

**Mapping Benjamin: The artist in the digital age.  
Towards a new definition of the artist as cultural worker.  
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*...the artist's constitution as a worker subject*

In this essay WE would like to present a group of categories developed within the tradition of continental philosophy, which should help to revise and understand the artist's function as a social and economical being in a new perspective. The main problem for such enterprise is to relate a series of concepts that are implicit when trying to highlight the artist as a worker subject, especially the relation between art and culture, which is always a difficult relationship to understand and to visualize.

Benjamin's analysis on the technical reproducibility of art and the missing aura (1935), foretold a radical change, not only in the way art would be produced; he foresaw a radical change within society. Using the word "aesthetisierung", Benjamin configured an original perspective in the reflection on art- understanding it as a social phenomenon with severely political implications. Benjamin introduced the question of mass consumption and its political effects on the realm of art. Benjamin's thus departed on the assumption that art and culture are in a silently uttered relationship. Benjamin cultural criticism on culture has a long tradition in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps the first sign was the cultural pessimism in the first two decades of the past century, and perhaps its last formulation encloses the reality of culture as obliterated into the global sphere and allied with contemporary capitalism (culture compounds the tertiary sector par excellence). But a point that WE always missed in each of these analyses, is a comment on the social reality of the cultural workers (makers) in relation with the changing culture. Instead, today we have a series of new mythologies: the artist's contemporary history is based on his/her richness, extravaganza, adumbration and geniality. When we discussed the artist's social reality we referred to names, galleries and last auction prices, but we hardly spoke of the collectivity; we never spoke of the huge collective of cultural workers. The word "we" was eliminated from the vocabulary.

The objective of this essay is to propose a relation between the analyses on culture, trying to embody into the artist's constitution as a worker subject. I'm aware that most of this analysis is contextualized in the continental philosophy of the last three decades, a philosophy that raises its postulates over the intensive reflection of the being in its multiple possible subjectivities and capitalism's influence on this process.<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that this central topic is present in each of the philosopher's systems, it is impossible to interpret it as a unitary corpus made by univocal conceptualizations. The conveyed meaning of some of the fundamental categories produces a strong theoretical differentiation between the parties. (It has long been known that Foucault and Deleuze's dispute is referring to a central knot in the way power can be understood). I'm afraid that I failed in the task of making these conceptual differences clearer and of elaborating a self sustainable vocabulary based on political theory and Marx. Nonetheless, what is important is the attempt to unify this group of theories related to a specific and real social problem: new forms of capitalists' exploitation of the field of cultural work. The most predominant example is the artist, as constituted subject and as a process of constitution.

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<sup>1</sup> I'm particularly referring to the works of Deleuze, Guattari and Bernard Stiegler, especially regarding a tradition initiated by Simondon. Another point was developed by Althusser in his essay on Ideology. A more intensive investigation of the fields of politics, subjectivity and capitalism can be found in the works of Antonio Negri and Maurizio Lazzarato.

*... culture provides a high economical profit, but in the end we are forgotten in the participation of the economical dividend*

In its form, this essay completes its mission only when it is considered to be a collective work. It is open to discussion and explanations, is even open to withdraw thesis and argumentations. This essay begins with a theoretical part, in which some of the relevant theories are explained, and it “adapts” to the problem of the artist as cultural worker. The next part is more rhetoric, and uses language to reach an emotional level in the reflection on a problem in which a group of people, including friends, acquaintances and relatives as well as myself of course, are included. This is my own reflection and I simply request that when it’s symptomatic reaches an unexplainable level, consideration will be given to the fact that all of these are motivated by my appeal to a prompt collective action.

The moment in which culture is considered an important *raison d’État*, proven by the appointment of the Enquete-Kommission “Kultur in Deutschland” during the period from 2003-2007<sup>2</sup>, is the time to depict the social problems, which originated in the use and abuse of culture in the business sector. The importance ascribed to culture, expressed through the support and increasing number of biennials, art fairs and other events, demonstrates that a change took place in the political and economical perception of culture. A posteriori in which we can see that culture provides a high economical profit to some sectors; tourism, gastronomy, retail- and real estate, etc but that cultural workers are forgotten in the participation of the economical dividend. To stop this form of abuse, we have to reinforce the idea of the collective. Nonetheless, we fear that collectivity is being jeopardized by other forms of individuality’s self-constitution. The increasing velocity and a new class-differentiating society have concentrated a lot of emphasis on the personal decision of every cultural agent. An individual-self salvation strategy has been practiced since the school developed the motto, “agency and production as a way to access a market”. Since then, the market has been bestowed with all-empowering decisions over individuals. It determines who is good and who fails. Who will make the next step and who can’t play anymore. This logic is conflated in its own execration, as illustrates in 2006 when Sotheby’s Tobias Meyer remarked that “the best art is the most expensive because the market is so smart”. And we are afraid because we don’t substantiate the energy and decision for resistance, but instead produce a passive reaction: accepting internships, exhibitions, low wages and other abuses.

