

I have been asked to talk about the cultural exception and the status of the artist, but insofar as we have already done a lot of work on this subject, I would like to try to formulate the problem a little differently.

The power of a political or social movement does not lie uniquely in its capacity to achieve the goal it has set itself, such as in this case, perhaps, obtaining the abrogation of the new outline agreement, which would depend primarily on the balance of power at a given time. The power of a movement also depends on its capacity to pose new problems and elicit new answers. And we know that this movement has raised many questions. Personally, I would like just to concentrate on the role of culture and art in capitalism today. I would like to start with the conception that we have of wealth creation.

We have inherited a conception of wealth creation that comes to us from the Scottish illuminism of the eighteenth century. The philosopher Adam Smith posited a very simple principle: “If you take on servants, you lose money; if you take on workers, you earn it.” This conception of the wealth generated by production marks the beginning of capitalism and even today remains central to the structure of our society: the ASSEDIC employment office,¹ employee relations—all this is organised around this conception of wealth. However, we might ask if this simple affirmation still holds in today’s world. If companies hire workers in the way Smith and Marx describe, that it so say, workers who do a repetitive activity, they run the risk of losing money, or at least not making enough, and that is one reason for the problems of offshore outsourcing. The structure of capitalism has changed radically. I’ll give a very simple example: a traditional business that developed along Fordist lines, such as the motorcar industry, has radically changed its way of conceiving production. Today, it must sell its cars before it can produce them. The production of the car begins only once it has been sold. This means that before materially producing a commodity, one must construct the consumer, the clientele: one must set up the relations that make it possible to sell the consumer object.

This clientele is constructed through marketing, advertising and communications policies, using “artistic methods”. Here we could apply Duchamp’s observation that a work of art is half the product of the person who made it and half that of the person who looks at, listens to or reads it. The consumer is thus constructed through the consumer’s own involvement. This means a radical change in our way of understanding culture and artistic output. That is why we can no longer talk in terms of an exception in the arts because, from both formal and material standpoints, cultural practices are an integral part of the organisation of production. I have seen a lot of artists in TV advertisements whom I had previously seen on the coordinating committee.

This simple example is symptomatic of ambiguities that exist throughout artistic production. These people I saw

making adverts are actors: they have one foot in artistic production but another in the production of the consumer. I could extend this example.

What is important in capitalist production today is the affective relation: relations of sensibility. There has been talk of relational aesthetics, but one could also talk about relational capitalism, since it engages every kind of experience: the experience of art, the experience of nature and the experience of others. These are kinds of experiences that are fundamental to contemporary capitalism, which it articulates, constructs and formats before producing material goods.

Of course, all this implies a whole world of intermittently employed people, especially those who work in TV productions, but also in live performances: many companies must, at the same time as performing, maintain a social role, build social connections (workshops with students, associations, etc.). Artistic activity thus plays a full part in the planning policies of towns, departments and regions. There is “co-penetration”, a close interrelation of culture, art and this new way of thinking, of practising capitalism and politics. This phenomenon is not negative in itself, rather, it is problematic; in other words, it is something we need to think about and constitute as a political object. And this has been made possible by the cancellation of festivals (which are an integral part of the policy and economy of towns and regions—see the legal action taken by hoteliers, restaurateurs and shopkeepers in Aix-en-Provence when the annual festival there was cancelled).

Capitalist production therefore uses artistic forms to produce sensibility, affects, opinions, beliefs and thoughts. These, more than material output, are today’s true production. This aspect, which has never been studied, is nonetheless very important because, while it uses artistic form, capitalist production totally denies artistic content, that is to say, the capacity to singularise, to produce something singular. The work done by this kind of production engenders a homogenisation, a formatting of subjectivity. The references drawn on by the production of the clientele, consumer or audience emphasises “the average man”, and constructs average desires and beliefs, that it to say, a concept of subjectivity based on the majority. (TV ratings would be one good example of this production of majority subjectivity.) Because where the motorcar industry speaks of its “clientele”, the cultural industry and communications industry speak of their “public”. How is such a public constructed and managed?

There is, then, an aesthetic war being fought around constructions of the sensible. The creation of the sensible today plays the same role as material production did in the capitalism of the nineteenth century.

