Gallery).

The reaction of the NPG to Bronson's request is illustrative of the status of artists in the artistic field: Artists are fundamentally powerless because they cannot acquire (access to) power and capital by themselves. The status 'artist,' and the limited power that comes with it, is to a large extent not self-proclaimed but must be given by other agents (Groys 43) who invest their symbolic capital in their declaration of an art-producer as artist. In other words, in order to be an artist, one has to be considered an artist by the 'right' people. The artist's access to power cannot be gained independently, yet once recognized as artist by the field they, too, take part in the reproductive practices of the field. In this way, even though we would like to think of the artist as "isolated" (Bourdieu, "The Field" 34), i.e. ideologically independent and working outside of the field, they, too, have to participate in these practices. In order to acquire legitimacy as an artist, they have to function within the field and its economic system.

The artist might not have the legal power to have the art he has created removed, but he has cultural leverage that secures his/her position within the field and that needs to be defended: the sovereignty over the meaning of his/her own artworks (Cuno 52). Thus, Bronson's request is deeply embedded within the framework of the field and secures his position within it as well as his chances to gain and maintain material and immaterial capital. Bronson's resistance illustrates how the field compels its agents to reproduce its rules and to fall in line. Bronson's resistance does not exist outside of the field. In fact, it is part of what constitutes his power within it. Speaking out against censorship evidences his integrity and authority as an artist and, thus, contributes to his cultural and symbolic capital. The museum's response demonstrates, however, that they, too, have to protect not only their investment but their reputation. In the resulting push and pull between the artist and the museum that which is disavowed, i.e. the economically interested nature of their investment, threatens to surface and must once again be repressed. If the museum only wanted to protect their monetary investment, they could have rejected the artist's claim outright since it did not have legal grounds. But by making the symbolic concession in the form the statement placed next to the painting they uphold the artist's artistic integrity and his symbolic sovereignty over his own work, which the museum in turn depends on for its own legitimacy. Bronson's request and the museum's reaction to that request illustrate how complex transactions of different forms of capital are within the artistic field, how imminent

it is for the agents to secure their capital, and, most interestingly, how the field demands its agents to partake in these transactions in the first place. Pressured to engage in transactions, both agents' anxiety to lose their position if they refuse to do so becomes a stabilizing factor for the continuation of the system because they once again reproduce its laws.

Foundations and the NPG: Securing while Disavowing Capital

Bronson was not the only one who openly criticized the museum's decision. The anxiety-driven impetus to protect one's position and capital already apparent in relation to the artist and the museum is even stronger when economic capital is directly involved. The fact that economic and interested, i.e. capitalist mechanisms have to be disavowed at all times make transactions aimed at converting economic capital into cultural and/or symbolic capital more risky. The reactions to incomplete transactions are voiced in a stronger way because the need to secure legitimacy and integrity is more pressing when money is involved.

In this way, the reactions of the foundations that contributed majorly to *Hide/Seek* illustrates not only the crucial role private funds play in financing museums, but also that the foundations' economic capital alone cannot sustain their position within the field but needs to be legitimized by cultural capital. Their economic capital, however, seems to give private investors the authority to put some degree of pressure on the institutions they are funding.⁸ Yet, these foundations must disavow that their influence derives from economic capital in order to keep their reputation-based position within the field. In the case of *Hide/Seek* four main sponsors contributed to the exhibition's total costs of \$750,000: the Calamus Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation (\$100,000), The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation (\$10,000), and The Calder Foundation (Capps).⁹ With this money the NPG could acquire

⁸ The immense economic impact that private foundations contribute to art is influential to a degree that art commentator Jillian Steinhauer titled one of her articles "Private Giving Sustains Art Museums."

⁹ Unfortunately, I could not retrieve the exact amount of money the Calamus Foundation and the Calder Foundation provided because they did not publish these numbers. Since the donors are listed according to the size of their fund and because the list of supporters is of considerable size (cf. "Acknowledgements"), however, it is safe to say that at least one third of the exhibition costs, and all the costs connected to loans of exhibits, were covered with money from private donors. As indicated before, for *Hide/Seek* public funding functioned to sustain the facilities (maybe in anticipation of conservative criticism).

artworks and enter loan agreements with other institutions and benefited majorly from private financial support in order to acquire loans and mount the exhibition. Additionally, the NPG avoided justifying their content-related decisions and artistic choices in a way they would have to if federal money had been involved.

