



Contempt, consensus and acclamation in post-fordist society

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Abstract

In classical liberal thought the driver of bourgeois society is envy, functioning as an emotional boost for production. But what happens to those who cannot 'put their envy to production'? Liberal and neo-liberal rhetoric about social exclusion considers this the result of the unproductive subject. This 'lazy' subject, not utilizing the supposedly emancipatory feature of envy, becomes the scapegoat. Consider the so-called media mud-slinging machine of recent years, through which contempt is spreading on a large scale. It can be considered as a sort of media training that is accompanied by the mechanisms of *acclamation* and *consensus*. It works as a way to reorganize the structure of the apparatuses by educating subjects to public contempt and social exclusion. The aim of this contribution is to offer a perspective on the potentiality of affect or affectus as a non-judgmental and non-despising mechanism of subjectivation.

Keywords

Subjectivation - Post-Fordism - Sad passions - Judgment

Desire and production

The basic assumption of this paper is that desire is not an acquisition of an object that it lacks but a process of production which produces the real. According to Deleuze and Guattari:

If desire produces, its product is real. If desire is productive, it can be productive only in the real world and can produce only reality. [...] There is no particular form of existence that can be labeled 'psychic reality' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 28).

According to Deleuze and Guattari, desire is a machine which produces reality, objects, flows, bodies. For desire is productive of reality, there is not a separated form of existence that can be labeled 'psychic reality', therefore desire fits in a broader chain

of production which also creates in turn institutions and processes of capitalistic valorization. Due to the social feature of desire, its repression has negative effects on subjects and is directly related to the social oppression. Deleuze investigated desire in all its facets, especially dealing with modern philosophy. As well known, one of his privileged authors has been Spinoza. What can we deduce from the connection between emotions and production of reality from Spinoza? Spinoza, in *Ethics* III, stated that the fundamental emotion is desire to which one can link two secondary emotions i.e. joy (which brings a greater perfection) and pain (which brings a minor perfection). Love and hate are joy and pain combined with the idea of their external causes. Who loves tends to keep and maintain the loved thing and who hates tends to remove and destroy the hated thing. The negative emotions are bearer of separation in reality. As one can deduce from *Ethics*, a sad passion produces sadness and joy produces the ethical life. In this perspective, emotions play a central role in the production of reality, but it is necessary to make a distinction between sad passions and joy. What is the element that transforms the emotions making them sad? Deleuze indicates that judgment makes a passion sad, in the wake of Nietzsche and Artaud (Deleuze 1997). Judgment pretends to represent the truth about something through an image which would be declared as fixed but it succumbs as well to our impermanent beliefs, passions and imagination. The negative judgment feeds contempt. Contempt is a relational mechanism that works within what I call 'judgmental subjectivity' (Landolfi 2016) as a typical mode of functioning of power in Western neoliberalism, in which the role of the sovereign judge is played not by the traditional sovereign but by *omnes et singulatim*, at micro level. Judgmental mentality, in my reading, is the 'governmentality' which produces economic subjectivations. Since contempt produces the rejection and expulsion, the despised, in order to be accepted again, must educate him/herself with a 'work of valorization' on him/herself so to attract the gaze of others. The despised must resort to strong feelings and motivations to model himself and become an object of value in society, an accepted product. It is at this point that the search for consensus puts in motion the process of subjectivation and auto-subjectivation of the despised in a discriminative chain of production of value and non-value regulated by the judgment and subsumed in economic processes. I would argue that the mechanism of production of value makes use of sad passions such as contempt – and the search for consensus and acclamation – in contemporary subjectivity in order to recruit desire: thus in post-Fordism, contempt has not only a moral function but also an economic function because it contributes to the production of value on desiring level. The production of value is no longer based only on the production of the objects but goes hand in hand with the production of such subjectivities which fit well into the market. What role do the different levels of subjectivity play in post-Fordist society? We are dealing with a double layer: on the