*...missing a comment on the social reality of the cultural workers (makers) in relation to the changing culture*

I am concerned with the development of industrialization and commercialization that has occurred within the culture, and its consequences on art. This phenomenon has been widely known since the Horkheimer and Adorno essay on the Culture Industry, dated 1947 and published among other essays in the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*<sup>3</sup>. In their essay, the philosophers were confronted with the emergence and fast development of mass culture and its products, movies, radio and magazines in the post-war world. Horkheimer and Adorno understood them to be the result of the changes arising from the production and function of culture inside capitalist societies. In such societies, it is not only labor that is meant to increase profit, but culture as well. Thus culture relies on the same operation as every other product on the market and it has to be integrated into the succession of the daily basis of consumption and inside the tension build-up between labor time and leisure. Culture therefore accepts its function as leisure, but at the same time only represents an extension of working time; it affirms the capitalist’s ideology, annulling every capability of self-reflection in the subject: “In contrast to the Kantian, the categorical imperative of the culture industry no longer has anything in common with freedom. It proclaims: you shall conform, without

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<sup>2</sup> Source of the final report, 11.12.2007: <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/16/070/1607000.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> ADORNO, Theodor W., HORKHEIMER, Max, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Philosophische Fragmente: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Band 5, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, 1987.

instruction as to what; conform to that which exists anyway, and to that in which everyone thinks as a reflex of its power and omnipresence anyway. The power of the culture industry's ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness."<sup>4</sup> Culture became simple and repetitive, based purely on apparent novelties but not on essential differences, and thus losing with it every possibility of social emancipation.

Drawing conclusions from the culture industry, the Adorno and Horkheimer analysis of art foresees the merging between high art and low art, called bourgeois art and popular art. They thought that when the objective culture became a mass product, art would be a merchandise; solely definable on the basis of value and not aesthetical values. To support this conclusion, they went back to the historical materialistic process in the bourgeois' liberal emancipation, by which the creation and uses of art, despite its elitist character, were a step towards social autonomy. Thus far art is no longer autonomous, but responds to the necessities of the market; it will merge the separation between "high art" and "low art". The latter would be declared as a suspect, due to its exclusive character of only targeting a narrow market group and not the public, and it would be drawn under the conditions of consumption, losing with it its rebel potentiality.

*...the pessimistic view of the two philosophers wasn't completely wrong*

I will begin by the hard fact, despite the historically and socially preserved difference among art, that the intrinsic relationship between culture and art is anymore conceivable other than under a function of capitalism's new form. In fact, the pessimistic view of the two philosophers wasn't completely erred. Art did merge, but not in the form they had supposed it would be. It was not the mass public from workers who came to the gallery opening after the work in the fabric, or saw it on TV, but a multitude of a new generation of cultural workers not with fabric, not with regularly wages, not with dependency. The public that should consume art exists, not unitary and as mass, but fragmented isolated, blurred in the merges of their own subjectivity. At the end capital had played the main role but the historical script had changed. Perhaps the first sign of radical transformation inside art was given by Deleuze in his Postscript on the Societies of Control, a small text that appeared in L'autre Journal in 1990, first published in English in October magazine<sup>5</sup>. In his text Deleuze recapitulates the Foucaultian analysis on the disciplinary societies, and discovered that we were entering a new form of society which he named the society of control. While disciplinary societies are characterized by the use of a restricted surveillance in time and space over a population, expressed in practices of the school, hospital, army etc; the society of control is characterized by a constantly exercised power directly over the individual who is moving within the borderless space of a society.

For Deleuze every wall is falling apart, institutions are no longer sustainable, and modifications in the subjectivity process are changing. In a society of control, the recognizable differences between the outside and the inside, namely between the individual and societal construction expressed, for example with the jail and the juridical apparatus for punishment and judgment, no longer exists. But what produced this radical shift? Deleuze's answer describes the logic inside the societies of control. This had changed from a disciplinary logic with its spaces towards a generalized form of power transiting over the whole social body. The various forms of control constitute a network of inseparable variation. The individual in the society of control is the object of a constant modulation. Between disciplinary societies and the new society, what operates is a shifting within capitalism, from its static production of profit, understood as a capital of concentration of means in the nineteenth century, towards a capitalism that sells services. "In control societies the dominant model is that of the business, in which it is more frequently the task of the individual to engage in forms of competition and continuing education in order to attain a certain level of

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<sup>4</sup> ADORNO, Theodor W., "Culture Industry Reconsidered", in: The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture. Routledge, London, 1991, p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles, "Postscript on the Societies of Control", OCTOBER 59, Winter 1992, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, pp. 3-7.

salary”<sup>6</sup>; and that is highly dispersive. The individual is becoming a 'dividual', whilst the collectivity is reconfigured in data and markets prognoses. Nothing evades this new logic: “The family, the school, the army, the factory are no longer the distinct analogical spaces that converge towards an owner--state or private power--but are instead coded figures--deformable and transformable--of a single corporation that now has only stockholders. Even art has left the spaces of enclosure in order to enter into the open circuits of the bank.”<sup>7</sup>