The movement of the Intermittents does not yet have the strength to raise this problem. Some think that it is not its role to argue about the contents of production. Making weapons or yoghurt is all the same for some people; their main concern is jobs and wages. And yet this cultural pro-

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The Association pour l’Emploi dans l’Industrie et le Commerce (ASSEDIC) is based on a principle of inter-professional solidarity. It informs and enrolls jobseekers and handles the payment of their benefits. It is responsible for enrolling employers and collecting their contributions.

duction captured by new capitalist strategies could be a massive weapon for destroying our subjectivity, a weapon for polluting our brains (in fact it already is).

The second problem is that of wealth. This new form of production, which reverses the relation between material production and the production of affects, beliefs, etc., also produces a new form of wealth. A few years ago, Godard asked, “Why don’t we pay television viewers?” This question could be taken as simple provocation, but it does point up a real problem: in this relation between industry and the production of the consumer, the consumer plays an important role.

(I would point out that for a few years now, the time that the French spend in front of their television set has overtaken the time that they spend at work. For subjectivity in general, this time when our attention and our memory are captured by televisual flux is hugely important, but most people give it no thought.)

Economists are beginning to think about this question because they are realising that consumers are becoming part of companies’ capital, even if they are not recognised. It is likely that a good part of our social budget deficits (social security, pensions, Intermittents du Spectacle, etc.) is due to the fact that we do not yet calculate wealth in relation to this new form of production that I have all too hastily outlined. A huge amount of “affective” work is brought into play by the production of the *sensible*, by the production of relations. This is free work, which brings no financial reward. If, as Duchamp says, the public is responsible for half the construction of the “work”, then it should be paid for this relational affectivity—if, as I think it is, that affectivity is at the centre of contemporary capitalist “production”.

There is, then, a discrepancy. Not only does industry construct new forms of affect, opinions and subjectivity that are a fundamental prerequisite for material creation, but it also produces new forms of “immaterial” wealth. And here the coordinating committee went to the heart of the problem when it suggested finding new sources of finance. However, these sources of finance don’t come easily. And therein lies the problem of the Intermittents du Spectacle movement, but not only of that. We need to start structuring this new reality, naming it, bringing to the fore this relational, affective and free work that we are involved in. We should, for example, raise the problem of “national accounting”, which is still based on a conception of wealth that refers to Adam Smith’s pin factory—that is to say, a conception of wealth that takes into account only “material” wealth. This is clearly an important and complex problem that I can only touch on here, but I think that the question of the financial shortfalls in welfare budgets should be approached from this viewpoint: the classical wage structure does not allow us to capture this new form of wealth and therefore impose its distribution.

I think that the movement raised this question. The difficult thing is finding a way of making it apparent and moving it forward, because if we stay in a logic of opposition to the government there’s a risk it’ll be hard to develop. Nevertheless, the “no” to the abrogation of the protocol and the opposition to the government are fundamental because it’s only through this fight that we have been able to construct a public space where these questions have emerged. However, there is a need to think through a system that makes it possible to articulate these questions of culture, wealth and production and make them into a real political issue. The problem does not concern only art and performing arts professionals, but all of us, because these systems capture the subjectivity of each and every one of us.

DEBATE PUBLIC

There is something in your argument that I find problematic, because if we have entered a new age where, to repeat your example, we build the clientele before we build the car, we do still have to build the car, after all.

MAURIZIO LAZZARATO

Yes, of course it has to be produced materially, but contemporary capitalism in fact separates the company from the factory. The company creates the clientele, invents the product and the consumer for this product and the factory (which can be delocated) makes it. What I am trying to say is that the capitalist command centre is in the company and no longer in the factory. In order to reverse this “international division of labour”, we need to take both into account, but with the awareness that it is the company and these new forms of production that are strategic.

Production is always a sequence of difference and repetition, of the invention of something and then its reproduction. Unlike industrial capitalism, what is important (what brings in the money) is the invention and its social distribution.

My presentation analyses the current situation in order to try to find effective ways of fighting. I took the car as an example because motorcar production is the flagship industry of 20th-century capitalism. The car was what drove the development of capitalism. There’s no fascination on my part. Today, we are in a different phase and the problem for companies is how to produce subjectivity. When Ford made a single model of the T5, he said that “people can have any colour they want so long as it’s black”. The question of choice did not arise. Today, the logic has changed. “You have the choice,” they say, “we are working to fulfil each person’s singularity”.

