

Creation Quits Its Pimp, To Rejoin Resistance¹

Through which strategies are artistic practices carrying out their critical function in the current moment? How are they promoting the reconnection of the powers of creation and resistance, of the aesthetic and political affects?

Paradoxical subjectivity

Subjectivity is the living laboratory where worlds are created and others are dissolved. The politics of subjectivation shift and change, along with their inherent relations to the world's otherness: varied and variable combinations of two different ways of grasping the material world, either as a pattern of form or as a field of force — two modes of apprehension which in turn depend on the activation of different powers of subjectivity.

Understanding the world as form-matter draws on perception, carried out by the sensory organs; but understanding the world as energy-matter draws on sensation, engendered in the encounter between the body and the forces of the world that affect it. That which in the body is affected by these forces is neither its organic, sensorial or erogenous condition; rather it is the condition of flesh shot through with waves of nervous energy, what I will call a “resonating body”. Thus the perception of the other introduces his formal presence, through its representation, into our subjectivity; whereas sensation constitutes his living presence. Between these two ways of grasping the world there exists an irresolvable paradox: on the one hand, the new blocks of sensations throbbing within subjectivity as it is affected by other worlds; on the other, the forms through which this subjectivity recognizes and guides itself in the present. The ineluctable disparity between these two ultimately places the current forms in check: they become an obstacle to the integration of the new connections to the world's otherness that have provoked the emergence of a new state of sensation. Thus they cease to be conductors of the process, they are stripped of vitality, they lose meaning. A crisis arises in subjectivity, bringing pressure to bear and producing unease. To respond to this pressure, life is summoned up as a power of resistance and creation. In other words, this unease leads to the creation of a new configuration of existence, a new form of oneself, of the world and of the relations between the two; and it also requires a fight to bring these new boundaries into existence, to embody them.

The association of these two forces in action grants life its continuity and expansion. The multiple molecular transformations which thereby arise are accumulated and eventually precipitate new forms of society, an ongoing “open work” whose creation is necessarily collective. The paradox in subjectivity and the crisis it provokes thus constitute the individualisation process in its constant becoming-other; they are its trigger. This turns all forms of subjectivation into ephemeral configurations in unstable equilibrium.

The practise or non-practise of these two forms of knowledge and the place each one occupies in relation to the world define modes of subjectivation, each of which in turn defines a politics of the relation to otherness, whose effects are not neutral: they encourage, or conversely, they constrain the processuality of life, its expansion as a power of differentiation which is both a force of invention that decomposes worlds while recomposing others, and simultaneously, a force of resistance that permits change to occur. In other words, the changing politics of relationships with the other are what encourage or constrain life's struggle for resistance. How can we use these terms to conceptualise the prevailing politics of subjectivation within the present context of “integrated world capitalism”?²



Image from the workshop “la_multitud_conectada” (The Connected Crowd) part of Reunión 03 which took place at the International University of Andalucía (La Rábida) from September 1-5, 2003.

Kidnapped invention

Some contemporary writers, especially those close to Toni Negri, claim that from the 1970s or 1980s onward, capitalism has turned the force of invention into its primary source of value, the driving force of the economy itself. How should we view this phenomenon from the viewpoint of the politics of subjectivation underlying it?

Two aspects stand out here, and clash: on the one hand, the knowledge of the world as energy-matter tends to be discredited, and as a result, deactivated; on the other, the paradoxical link between the virtual blocks of sensations and the current forms of life is brutally intensified, thereby intensifying the tension and the mobilisation of the creative force that this dissonance provokes. There are many reasons for the intensification of this dissonance. To take just two of the most obvious, let us first look at the fact that the globalised urban existence introduced with capitalism implies that the worlds to which subjectivity is exposed at any point on the globe are increasingly multiplied and vary at an increasingly dizzying speed: in other words, subjectivity is continuously affected by a whirlwind of forces of all kinds. Second is the way that the need to constantly create new market spheres — an inherent necessity of capitalist logic — means that new forms of life have to be produced to give them a subjective consistency while others are swept off the stage, along with entire deactivated sectors of the economy. The combination of these two factors shortens the shelf-life of the forms in use, which become obsolete even before there has been enough time to absorb them. What is more, this combination also imposes the obligation of reformatting oneself rapidly, even before there is time to really feel the sensation to which the change gives rise. One lives in a constant state of tension, on the verge of exasperation; and the result is that the force of invention is invoked very frequently.