*...art under cultural industrialization as a functional part of a society of control*

Deleuze’s quickly drafted thesis opens a door by which it is possible to imagine a new relation between culture and art. His claim holds that the subjectivity process is radically deformed by the shift in capitalism, and this is expressed in different areas of the social construct, including art. This means that even the subjects who decide to become artists are trapped inside the logic of a society of control. In one way, it is compelling here, Deleuze’s idea of freedom and self determination postulated after the sixties, an ideal that made the artist a subject who embodied self autonomy and independence to capitalism. But inside Deleuze’s society of control even art is under a new regime of capitalistic structures (which he called an axiomatic machine). This should be especially painful for Deleuze: The fact that in his essay art became its own phrase in the society of control, preceded by the adverb “even”, and separated from the enumeration of the old structures that succumbed under capitalism, is pretty remarkable.

I’m not saying that art wasn’t historically always nestled in a set of economic relationships, and today it is, and this is problematic. I want to highlight that art under the cultural industrialization must be understood as functional part of a society of control where a new form of power is been exercised: Biopower, that “refers to a situation in which what is directly at stake in power is the production and reproduction of life itself” (I will elaborate on this problem later). The main thesis is that in this society, art and artist make up an essential part in the displaying, acceptance and embodiment of this power; they are a product of it and they reproduce it. It is even rooted in how this artistic subjectivity is chosen as a life option, and disseminates its conformity. In normal language we experience this transformation on the level of our daily critique and surprise: The popular claim that art became a lifestyle and the brutality by which money flows into art producing speculation and monopoly on the market<sup>8</sup> are both true, but they belong to two different expressions of the same process. While the latter affects an order of economical axioms based on market laws and practices, the former notates the process of subjectivity which is always manipulated and transformed by the flows of biopower in a capitalist society. The distinction between the two general expressions seems important to me, because displaying it as the same thing, and not as two different faces of the same coin, had influenced the literature and research on culture and art under new capitalism. We have several texts that described the situation, and many of them use certain narratives that compete with Hollywood magazines’ gossiping. In the end we are deprived of a real analysis that can explain to us how this radical change did happen, on the sphere of culture and on the arts.

*...art and culture under a new form of capitalism*

Up until now, I have made the following statement my point of reference: Art and culture are determined

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<sup>6</sup> MARKS, John, Control Society, Entry in Deleuze Dictionary, edited by Adrian Parr, Edinburgh University Press, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the five pages of the postscriptum are more poetically written than theoretical. To understand what theories are behind the Deleuzian thesis, see Michael Hardt. The global society of control in Gilles Deleuze, Une vie philosophique: Rencontre International Gilles Deleuze, ed. by. Éric Aliez, Rio de Janeiro, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> The latest documentary of Ben Lewis shows the despicable practices of galleries, collectors and auctions houses that firstly, exercise a monopoly on the market, and secondly, guarantee higher prices for the artist, allowing speculation and higher profits. Whereas many of these practices are strictly controlled and punished in some markets, in the art market none of these practices have to submit to any further investigation of regulatory body. Directed and written by Ben Lewis, The Great Contemporary Art Bubble, 2009. Coproduced by ARTE, BBC, ZDF.

under a new form of capitalism that works with the raw material of life, therefore having even been capable to modulate the subjectivity process. I must confess that this conclusion is negative, because it directly affects the social idea of the artist himself. I'm aware that this statement must have dwelled in everybody who decided to be an artist as a life option, and found himself at the side of those who are oppressed or poor, or simply who think and reflect on capitalism. To all of those people, I can only plead for patience. So far I'm not doing this only under a methodological principle, as a way to obtain some preliminaries in this essay, but also as a way to really point out social and economical problems in the relation between art and capitalism that are constantly evaded, but are central for me in a new understanding of the artist as a cultural worker. Despite the harshness, my argument relies on some historical facts. The changes in the hegemony of production operated since the end of the second world war, described as the shifting from production inside a fabric towards an individual who is in himself an industry and who has to offer services, are related to the shifting in the labor, that in the social theories is mostly characterized as the shifting between material labor and immaterial labor.

In a broad sense, immaterial labor was a term developed within the tradition of the operaismo (workism), a neo Marxist movement in Italy since the early 1960s whose principle was to defend the creativity and autonomy of the labor. In a new way of reading Marx, operaismo denounces that capital always tries to expropriate the worker's inventive and the cooperative capacity, on which it depends for production of commodities. But in this process, capitalism would find resistances. So in order to avoid it, capital would expand its area of dominion and its technological intensity in an attempt to control the worker. In the struggle of human labor to evade exploitation and capitalism, the worker is not only made but remade, generating new forms of labor. The latest shift took place at the end of the seventies; when capitalism began a process of expanded transnationalization and laid a strong emphasis on the production and creation of new technologies. This shift is described as evolving from a 'Fordist' to a 'Post-Fordist' regime of accumulation, a shift in which the move from industrial, mechanical production technologies landed into postindustrial (digital) systems.

