

## ***How to use the market to circulate a more interesting product: post-growth issues in the art of Tino Sehgal***

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Within the past fifteen years contemporary artist Tino Sehgal (b.1976) has become a household name on the international art circuit with his artworks prominently featured at leading commercial galleries, major museums, biennials, art fairs and international art events. Sehgal's art has been given extensive press coverage and hailed as radically novel because his performance pieces revolve around social interactions and choreographed dialogues between an art audience and hired performers, and yet are sold on market terms like traditional artworks. With a few notable exceptions the art critical reception of Sehgal's oeuvre has been largely laudatory – culminating last year with Sehgal shortlisted as a Turner Prize nominee and receiving a Golden Lion as “best artist” at the Venice Biennale.

In my paper I will depart from an apparent anachronism or impasse within the art critical and art historical reception of Tino Sehgal's work:

- In the critical literature the merits of Sehgal's work are frequently associated with the novelty of his practice and a critical stance towards materialist consumption and the art institution that is expressed through the immaterial character of his works and their reliance on direct audience participation.
- Yet in a broader perspective the model proposed by Sehgal is hardly *avant-garde*: as products his artworks merely echo the post-fordist culturalized economy and its reliance on immaterial labor practices. And the open-ended performative concept of art, propelled by Sehgal, has already become part of the art institution.

Considering this, and the fact that Sehgal grounds his practice in considerations on sustainability, I pose the following question: what relevance does Sehgal have for thinking through how artistic practices might pave the way for a post-growth society and what art might be like in a post-growth society?

Using articles on Sehgal's art published in art magazines and art historical journals within the past 15 years as my source material, I argue that the claims made about the criticality of Sehgal's work are widely based on artistic models for critique that, from a historical materialist point of view, no longer hold up to closer scrutiny. Rather than being directly critical of capital, Sehgal's art has similarities with contemporary marketing strategies, forms of consumption, and newly emerged labor practices as described by theorists such as Adam Arvidsson, Paolo Virno, Maurizio Lazzarato and Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. And in many ways Sehgal's art fits neatly within the agenda of the neoliberal art institution.

Drawing on the work of art historian Claire Bishop I suggest three art theoretical models for explaining what might constitute criticality in artworks based on audience participation. I argue that only one of these models grants any critical agency to Sehgal's practice, and only in a very limited way. Despite Sehgal's explicitly stated ambition of creating a new type of art that promotes sustainability through the art institution his practice in the end seems inefficient in that regard and in many ways to be at odds with descriptions of post-growth society in the writings of Serge Latouche and André Gorz.