To aggravate the situation, this entire process occurs in a subjectivity blind to the world's forces of otherness, dissociated from the resonating body and, consequently, left without access to the new blocks of sensations that summon up its power of invention; left without the bodily compass that orients the creation of territories, so that they can operate as the existential actualisation of those sensations. A wellspring of inventive force is released, without any possibility to appropriate it and to build singular worlds in consonance with what the life process requires. This wellspring of “free” invention power is

what contemporary capitalism has discovered as a virgin resource, an untapped vein of value to be exploited; a phenomenon which Toni Negri and his collaborators can be credited with discerning and describing.

In order to extract maximum profitability from this invention power, capitalism pushes it even further than it would be by its own internal logic, but only to make an ever more perverse use of it: like a pimp, it exploits the force of invention at the service of an accumulation of surplus value, taking advantage of it and thus reiterating its alienation with respect to the life process that engendered it — an alienation that separates it from the force of resistance. On the one hand you have turbo-charged inventive power freed of its relation to resistance, and on the other, a tension aggravated by an experience of the world's otherness disassociated from its grasp as energy-matter by the resonating body. This is what defines capitalism's mode of subjectivation in the present. Accelerated and liberated of its association with resistance, the power of invention is captured by capital to serve in creating template-territories that configure the right types of subjectivity for each new sphere that is invented. These are homogenised territories of existence whose very formation is organised by the principle of the production of surplus value, which overlays and overcodes the entire process. Easy-to-assimilate “ready-to-wear identities” are accompanied by a powerful marketing operation concocted and distributed by the media, so as to make us believe that identifying with these idiotic images and consuming them is the only way to succeed in reconfiguring a territory, and even more, that this is the only channel by which one can belong to the sought-after territory of a “luxury subjectivity”. And that is no trivial matter, for outside such a territory one runs the risk of social death, by exclusion, humiliation, destitution, or even the risk of literally dying — the risk of falling into the sewer of the “trash subjectivities”, with their horror scenarios made up of war, slums, drug traffic, kidnapping, hospital queues, undernourished children, the homeless, the landless, the shirtless, the paperless, the people who can only be less, an ever-expanding territory. If trash subjectivity continuously experiences the distressing humiliation of an existence without value, luxury subjectivity for its part continuously experiences the threat of falling outside, into the sewer-territory, a fall which may be irreversible. The prospect terrifies it and leaves it agitated and anxious, desperately seeking recognition. ➤



Mauricio Dias & Walter Riedweg "Mera Vista Point" 2002

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» The process is completed when capitalism takes advantage of the heightened tension in order to create an environment that is ripe for pressing advances by the media, selling its promises of pacification backed up by the instantaneous reconfiguration that the consumption of the commodified template-territories is supposed to provide. An operation that injects into the weakened subjectivity increasingly large doses of hope that the tension can be alleviated, and keeps it alienated from the forces of the world that are demanding to get through.

In the vertigo of this constantly accelerating process, there are fewer and fewer opportunities to get to know the living reality of the world as energy-matter (to "know" in the sense of leaving oneself vulnerable to its resonance); there are fewer and fewer opportunities to escape to this dissociation. It is impossible not to surrender to the constant onslaught of the stimuli; otherwise one will cease to exist and fall into the pit of the trash-subjectivities. Fear has now taken the stage. However, as those close to Negri also tell us, if contemporary capitalism has stimulated invention power in order to live off it like a pimp, at the same time the mobilisation of that force throughout all of social life has created the conditions for a vital force of resistance, a power of variation that is probably without equal in any other period of Western history. Here is the root of a constitutive ambiguity of capitalism, its Achilles' heel. Through the breach of that vulnerability, other scenarios are building momentum, governed by other principles.

What are the strategies of subjectivation that unblock the access to the resonating body, reconnect the power of creation to the power of resistance, and free it of its pimp? To answer that question we need to place ourselves in an area where politics and art are intertwined, where the resistant force of politics and the creative forces of art mutually affect each other, blurring the frontiers between them. I propose we try placing ourselves in that hybrid zone on the side of art contaminated by its proximity to politics in order to try to discern strategies of this kind.

The politics of creation: artistic practices in the present

If we reflect that artistic practice consists in actualising sensations, in making them visible and speakable, in producing cartographies of meaning; and further, if we reflect that sensation is the living presence in the body of the forces of the world's otherness seeking their passage, shattering the current forms of existence, then we can assert that actualising these forces means "socialising the sensations", communicating to a group the new compositions of forces that affect it and make it drift toward new configurations.