Roughly, immaterial labor describes the shift from a bodily production of commodities to an intellectual production. Under some sociological aspects this was referred to as the conformation of information societies, where the know-how, or the database, played the important role. Nonetheless, the definition of immaterial labor as a production of intellectual assets and the principal component of the information industry was an insufficient concept for understanding other forms of labor that are becoming highly predominant in today's society. Immaterial labor was not only about organization and adaptation of numerical information or code data and its posterior transformation in binaries and algorithms. As new branches of the global economy have shown, a new way of labor is about the handling and exchanging of more bodily sensations and sympathies, creating new social relations through communication and language. Since the first book "Empire" in 2000, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt have postulated this expanded definition of immateriality; immaterial labor is working with the affects: "The model of the computer, however, can account for only one face of the communicational and immaterial labor involved in the production of services. The other face of immaterial labor is the affective labor of human contact and interaction. Health services, for example, rely centrally on caring and affective labor, and the entertainment industry is likewise focused on the creation and manipulation of affect. This labor is immaterial, even if it is corporeal."<sup>9</sup>

*...culture works primarily on affects and communication, and can be understood as an immaterial labor*

Originally the cause for a theory of immaterial labor as affective work was the nurses and female childcare employees' movement and strikes for better working conditions. (Their work was unfairly paid, on the basis that nurturing belongs to the female nature and it doesn't need any qualification). Nonetheless,

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<sup>9</sup> NEGRI, Antonio / HARDT, Michael, Empire, Harvard University Press paperback edition, 2001, p. 292.

immaterial labor can be understood in a broad range, having to do with the role played by communication and the production of social life at the moment they are integrated into economy. **In** this sense, because culture works primarily on affects and communication, it can be understood as immaterial labor. In another more radical perspective, culture is necessarily and only immaterial work that is closely related to the production and enhancement of commodities. Maurizio Lazzarato, who developed the concept next to Antonio Negri, conceptualized immaterial labor in the nineties as “the activity that produces the ‘cultural content’ of the commodity, immaterial labor involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as ‘work’ – in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion.”<sup>10</sup>

As we can appreciate, Negri and Hardt are more positive regarding culture as immaterial labor. In their system immaterial labor has the task of originating social life, using creativity and language as a vehicle to communicate with each other. In this view, culture is autonomous from the capital and its potentiality is to reduplicate new webs of sociality that of course can be used in a later phase by the capital, turning this social construct into a commodity. Lazzarato believes that culture is no longer sustainable or independent of new labor relationships emerged under the development of the market. Culture “works” on giving another aspect to the commodities.

*...we are at a crossroads*

We are at a crossroads. We have two different conceptualizations. In a conversation in 2008 with Maurizio Lazzarato, he suggested he was changing, or perhaps abandoning his concept of immaterial work. His skepticism had made me abstain in developing this concept any further than in its original conception of his seminal text from 1994. His possible rejection to the concept lays on the fact that it is hard to understand when detached from a further development of the concept of biopower and biopolitics. We can conclude that Lazzarato is a critic of the concept. On the other hand some critics have pointed out that Negri and Hardt’s concept of immaterial labor in is a mixed soup where a lot of dispersed elements are included: nurses, designers, prostitutes, artists, etc. The social reality of each of those belongs to a different range of necessities and answers. Negri and Hardt did reply, postulating the idea of Multitude. A social class made by individuals, a complex constructed on unitary differences, with the possibility to react against capitalism and its exploitation using the production of social life. I’m not going to expose the concept of Multitude because I’m afraid that precisely this production of social life is completely integrated in the production and reproduction of the capital. Examples taken of the Web 2.0, known as the social web, clearly show in the case of Facebook that the construct of a life, (in most cases a real life endowed with a name, its social interdependency represented in the name of relatives and friends that are logged in, and its collective character, represented in the global potentiality of the internet), is exploited in order to produce values. Restricted to the controlled space of Facebook’s interface, the possibilities of merging my subjectivity with the control of marketing, publicity and other commodities is higher than those of meeting my friends at the resolved space of the public domain. That social life is a value, a higher one, shows how much the internet’s big gatekeepers (google, yahoo, etc) have paid in order to buy the data and the algorithms which contained life.

*...how to define the function of the artist as culture worker?*

How then can the function of the artist as culture worker be defined in the dimension of the labor? It is necessary to draw some borders with regards to the immaterial labor’s function when related to the artistic production. I would like to propose that we find the artist within a sector delimited by the following fields:

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<sup>10</sup> LAZZARATO, Maurizio, Immaterial Labor: <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm>.