At the same time, the foundations just listed also benefited from the relationship with museums, as Bazon Brock fittingly describes: “Museums are noteworthy spaces which are recognized by the community at large, and the quality and quantity of experiences they claim to hold in store have enormous potential for public relations purposes” (26). In other words: while the museums profits from private money, those donors, such as foundations or companies, profit from the reputation and prestige of the museum. This dynamic has also been noticed by Michael Grenfell and Cheryl Hardy, who explain how donors gain from their economic involvement with a museum in terms of Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital:

[T]he donation of economic capital in the form of art works [...] or national grants and funding for buildings [...] has been transmuted into increased and consecrated habitus (sociocultural capital for the donor), while augmenting the museum’s own economic and cultural capital. (102)

In this way foundations, for example, engage in a legitimate transaction that aims at converting economic capital into cultural and, ultimately, symbolic capital: while enabling the museum economically they acquire cultural and symbolic capital. The prestige and reputation of the museum is acquired by foundations through their alignment with the institution or a specific project, e.g. an exhibition. For sponsors and foundations this kind of economic-into-symbolic-capital-transaction is necessary because, as discussed above, in the artistic field economic capital itself does not have much leverage but needs to be sanctioned with legitimate practices and gained by following and reproducing the rules of the field: In order to acquire cultural capital the transaction has to be disavowed and the agents involved have to pretend “not to be doing what they are doing” (Bourdieu, “Production of Belief” 261). The language used to talk about these transactions shows this very well: foundations do not *buy* a work of art or *invest* in an artist, they “[provide] grants” (Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation) and support projects. These grants are thus not being offered for altruistic reasons—even though foundations such as the Andy Warhol Foundation consistently

underline their status as a “philanthropic organization” (“Foundation”); cultural capital is being expected in return.

When the transaction is incomplete, the conversion of capital fails and something that has been paid for is not delivered. In this case it is necessary to ensure that the foundation’s current status and reputation is at least not lost. This, however, has to be done covertly since the loss of economic, cultural, and, most importantly symbolic capital must not be acknowledged. Discreetly securing their immaterial forms of capital shows itself in the public criticism directed toward the NPG and the Smithsonian Institution and their decision to remove Wojnarowicz’s video: The foundations employed the argument of censorship that dominated the public debate to put the events at *Hide/Seek* in the context of the culture wars even though the circumstances were quite different.

In their letter to Smithsonian Secretary G. Wayne Clough, sent on December 13, 2010 the Andy Warhol Foundation strongly criticized the removal of the video and calls the “blatant censorship [...] unconscionable” (Andy Warhol Foundation). In a manner that clearly distances the foundation from the museum, they condemn the NPG’s decision as detrimental to the values a national museum should advocate and clearly position themselves in opposition to it: the removal, the letter argues, “is inimical to everything the Smithsonian should stand for, and everything the Andy Warhol Foundation does stand for.” The foundation immediately pointed to the Smithsonian’s failure to meet their agreement and underlined that only the foundation had held up their end of the bargain in providing “more than \$375,000 to fund several exhibitions at various Smithsonian institutions” (Andy Warhol Foundation). In directly linking shared values to the large amount of money the foundation had offered the Smithsonian, the economic transaction becomes visible. In a system that values discretion as highly as the art world, disclosing the exact amount of money is a strong reaction in that it seemingly disregards the field’s insistence on disavowal. It demonstrates the importance of this specific kind of transaction, it shows that the foundation relies on converting money into reputation. When the transaction is incomplete, it is necessary for the donors to transgress the discretion rule in order to secure their immaterial capital: By calling out the NPG and the Smithsonian, the Andy Warhol Foundation is not only able to demonstrate their moral integrity but also disavows the existence and

relevance of their planned transaction. In the eyes of the public, only the NPG and the Smithsonian would have benefitted from the agreement with the foundation, who can now validate their position within the field.

By implying moral weakness on the part of the Smithsonian because of how they reacted to voices “of ignorance, hatred and fear,” the Andy Warhol Foundation painted a very honorable picture of themselves and, thereby, displayed their (claim to) moral authority. The fact that the Andy Warhol Foundation saw their symbolic capital in the form of credibility as well as the additional capital they were hoping to gain from their alignment with *Hide/Seek*, endangered led them to emphasize their “mission to defend freedom of expression wherever and whenever it is under attack” (Andy Warhol Foundation). In this way, the Andy Warhol Foundation was able not only to stabilize their position within the field and to reproduce the rules of the field but also to profit from an incomplete transaction as it provided an opportunity to publicly renew the foundation’s standing.

