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The Precarization of Cultural Producers and the Missing "Good Life"

kpD

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Precarization is not happening for the first time because so-called normal working conditions are changing. There are continuities running through the history of capitalist nation-states. In the past two hundred years, those who have been affected again and again by precarization are the ones positioned as "others" with respect to a hegemonic male, white, national norm.

Precarization is not solely an economic issue. For this reason, we take the question of precarization as an impetus to think about the fundamental constitution of our western societies. Hence our point of departure is precarization as a mode of societization, from which we seek to understand the associated conditions of subjectification in their historicity and current transformation. If we break this down, it means, for example, that precarization has something to do with the experience of a non-functioning identitary ascription/appeal and its associated disambiguations, which nevertheless materialize in subjectification conditions in certain ways. For instance, that being "woman" is not only what one can, should, wants to be – but that a subjectification "as woman" also takes

place at the same time. Various professional, status-related, gendered, sexual and ethnicizing positions, which are socially very contradictory, frequently have to be taken at the same time or one after another.

We propose a perspective of precarization that attempts to address the difficulties associated with accommodating this incompatibility. For it seems that one mode of precarization results specifically from a shortcoming of these practices of identification.

Impossibility of Disambiguation

Taken in this sense, the term may also present an opportunity. Indeed its open-endedness, the way it is impossible for it to define an identitary "we" enables connections to other groups, especially in the context of "Euromayday".

We are in contact with feminist groups such as precarias a la deriva, for example, who carry discussions revolving around care economies or with groups such as the "Frassanito Network" that relates from the perspective of migration. To begin with, "Euromayday" creates a political space, in which different approaches and politics of precarization can be articulated and related to one another. We regard this as an important process of political constitution. "Euromayday" does not stand for a certain specific understanding of precarization. Instead, there are many different groups, collectives and individuals participating, who get involved in the debates and mobilizations.

Traversing Different Fields: Cultural Producers

With the interviews that we conducted with cultural producers in late 2003, we wanted to focus on the relationship between the precarization of the respective circumstances of life and the intractability of cultural and knowledge production, in order to look for the lines capable of collectivity there, which lead out of individualized experience. The thesis of our investigation was that neoliberal appeals do not become wholly submerged in subjectifications, that the desires in the practices of cultural producers do not completely dissolve in the disciplining of flexibilization. We thought that there must be – perhaps initially individual – practices to elude the "economization of life".

We use the term "cultural producers" quite strategically. In this way we do not speak of a certain sector (cultural industry), nor of a surveyable social category (members of the artist social class in Germany, for example), nor of a professional self-understanding. Instead we speak of the practice of traversing different fields: theory production, design, political and cultural self-organization, forms of collaboration, paid and unpaid jobs, informal and formal economies, temporary alliances, project-related working and living.

When we speak of *precarized* cultural producers and investigate the conditions of their existence, we want to pursue the obvious phenomenon of a simultaneity of seemingly contradictory modes of subjectification. On the one hand, there are the increasingly efficacious ideas of freedom and autonomy that function according to the traditional bourgeois logic of sovereignty, and on the other there is self-exploitation in precarious circumstances: in other words, the simultaneity of sovereignty practices and precarious, heterogeneous, fragmenting practices.

Action!

What is important is that with the term cultural producers, we speak – in our investigation and in the film project "Kamera Läuft!" ("Action!", Berlin 2004) – of those people with whom we collaborate for a specific form of political practice in the cultural field, or whose practice we refer to. For the investigation we interviewed fifteen people – including ourselves – in Berlin, who produce cultural products, critical discourses and socio-political fields of action. The selection is based on our respective positioning, concerns and interests.

Our questions were based on the survey action conducted by "Fronte della Gioventù Lavoratrice and Potere Operaio" in early 1967 in Mirafiori, "Fiat is our university", which asked, among other questions, about what people imagined as a "good life" and about organizing.

In the course of the investigation, we found that we did not really get answers to these questions, which actually address the socio-political and collective dimension of precarization. The case was different with questions about individual practices of working and everyday life. We were able to document long descriptions of feeling overwhelmed, of stress, but also of individual strategies of refusal as responses. With a view to a potential politicization of cultural producers, however, we were also interested in collective strategies of refusal and the concomitant desires to improve one's own life, the lives of others, ultimately to change society. Yet the only thing that permeated all the interviews at a more general level was a suffering from a lack of continuity.

We were not so surprised that we hardly received responses to the question of politicization and organization. Nevertheless, what was perplexing was that none of those interviewed could really express what a "good life" would look like, or what would distinguish a life

that would consist not only of a constant appeal from others or from oneself to be, paid or unpaid, productive and creative.

Even in our own horizon of ideas, we hardly found alternative conceptions of life that could counter the existing conditions with something clear and unequivocal.

Yet if work and life increasingly mutually permeate one another, then this means, as one interviewee said, "work seeps into your life". However, it is obvious that there are not enough notions of a "good life" seeping into work, so that it could, in turn, be transformed into something that collectively signifies a "good life".

Atelier Europa

Following our investigation, in the context of the exhibition project "Atelier Europa" we attempted to answer the question of organization by noting that, in part, there are already alliances between different social fields. For this reason, we used the invitation from the Kunstverein Munich to meet in this location, present approaches and exchange different experiences, in order to be able to continue thinking about this together. Thus, instead of describing the field of cultural and creative work as a place where the source of economic innovation could be identified, we invited magazine projects, artists, filmmakers, fashion designers, theater artists and designers from Spain, France, England, Switzerland, Austria and Germany, who have worked in past years on the criticism of neoliberal economicization from the perspective of culture, to reflect on their participation as actors in this discourse.

The desire for other concepts of working and living, new forms of collaboration and knowledge production in interdisciplinary contexts became the starting point and motif for a desired social

change that adheres to the criticism of the conditions of wage work and consumption organized on the basis of the society of control.

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