- a. Production of affects based on the image, sound and other aesthetical phenomena
- b. Production of affects using communications forms based on values and symbols
- c. Re-production and divulgation of affects based on the image and in the communication-based affects in order to originate a social texture
- d. Gatekeepers function: to exercise control and management on the social life where the affects are recreated

In order to illustrate those fields, we have to imagine an artist that uses an image; a painter. His painting supposedly has a meaning over the world, as historical, critical, etc. It recreates a certain affective sensation, which we can call an aesthetical experience. However his labor doesn't end in the mere production of the painting, but rather in developing specific communication with, for example, the history of art, the social context of the painter (the city in which he lives, his comrades etc), and approaching a wide range of persons who are unknown at the moment: the gallery visitor, the beholder etc. But this communication isn't freely distributed; a system exercised control over this production: the gallery owner, the collector, the press, etc. Under these coordinates, it is possible that the affect, based on a communicative image reaches another level, approaching a broader public; and in the end becoming a representative for a collective of individualities. For example, the painting is catalogued as part of a school or a nation, German or American.

*...But how is this indifferent difference possible?*

On this basic depiction of the artist's immaterial labor, the gaze evades the fact that precisely every production of affects, either based on the image or on the communication, recreates a social order that complies within an orientated capitalistic labor. Image and communication are a part of advertising and marketing's strategies. What could be the difference between an artist and graphic designer? Luckily for some designers who bestowed their work with the attribute "art", there is no ontological difference but rather only a formal one and we are somehow close to Lazzarato's perspectives of culture as immaterial work. But how is this indifferent difference possible? Or, how is it possible that a blurred border exists, and it is simply drawn every time it is necessary to reaffirm "culture", or to legitimate budgets, personal positions, government strategies or national pride? Someone could respond that the above defined sectors are always blurred, and that he or she would like us to compare art and handicrafts. Both working with the image or on aesthetical forms have a social communicative function; both depend on the cultural market. But in his/her response he/she is forgetting the fact that art has an aesthetical function, in which it postulates the essential question of the existence in different ways over the materiality. This is an epistemological function that can be postulated or answered by other human activities, such as science, but not necessarily over an aesthetical content, which Deleuze and Guattari defined as a precept, or a "block of sensations". But if culture and therefore art, had reached this level of economization perhaps we have to take valediction of our dream on culture and its power to re-signify the world, which is condemned to its emptiness in the excessive consumption propelled by capitalism.

In the end, under a post-Fordist system, it is not the product itself that makes a difference but its own production, namely the effects on the social life addressing the artist and the graphic designer (as well as the fashion designer, the marketing expert and others). I think it is very important to keep in mind that capitalism needs to find an unmediated way of establishing command over the subjectivity contained in life. Because the capitalist can't compel the subjectivity to any task of execution, it uses its competence in the areas of management, communication, and creativity. That's why creativity is no longer a concept referring to the act of human production in the realm of the arts and can't be used to point out any differences within other labor areas. Since the deconstruction theory in the seventies, which declared the death of the author, was announced at the same time and in a philosophical way, this meant the end of the genius. After that, there could be no authors and no original creations, but just producers of social

relations in different branches, who use or consume, as Boris Groys described, the big archive of references and practices, artistic ones as well, on which culture is transformed.<sup>11</sup>

*...lifestyle is in any case the product of an individual decision*

The relationship between production and life has been changed. Life is no longer subordinated to the day of labor, but rather life is an apriori condition and the cause of all production. The word “lifestyle” is a good key word for understanding this, because in its semantic root, it shows how life has been coupled to a style, to a product of an industry, a commodity and profit. But lifestyle is in any case the product of an individual decision; it needs collectivity in order to become a social goal. “Industry produces no surplus except what is generated by social activity. (...) The excess of value is determined today in the affects, in the bodies crisscrossed by knowledge, in the intelligence of the mind, and in the sheer power to act. The production of commodities tends to be accomplished entirely through language, where by language we mean machines of intelligence that are continuously renovated by the affects and subjective passions.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus Biopower is the power exercised over life, as well as over individuals and over the collectivity. But power always has to be organized in a set of practices and discourses; it doesn't stay in the air but appears within every relation inside the social body. What is the shape of Biopower? Or better said, in which context are these power relations framed? The question immediately relates itself to politics. In his book entitled *Homo Sacer* (1995), Giorgio Agamben describes how the antique distinction between *zoe*, which is biological life and *bios*, which is political life, was transformed in our modern society at the moment in which the introduction of the *zoe* into the political sphere succeeded. For him and Foucault, this event is the landmark of modernity and the principle of the modern state. But what made the introduction of the living being and man as a political subject possible? Was it produced by sovereign power? The birth of biopower and the redefinition of the problem of sovereignty were analyzed by Foucault, approaching a positive theory of power. Searching for effects on the constitution of subjectivity, he developed a new political theory that describes the moment at which life was introduced into history. “He demonstrated how the techniques of power changed at the precise moment that economy (strictly speaking, the government of the family) and politics (strictly speaking, the government of the polis) became imbricated with one another.”<sup>13</sup>

