

All

Power

to the

Copenhagen

Free

University

I'm mad as hell
- and I can't take
it anymore!

Of all the affairs we participate in, with interest or without interest, the groping search for new ways of life is the only aspect still impassioning. The aesthetic disciplines have proved blatantly inadequate in this regard and display the greatest detachment when it comes to the basic questions. But the way forward is not to disband the aesthetic disciplines – the way forward is to demand more from them. In our search for new ways of life the chemistry of unhappy consciousness and surplus energy is still making us establish experimental institutions and still making us reformulate a discourse within which we apply the word ‘aesthetics’. Copenhagen Free University is one such institution / discourse.

Living in a society ruled by the stomach of the ever-expanding middle classes – obsessed with security and order and consensus – the ‘unhappy consciousness’ tends to implode in the suicidal feeling of there being no exit. With a tradition of truce and consensus politics in Danish society the aesthetic disciplines have been predominately playing along the lines of the state in the reproduction of cultural values. The state explicitly states that cultural politics have nothing to do with social politics, and is convinced of the ‘single’ common good that can come from the integration of the aesthetic disciplines in the nation’s general production of value. Both in terms of cultural and monetarian capital, that is. Synchronously the state is encouraging all, including the cultural producers, to be critical, to behave with social responsibility and, in general, expects people to express themselves and promote individualised subjectivity. This strategic double bind is the technology of power – a technology for creating and controlling the voices present in society. Conflicts are explained as misunderstandings and mediated through the panacea of ‘dialogue’. Using words such as Communism, Class Struggle and Revolution in a Danish context will qualify you for a free consultation with a psychiatrist.

Copenhagen Free University is one voice in a mumble of voices. We are not two or three individuals, we are an institution drifting through various social relations, in the process of being produced and producing. We are the people in the house. This position establishes an ever-changing formation characterised by many contexts, platforms, voices, actions, but also by inactivity, refusal, evacuation, withdrawal, exodus. According to the Situationist Asger Jorn, subjectivity is a point of view inside matter, “a sphere of interest”, and not necessarily that which is equateable with the individualised ego. Our subjectivity (what is said and what is done) rises from the material conditions of our everyday lives and subtracts from the mediated rationale of the public sphere. In the public sphere any arguments are caught up in and filtered through the rationale of the individualised citizen. What if you do not feel like a sensible citizen? Copenhagen Free University is “a sphere of interest” arising from the material life we experience and will always already be politicised before any citizenship. Our scope is both local and global, looking for fellow travellers around the corner and around the world.

Our point of departure is now and here: The circulation in and the consequences of the present day political knowledge economy and the desires distributed, accumulated, redirected or blocked in the flows and networks of that landscape. The fact that higher education is no longer the exclusive domain of the bourgeoisie and its children and that the workforce of today is generally highly skilled has brought us ‘mass intellectuality’. The mass intellectuality and today’s immaterial mode of production that demands a workforce that is able to work in an environment producing abstract products characterised by knowledge and subjectivity, has, in particular, caught our interest. Not that we would like a job, but we recognise that this development is influencing our emotional lives.

Based on assembly lines and machinery, the Fordist mode of production demanded a manual effort from the worker and did not invade the nervous system in any way other than through boredom. In the western world this mode of production has been left behind. Work is knowledge and the centre of productivity has moved inside the body of the worker, colonising not only the muscles, but the nervous system as well. Production increasingly involves, at various levels, an ability to make decisions among different alternatives giving a degree of responsibility through this decision making. To be productive in the knowledge economy, the worker is expected to become an active subject: one has to express oneself, one has to speak, communicate, cooperate etc. The mode of production is becoming immaterial and is related to processes of communication which require that the worker is critical and expresses subjectivity. It comes as no surprise that the ethos of the state regarding citizens has become almost identical with the ethos of the capitalist production regarding the worker. The present day political knowledge economy is taking shape.

When we turn our attention to the mode of aesthetic production we have to recognise that the artist is becoming the role model worker of the knowledge economy. The artist is traditionally investing 'the soul' in the work, which is exactly the qualifications modern management is looking for when looking for a new employee. The entrepreneurship, self-employed independence and the sacred individuality of artists are the dream qualifications of the knowledge worker of tomorrow: An unorganised, highly skilled individual with no solidarity selling his/her living labour as a day-labourer. The heroic avant-garde artist of yesterday will become the scab of tomorrow. We see it around us and are doing it ourselves, with interest or without interest.

Another aspect is the fact that much aesthetic production today is instrumental in the reproduction of the ideology of the knowledge economy. This is happening often when artists are engaging in new technology, when artists are engaging in social regeneration, when artists are making art in public space, in general when artists are engaged in good and edifying causes. Artists are, with intent or without intent, affirming the current hegemony: spearheading new market

standards or sweeping up where the state and capital are missing out. Copenhagen Free University is setting out to develop other strategies; strategies of withdrawal and contestation. 'Withdrawal' to indicate an activity not based on direct opposition, but on a refusal of power, a refusal of obedience. 'Contestation' to indicate an activity engaged in exposing the antagonisms, which, under the surface, characterise society and allow them to crystallise.

Copenhagen Free University was established to explore and intensify the forms of knowledge and subjectivity that we see withdrawing from or being excluded from the increasingly narrow-minded circulation of the knowledge economy. Our primary aim was not to throw sand in the machinery, but to valorise the stammer, the poetry, the disgust, the schizophrenia etc. For that purpose we needed a university. Even without any permanent internal structure the Copenhagen Free University is the body, which guarantees our valorisations.

It seems that the knowledge economy is working with an understanding of the aesthetic disciplines solely as a product within a superstructure. When a city has been planned, a building built, a product developed, it is then that artists are called for. This understanding is the currency among the state, art institutions, and many of the artists. Art is a social practice, but is it solely a social construction to the good of public health? We intend to reconnect discussions of aesthetics to the base. Mass intellectuality and globalisation offer a potential to reintroduce avant-garde strategy not based on the universality of the heroic avant-garde, but unfolding as collective and polymorphous creative forces in the production of social relations. Aesthetics beyond disciplines. Aesthetics as a fact of life.

-The Committee of 15th July, 2001/Henriette Heise & Jakob Jakobsen

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