The Andy Warhol Foundation is just one example of a number of similar reactions to the video’s removal by foundations that had contributed to the exhibition. The other main sponsors also saw a need to cover their bases and openly distanced themselves from the NPG and the Smithsonian because the conversion of capital they were hoping to accomplish did not take place. The Calamus Foundation stated that the removal “empowers the forces of discrimination, repression and homophobia” and the foundation’s “trust in the Smithsonian and the National Gallery to maintain the highest standards of independence, artistic integrity and free speech has been betrayed” (Pilkington). Similarly, the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation withdrew their funding for future projects and stated that “[i]n this climate, at this moment, we would not consider Smithsonian grant requests” (Capps). The Calder Foundation found a different way of confirming their own status as a credible and influential agent by denying another form of economic capital: an artwork that was to be featured in the exhibition that immediately followed *Hide/Seek*. The foundation’s president Alexander S. C. Rower explained: “As it is clear that the Smithsonian wishes to appease a fringe audience, it seems appropriate that we remove from the exhibition Aztec Josephine Baker which is surely a most provocative work” (Taylor). These reactions bespeak the omnipresence and importance of transactions and also illustrate how the different

agents of the field feed off each other—thereby reproducing the field—in order to secure their position.

“Serious and Sound Scholarship”: The Unwavering Belief in Reproducing the System

The tireless reproduction of the field’s value is evident in many responses to the removal of David Wojnarowicz’s video with which each agent tried to maintain their own position and authority. After the incident the Smithsonian, and with it its Secretary Clough, fell silent and did not respond to requests for commentary—until January 31, 2011 when it released an official statement that was, in the eyes of many art commentators, long overdue. In the Smithsonian Institution’s report, the Board of Regents reflected on the incident at the NPG and the implication it had on the Smithsonian’s role and responsibility as a public institution that “is owned by the American people” (“Report” 3). As a direct response to the hasty decision-making of Clough, the Board suggested that “[i]n the absence of actual error, changes to exhibitions should not be made once an exhibition opens without meaningful consultation with the curator, director, Secretary, and the leadership of the Board of Regents” (“Report” 5). In so doing, the Smithsonian indirectly admitted that Clough’s decision as Secretary was too quick.

The report was also concerned with the institution’s future possibilities to prevent such situations and suggested to “[initiate] a summer executive education institute for curators and directors to discuss case studies applicable to Smithsonian exhibition planning and implementation” (“Report” 5). In other words, the Board decided to further institutionalize and professionalize the processes of decision making and art contemplation in an attempt to strengthen their own position and authority. Another fitting example for this practice is the Smithsonian’s “Directive 603,” the institution’s official guideline for exhibition making.¹⁰ “Directive 603,” effective since 2003, not only establishes how the Smithsonian understands itself and its work but, more importantly, sustains its position as an authority within the field. By creating and institutionalizing rules that require professionals to conduct “serious

¹⁰ This information is available because the Smithsonian Institution is primarily financed through federal money and thus is obligated to make their internal decision making processes and structure public and explicable. These reports also shed light on the Smithsonian Institution’s own position within the field and, additionally, in connection to other fields, e.g. the power field, that compels the Smithsonian and the agents connected to it to reproduce a different set of rules.

and sound scholarship” and “to create accurate, balanced, and high-quality interpretations of objects” (“Directive 603”) the Smithsonian even enables the art world. At the same time, it reveals that the Smithsonian is in turn dependent on the expertise of professionals and is even being held accountable for their actions by both other agents of the artistic field and the government. In this way, the Smithsonian Institution’s “Directive 603” illustrates how the rules are being implemented by the agents themselves to preserve their authority towards other agents. The existence of a directive such as this furthermore shows that the Smithsonian’s power, too, is interdependent because it has to answer to other fields. As a federal institution, “owned by the American people” (Smithsonian Institution, “Report” 3), the Smithsonian has to be transparent and be able to account for every step it takes.

Considering the events and practices around *Hide/Seek* enabled a discussion of the field’s internal structure that mostly remains hidden, thereby making a contribution to current discussions of the status and *modi operandi* of the artistic field and its agents. The two examples of transactions discussed in this article illustrate the difficult relationship between economic and non-economic capital within the art world and the artistic field, a field that constantly disavows the existence of capitalist modes of operation. Power and authority in the artistic field mainly rest on prestige, reputation, and integrity and not on economic capital. Even though economic capital enables the artistic field and undergirds many processes of cultural production, it does not generate power in the same way as it does in capitalist markets. In the artistic field economic capital needs cultural and symbolic capital in order to be legitimate. Especially the exchanges of private foundations show that even though donors and foundations exercise some kind of pressure, they rely on the reputation of the institutions they support. This speaks to a system that is hierarchical but in which power nonetheless functions in an interdependent way. In the artistic field in which competition is a governing factor, power and capital are always negotiated and never secure. For the agents within the field, the anxiety to lose one and/or the other leads to strong self-legitimization and validation impetuses and thus becomes a stabilizing force in reproducing the rules and practices of the field. The artistic field is mainly concerned with self-preservation; occupied with perpetuating and (re)institutionalizing its values and legitimizing its practices that again speak to underlying anxieties of losing capital. Based on an unwavering belief in the validity and legitimacy of its practices, the artistic field tirelessly

reproduces and conserves its own value as well as continues to determine the value and meaning of art to the public.¹¹

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