In Foucault's insightful lesson held in 1979 in the college of France, entitled the birth of the biopolitic, the relationship between the two forms of government is further developed. In its latest development the political economy is embodied into neo-liberalism's political program. Foucault's thesis explains that the rise of biopolitics happened when economy's principles were introduced into the field of politics, thus reshaping the definition of law and governmental practice: The question of the self regulation of the government, its relation with what it is allowed and what it is forbidden, legitimate and illegitimate, are in their nuclei radically new conceived. As Foucault explains: “on what does political economy reflect, what does it analyze? It is not something like prior rights inscribed in human nature or in the history of a given society. Political economy reflects on governmental practices themselves, and it does not question them to determine whether or not they are legitimate in terms of right. It considers them in terms of their effects rather than their origins, not by asking, for example, what authorizes a sovereign to raise taxes, but by asking, quite simply: What will happen if, at a given moment, we raise a tax on a particular category of persons or a particular category of goods? What matters is not whether or not this is legitimate in terms of

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<sup>11</sup> GROYS, Boris, *Der Künstler als Konsument*, in: *Topographie der Kunst*, München, 2003.

<sup>12</sup> NEGRI / HARDT, *Empire*, Ibid. p. 366.

<sup>13</sup> LAZZARATO, Maurizio, *From Biopower to Biopolitics, Tailoring biotechnologies*. Vol. 2, Issue 2, Summer-Fall, 2006, pp. 11-20.

law, but what its effects are and whether they are negative. It is then that the tax in question will be said to be illegitimate or, at any rate, to have no *raison d'être*.”<sup>14</sup>

In his analysis on political economy as the origin of biopolitics, Foucault offers a frame in which biopower would appear recognizable as the governmental mechanism that comprehends and amplifies the whole range of relations between the forces that are extended throughout the social body: meaning, between man and woman, employer and worker, doctor and patient, to cite some typical examples of the Foucaultian typology. Consequently, biopolitics in its governmental form is the strategic coordination of power relations in order to extract a surplus of power from living beings. I'm not going to offer an analysis here on the neoliberal concept of governmentally-made by Foucault, it would be too large, but it is important to have a clear understanding that under his term 'governmentally' are two main references. On the one hand, it refers to a set of practices that function as political representation of a form of government, but on the other hand, it embraces the process of subjectification that is contained in forms of knowledge. After a depiction of historical processes behind the formation of the liberal party in Europe, Foucault described how a neoliberal type of government engages some techniques of "self-knowledge", aiming with this governmental form to reach formation of an individual subjectivity based on self-knowledge and modern self-constraint. The neoliberal discipline search for leading and controlling subjects while at the same time not being responsible for them; in exchange it postulates that every individual, or form of collective association, are responsible for their own social security. State and representational government are detached of the responsibility, releasing every decision onto the individual while affronting the social risks. Individuals are transformed into industries for themselves, providing their own health regime, for example, in the search of nutrition, sports, yoga, etc. But just as well, the individual has to provide his own education, paying for it, extending the hours destined to learn, or he can simply find his place in the economy as a free-lancer, working extra hours, deterritorializing leisure time and work time, converting everything into a unity of work and production. At the end, the Foucault analysis would emphasize that in this 'autonomous' individual's capacity for self-control there is a link to forms of political rule and economic exploitation.

### *...art became lifestyle*

In this whole structure of a neoliberal government, Foucault's examples are always related to health, sexuality and family. I'm not aware if Foucault describes the role of culture and art in the biopolitical scenario. Nonetheless, art became, as we said, lifestyle. This transformation demonstrates the speed by which art is related to the production of social life, which is converted into commodity. In this order of ideas, it should be no surprise, that in recent years there an intensive relation has emerged between political representation and artists. The recent example of Guido Westerwelle as a collector and his affiliation as president of the neoliberal party in Germany, demonstrates to which degree art became a political medium, reinforcing the social context of his/her owner by postulating a special privilege and dominion. On the other hand, the flowering of private individual initiatives, by which art is not only collected but open to a certain public, expresses the accentuating on individuals who assume a function as culture entrepreneurs, taking it out of public hands. With the collecting of works and the privileges, they create an image of contemporary patron. But the problem with culture within the political economy not only lays in the fact that social life and its production is converted into a commodity. Because artist and culture workers are conceived as individuals who have to function under governmental premises, they have to take on all the social risks by themselves. The problem is, they don't have the same conditions as every other producer of social life on the market. This means that cultural work in the biopolitical system of power is underpaid; it doesn't allow him/her to assume the social risks that the state is no longer taking. This situation, which would try to be developed later, conducts art as his own misery; art consumes

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<sup>14</sup> FOUCAULT, Michel, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, in: Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. by Paul Rabinow, New York: The New Press, 1998.

itself because culture has to be transformed in spectacle in order to generate enough revenues for the artist.