To say that the power of invention is not only mobilised, but actively celebrated and intensified throughout the entire social field means that the exercise of creation is no longer confined to as a specific sphere of human activity. This situation brings new problems for art and demands new strategies. Through which strategies are artistic practices carrying out their critical function in the current moment? How are they promoting the reconnection of the powers of creation and resistance, of the aesthetic and political affects?

To simply remain in the ghetto of "art" as the separate sphere to which the power of creation was confined in the earlier regime is to run the risk of keeping it dissociated from the power of resistance, and limiting it to being a source of value, off which its pimp, capital, can make an easy living. It is the risk of being reduced, as an artist, to the function of a supplier of hard drugs in the form of ready-made identities, completely outfitted with their glamour-drenched cartographies of meaning, to be pushed by dealers on the growth-market of subjectivities suffering the syndrome of abstinence from sense, and even from their own silhouettes. Taken to the limit, this position results in the cynicism of certain artists whose creation is oriented by the desire to belong to this glamorised scene, and who offer themselves voluptuously for exploitation by the pimp.



Courtesy of the artists

On the other hand, it's useless to go on singing the same old song about the need to reconnect art and life, in exactly the way this question was treated during the modern period. Because if art and life are still divided, it's no longer because of the deactivation of creation in the broad sweep of social life and its confinement to the artistic ghetto. That situation has already been resolved by capitalism, much more effectively than it ever was by art. If there exists a dissociation — and there obviously does — it has clearly shifted, and at the same time it has become much more subtle and perverse. At issue here is an operation of great complexity that can intervene at different stages in the process of creation, and not only at the end. Its effect at that point is just more obvious, because it coincides with the moment when the dissociation makes itself felt on art's products, reifying them in two ways: either transforming them into "art objects" separated from the vital process whereby the creation was carried out, or treating them as sources of a surplus glamour-value, attached to the logos of businesses and even of cities, like Bilbao, for instance. In this case, the glamour pumps up the logo's seductive power, and thus the business's or the city's capacity to summon up identification and desire for consumption, which increases its commercial success. At present, certain artistic practices seem to be particularly effective in dealing with these problems. Their strategy consists of precise and subtle insertions at certain points where the social structure is unravelling, where tension is pulsating due to the pressure of a new composition of forces seeking passage. It is a mode of insertion mobilised by the desire to expose oneself to the other and to run the risk of such an exposure, instead of opting for the guarantee of a politically correct position that confines the other to a representation and protects subjectivity from any affective contagion. The "work" consists in bringing the forces and the tension they provoke into existence, which entails the connection of the

power of creation to a piece of the world grasped as energy-matter by the resonant body of the artist; and it consists at the same time in activating of the power of resistance. What is invented in this way are "spatio-temporal *dispositifs* of being-together"⁴. The living presence of this embodied attitude in an artistic practice has a power of contamination and propagation in the milieu where it is inserted, directly and indirectly. Mobilised in this milieu like everywhere else, the power of creation, having been allowed to reconnect with the world as energy-matter and to exercise itself in association with the power of resistance, gains an opportunity to free itself of the perverse destiny that strips it of the capacity to invent singular maps that can actualise the mutations of sensation currently underway. The work, strictly speaking, is in this case an event.

What other artistic strategies are confronting the problems that we have observed? What other problems are being raised by the dissociation of resistance and creation within artistic practices? And within other social practices, how does one see a reactivation and intermingling of the political and the aesthetic affects — those essential powers for vital health in any human activity? Finding directions for answering these questions is a task that cannot be performed by any single individual. Such an undertaking depends on the accumulation of infinitesimal experiments throughout the weave of collective life. ◀

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A more complete version of this text, including a section entitled "Policies of Resistance: the Lula phenomenon", can be found in the Zehar section of www.arteleku.net.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Text based upon a conference at *São Paulo S.A. Situação #1 COPAN*, curated by Catherine David (São Paulo, 23-27 november 2002).

2 "Integrated World Capitalism" (IWC) is a term coined by Félix Guattari in the late 1960s, as an alternative to the term "globalisation" which is generic and which serves to hide the fundamentally economic, and more specifically capitalist, sense of the phenomenon of internationalisation in its current form.

3 Cf. Gabriel Tarde by Maurizio Lazzarato.

4 In "Esthétique et politique. Un lien à repenser" ("Estética y política. Un vínculo para replantar"), unpublished seminar directed by Jacques Rancière at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona. MACBA, Barcelona, 13 to 17 May 2002.