Obviously, this is a false construction of individuality, of singularity. In fact, it represents a homogenisation of subjectivity, but built using other systems. That’s what’s at stake here. That’s where many cultural and artistic professions have already committed themselves. When I said that a number of us are already involved in advertising, I was

putting my finger on an ambiguity that we all experience, being caught up on one side in the dynamics of the organisation of this formatted, homogenising subjectivity, and on the other hand working towards singularisation, which we all seek to achieve in order to escape this logic. This is where artistic practices can play a fundamental role, in the production of singularity. Not as an “exception”, but as elements of a collective arrangement that needs to be constructed.

An important point about this movement by the Intermittents is that it was possible to discuss this issue. Before this struggle happened, the relation to this reality was either cynical and participative, or rebellious and unsubdued. The struggle of the Intermittents has opened a space for the discussion of these kinds of problems, even if they are not resolved. There has been a break. These problems can only be raised when there is a discontinuity, a break in the forms of control of the production of subordinate subjectivities. The situation is formulated collectively. The form of coordination is very interesting in relation to the traditional forms of organisation in the workers’ movement, like the CGT. It is a form of collective expertise in skills, and is beginning to adumbrate political passages.

This business of new forms of wealth is a huge problem, because we need to change national accounting, which is still based on the old of form of production, as I said earlier. We count what is productive and what is not using the old concept of 18th-century political economy. This is not a problem that the Intermittents movement can solve. It would be absurd to think so. But it has established one or two things, like that idea of opening up the base of contributions. We can only do so if we find other ways of financing it. We need to bring forth new forms of wealth production. We need to find ways of recognising wealth. Institutional and economic ways. We are still under pressure from different deficits. There are deficits because everyone, including the unions and the Left, still calculate wealth creation on that basis. There is no miracle cure and the start of a solution will involve this kind of collective expertise exemplified by coordination. This should be able to grow. Nowadays everything is delegated. The government has set up a commission of forty experts to decide what is good and not good for the national education system, but that’s not the dynamic I’m talking about. The conference on culture organised by Aillagon goes in the same direction, but the experts aren’t going to decide for everyone else. Because what is important is the capacity to appropriate this collective production of expertise.

To come back to this history of capitalism, the fact that the motorcar industry needs to have sold a car before it has even produced it is symptomatic of a radical change in the old forms of organisation of capitalism. That’s all I said.

PUBLIC

Look for new ways of financing, why not? But why not think about the way the UNEDIC is managed? Two years ago it had

quite a surplus. We could consider that the PARE,² as decided by the MEDEF,³ cost it dear. The ASSEDIC was used to finance the work of the big structures. The size of the contributions could vary according to that of the structure. For example, the Ministry of Culture does not contribute. UNEDIC, which is a non-profit association, should think about these ideas.

MAURIZIO LAZZARATO

Personally, I am rather in favour of “blowing up the UNEDIC”, as they say at the coordination, rather than managing it in a different way. UNEDIC is a machine for producing job insecurity, unemployment and poverty. It was set up in the post-war years when employment was, as the economists put it, “frictional”—that is to say, 2%. Today the situation is completely different. Today, like all other forms of insecurity, unemployment is not only the absence of a job: it’s another way of working. And UNEDIC can never cover that. UNEDIC does not help to palliate the lack of unemployment but, like the PARE, reproduces insecurity and unemployment. We need to find other ways—and the coordination raises this question clearly—because this irregular way of working isn’t characteristic only of the artistic professions but is also spreading to other kinds of activities. There too what was an exception is becoming a rule. We need to take into account this spreading of the relations between work and activity which is based on continuous work and discontinuous employment. The continuity of artistic work and the discontinuity of its use (and the problem of remuneration) doesn’t characterise only artistic work. It concerns more and more activities. And UNEDIC was conceived for another dynamic. With the PARE, the CFDT and MEDEF have created a machine for forcing people to do wage labour and accepting any kind of activity.

We need to set up the possibility of guaranteeing continuous revenue in the face of discontinuous employment.

MAURIZIO LAZZARATO

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PARE, the Plan d’Aide au Retour à l’Emploi, was instituted by the UNEDIC agreement of 01/01/01. Based on the principle of individual treatment and reaffirming the choice of a society based on work and not on assistance, the PARE encourages the unemployed to accept retraining in order to meet the needs of local companies and accept any job, since the third refusal on the part of an unemployed person means that their unemployment benefits are cut. Only two unions, the CGT and FO, refused to sign this agreement.

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The MEDEF is the French employers’ confederation.