*...culture, and especially arts produce real economical benefits*

The theoretical corpus, in its historical and societal conceptualization, has a purpose to fundament the description of a level of problems that have surfaced on the cultural activity and on the artistic production and are closely related to the artist as a cultural worker. My only purpose is to show how a scenario that had become real and possible, dwelt in the philosophical and societal analysis, in the creation and placement of categories, such as society of control, immaterial labor, biopolitic and biopower, and in the changes of the subjectivity process and economization of the social life and posterior transformation into a commodity. Culture and especially arts produce real economical benefits. It is no longer an abstract field of the world's representation but a real world's agent inside the new economical system. But while these effects become more and more real, and are effectively used by groups that represent an economical interest, (such as assets managers who, in order to reevaluate a real state property rent the space to an artist or cultural workers), the poverty of the cultural worker is ostensible and a solution for a dignified wage or forms of labor's organization are always denied. Even at the governmental level, the understanding and recognition of culture's economical effects is evident, but on the other side of the coin, the state support pushes culture and arts against the wall, against its own existence: While the German state sponsors the Berlin Biennial, creating a economical welfare for those industries related to tourism and gastronomy services, and while Berlin became a trademark inviting investors to build expensive flats, the cultural workers that labored in this event had underpaid wages or they were not paid at all. Sitting at my desk while writing these sentences, I can evoke the moment in which, for a ridiculous hour/wage relation, I sold my working force, my communicative and affective potentialities and originating benefits that in the end were deposited in the cafes' and boutiques' register machine on the street. But like me there were others, present and absent, future and past generations, changing personal exploitation into a collective one. Capital expropriates the collective life that we all create, transforms it into the numerical rules of its economical representation and produces benefits. Social justice shall be a topic in the discussion on cultural production.

*...culture is profitable and therefore an object for investment instead of "support"*

The objective of this essay is to point out some headlines by which the question of the cultural worker can be assumed within the social, economical and cultural responsibility. The main objective was to define some bases for a criticism which aims to question some cultural policies and politics, and detour attention towards a serious ethical problem: cultural workers are the object of a dependent and fragile economy based on criteria such as creativity and cultural industry. Namely, the positive terms to define a region of the capitalist production, culture and creativity, in reality concealed a problem: cultural workers are forecast to share a very small portion of the economy whose stability is supported mainly by the private and public funding model. Although this is an old model, and everybody knows that institutions such as the church or monarchies played an important part in art history, as patrons, collectors, purchasers and clients, (and so forth, so that an entire library is even dedicated to this area) towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some preliminary conditions had changed. First of all, the emerging of a new capitalism statute, which, to put it briefly, had reached the economization of the culture. Culture is profitable and therefore is object for investment instead of "support". Secondly, due to some operations based on the industrial production of image and aesthetic experiences, the profit made by a former investment is not perceivable nor possible in the culture itself, but patently in some "obscure" areas of economic capitalistic growth: real state, advertisement, marketing and tourism; just to name a few of them.

In other words, culture is an excellent business except for those who worked with and on culture.<sup>15</sup> This discloses a real problem, an ethical one: The population of those who can be called cultural workers is growing rapidly in the world. New generations of young people<sup>16</sup> are electing a fundamental decision: to work with culture, whether on the production of the image or on the production of the aesthetics. One question remains: would culture guarantee a fair working condition for this range of the population under the rule of capitalism? Can culture be preserved after its economization? Can we find societal fairness or societal exclusion in culture and therefore the extension of irrational principles of the capitalisms, its will for power and the production of new mechanisms for the subjectivity?

*...art's contemporary situation: many artists are becoming clowns*

In Bölls' book *The Clown (Ansichten eines Clowns, 1963)*, our principal character decided to be a clown and live in an extramarital relationship with the woman he loves. He is evading reproducing the conditions of the bourgeoisie milieu his family belongs to. But this rebel act is not only an answer to the moral structures of any form of a society, bourgeoisie, aristocratic, etc; but it was especially an answer to the post war society, wherein Germany was revitalized by the *Wunderwirtschafts*. Within the spectacular economical growth experienced after the War, the scares weren't cured, but rather were hidden in the complex determination of individualities and responsibilities, the revitalization of heroes and criminals, and the use of a double moral. In this context, Hans Schnier decided to be a clown and not an artist, he says, referring to his wages, the discussion of which is nonsense. In the arts, he says, one may always be either overpaid or underpaid. This sentence reflects a lot of art's contemporary situation, which may give the impression that many artists are becoming clowns. It is the massive laugh and not the individual one, the generalization of a reflection that has validity for everybody. The best show and the best scenario are the effective mediums to reach social stability. But behind this paradigmatic description of a clown, the real social problematic of the artist is concealed. To become a clown is just a metaphor to describe the subjectivity adjustment to society's economical conditions, the dominant role of the affects and the economization of social life. Becoming a clown translates into the transformation of the cultural production in terms of the spectacle. As Guy Debord writes in *The Society of the Spectacle (1967)*, a spectacle is social relations mediatized by images. These conditions are fulfilled by some of the artistic practices, but in order to overcome the static image of the painting, sculpture or performance, (and even the image of the video art), movement is introduced as the social life that would be the watermark in every gallery opening, auction, artist talk, retrospective and other form of cultural divulgation. But in order for a spectacle to be recurrent and positive, in order to feed the public, it relies on its own homogeneity despite presenting itself as heterogeneity, spread over thousand of galleries and shows. It doesn't matter how many galleries and artists, how many biennials and exhibitions are held, its own hegemony relies in

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<sup>15</sup> Here I had faced a problem. The precarious nature of the cultural worker, which has been discussed in the German circles: I hope to dodge any liberal doctrine over culture and arts, which has proven mistaken and dangerous and to evade the discourses over precariousness, which are manifest and different. The problem with "the awkward" position, in which cultural workers are "destined" to earn their life by producing in other activities, affine or not with his/her education (TV spots production, for example) and menaced by poverty, should be explained in a new light. It should be of interest for all cultural politics to modify and regulate those on the market who earn with the culture, directly or indirectly. Instead of playing "Cinderella", or the weak part of a government, culture as politics should be enforced to make decisions/ modifications over other parts of governmental activity, and open a range of heteronomy of the cultural experiences.

<sup>16</sup> The number of registered students in the state Art academies in Germany increased from 1998 by 3000 places. Nonetheless many of the educational programs in cultural production, mode design, web design, music production etc lay in the hands of private institutions and schools. But a second problem emerged in this shift: The number of women in the culture milieus is growing rapidly. Since 2000, the number of female students in German universities and *Kunsthochschule*, or academies of art, had overcome the number of male students. In winter 2008/2009 the number of students in universities was 1,365,927, of that 705,228 female students. In art academies from 31,565 students, 18,154 are female students, nearly 60% of the whole population. If underpayment is a criterion for many works practiced by women, and if cultural work is becoming a path to exploitation, we can regard the future of the female cultural workers with fear. More information: Statistisches Bundesamt, Fachserie 11, Reihe 4, *Bildung und Kultur*, 21. September 2009.

selecting the topic and the quantity: creating its own public, young and sexy, but excluding the poor and the forgotten, who are just around the corner. Culture as a spectacle is exclusivity in another meaning. Non-spoken rites separate the initiated and the ignorant.

Culture cannot break its own circuit of consumption because to introduce another taste would be too risky. Exception is when a different perspective would be present as exotic, as a product of the periphery: every spectacle accepts its own banlieue, as soon as the burned vehicles are part of the script and not a revelation of the human anguish, everything would be in order and the show can go on.

*...art produces real economical effects, but those are never directly invested in culture or art*

A spectacle's continuity relies on two actions: production and distribution. The former belongs to the artists, the latter to those who, unable to call themselves artists, play with the products and display them into a stable and perdurable form of exhibition. To be a curator is the product of a negative definition. "I'm NOT an artist, therefore I'm curator, gallery owner, collector and specialist and entrepreneur"; the relation of exclusion made in this judgment became tautological so far as this mental lie is a construct in the interior of every subjectivity process, and of the new educational system's goal, which is aiming to produce technocrats in matters of art and culture. Some study art history or cultural sciences as a way to attain knowledge that rests somewhere else; others just handle with art. They think that being a friend or handling with art and culture is enough; their motto is, contact as knowledge's condition. But knowledge is produced by their own insecurities, in their internal disputes and the insincerity to exhibit what is external would compensate its own desires and need for recognition. Banks and automakers collected and promoted art as the best way to create a clean appearance, which any publicist with thousands of images can reach. Every company needs just one image related to art in order to convey the desired message to the bourgeoisie milieu. Since more than a decade the word management is applied to culture, but the last thing that those managers have reached is social fairness. Moreover, the manager feels that his/her task is being certified because of the massive cultural production that constitutes our daily life.

In addition, the artist is sunken in the illusion of his/her own ego without knowing that there is plenty of abuse behind this process of revitalization. So far this ego is secured; the market has the guarantee that the production of life is stable. Negating the ego and deconstructing the role of the contemporary artist can be a first step towards a regulation and the institution of social fairness among the cultural productions. But what are the real solutions? Should the greatest of all revolutions be to sink the production and distribution of culture to a level zero of agency? Could the transcendental negation of producing and reproducing social life be the key to evade the transmutation of our collectivity into a singular commodity? After this rhetorical and theoretical part, I'm indebteding an example that verifies what I pointed out here: my claim that art as a cultural activity performed by the artist produces real economical effects, but those are never directly invested in culture or art. The collective of cultural workers is exploited. The social phenomenon of gentrification is the best example that uncovers the operation of capitalism's new form.

URL: [http://workingtogether.eyes2k.net/Sanguino\\_MappingBenjamin.html](http://workingtogether.eyes2k.net/Sanguino_MappingBenjamin.html)