one hand the question of subjectivity and psyche (affective and cognitive) related to material processes of production of reality; and on the other hand the definition of contemporary society in the context of the 'post', which signals that something has changed with respect to the previous mode of production, namely Fordism. Although the shifting from Fordism and post-Fordism (Vercellone 2006) seems to be a problematic object for a clear definition, we at least could say that whereas in Fordist society it was difficult to reconcile the dimensions of psyche and production, today, with the transformation of capitalist production, the immaterial has obtained a central role. This transformation of capitalist production makes it even more true the quotation mentioned above about desire, i.e. that there is not a separate reality that is called psychic reality. Psychic life is generated by the social operation of power (Butler 1997) and consciousness is the way in which power is anchored in subjectivity. The psyche is a social investment and is unthinkable as something separate because it is internal to the production processes of subjectivity stimulated by the post-Fordism. In Fordist society, subjects are organized in a disciplined segment. As Deleuze and Guattari describe segmentarity (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, Deleuze and Guattari 2007) life is drawn into an increasingly rigid segmentarity that overcodes everything that occurs: family-profession; job-holiday; family-school-army-factory-retirement. It is the description of people as elements of an aggregate, of disciplined Fordist-population, organized in space and time inside the predetermined schemes of life-work time, which in turn determines subjectivity. Today, by contrast, we are dealing with a mode of production in which the organization of labor force is no longer segmented in the workplace because information and communication do not require the same space-time population management. More centrality has been achieved by the level of motivations, beliefs and desires of people, rather than the discipline of groups, but those emotional factors are not meant as the hidden substance of individuals. Emotions are not considered as psychological states but as social and cultural practices (Ahmed 2004). Following Durkheim (1966), Ahmed offers a model of sociality of emotion and affirms that the individual consciousness is no longer the origin of feeling: emotion is what holds or binds the social body together. The process of production uses knowledge, information, culture and social relations as its 'primary matter' (Virno 2001). We are constantly producing value, even when we chat on social networks, because we are providing information about ourselves that is useful to the market. An empirical evidence can be represented by the behavior of people in the Internet: the actions of users on social platforms like Facebook or YouTube are not naive pastimes for a spontaneous socialization but are finalized to the valorization of the self, i.e. to the production of value (or a valuable subject) in the human resources frame. The socials are extraordinary and huge factories of the dematerialized economy based on informations. The online production of speeches on the self and on the

others, and the compulsive traduction of states in images, generates a demarcation line between the cool subject with many followers, and the despised, clearly evoking a model for social construction of contempt and its economic consequences (Landolfi 2016). According to Hamann, it is no longer true, as Marx once claimed, that the worker «is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home» (Hamann 2009, 39). Within this formerly public realm we now find that private interests or public/private amalgams have gained greater control and influence. In major urban areas Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) have appropriated many traditional Reality television, social networking sites, personal webcams and confessional blogging, which have all contributed to expose the private realm in unforeseen ways. For this reason, Kenneth McKenzie Wark argues in *The Spectacle of Disintegration* (McKenzie Wark 2013) that we should leave the concept of biopower behind and the related frame of disciplined society produced by regulatory mechanisms for managing people as a large group. In Fordism, subjects were fostered by power, which provided the supply of labor force, taking care of its health and needs, and making the labor force available to the market. Today we have exceeded the dimension of biopower, since power does not feed its subjects any longer. Because processes are automated, the new economy requires a different kind of labor force. Changes in technology, have led to a reorganization of capital which in turn has resulted in a different relationship with subjectivity in economic production, characterized by the real subsumption both of *bios* and *zoe* in the production of value (Cooper 2014, Braidotti 2008). We should consider, then, the production value at the level of bodies and subjectivity. Even subjectivity is a product, we think of the ‘human capital’, and ‘human resources’. Contempt, then, separating the good from the bad human capital, is a selective mechanism to enhance the productive subject. The production of value through the exploitation of the different levels of subjectivity – what one knows, feels, shares and thinks – seems to be at the core of capitalist mechanism of valorization. We can remind Kafka’s statement:

Capitalism is a system of relationships, which go from inside to out, from outside to in, from above to below, and from below to above. Everything is relative, everything is in chains. Capitalism is a condition both of the world and of the soul (Janouch 1971, 151-2).

The ‘soul’ as the parameter of a new kind of subjectivity within a chain of machine-body-mind production and consumption has been conceptualized as ‘soul at work’. To speak of a soul at work is to move the center of gravity in contemporary debates about

cognitive capitalism (Moulier Boutang 2012): as a matter of fact, Jason Smith, in the Preface to *Soul at work* states:

The soul is not simply the seat of intellectual operations, but the affective and libidinal forces that weaves together a world: attentiveness, the ability to address, care for and appeal to others. The contemporary subject of cognitive capitalism [...] is not simply a producer of knowledge and a manager of symbols. Capitalism is the mobilization of a pathos and the organization of a mood; its subject, a field of desire, a point of inflexion for an impersonal affect that circulates like a rumor (Berardi 2009, 9-10).

Where the factory produced alienation, today the emotional involvement and participation of the stakeholders in capital is put into production like a social generalized factory. Labor and desire are tied together. Souls are fed to the work, just as their imaginations are colonized, because desire is the realm in which production takes hold. The economic agents reach out directly to the subjects, offering something that is more than an object: it is a horizon of pleasure. Hence we end up with emotional, psychological and passionate subjects within a production system in which are no longer filtered and/or protected by representative organizations of mediation (parties, unions and so on); instead we face a direct and immediate relationship between the emotions of the people and the production value. Finance works through trust and agreement, intangible factors that converge on important choices on the basis of belief that you have with respect to the success or failure of a stock exchange listing. The Internet, television and other digital information systems, moreover, contribute to produce value by *consensus*. We evaluate the success of individuals (Marwick 2013) and/or their business on the basis of 'shares' or numbers of 'likes' which would represent a status of consensus and social acceptance. Jim McGuigan (2014, 223-224) proposes a critical analysis about the social pressure to imitate the 'cool subject' that coincides with the ideal typification of the neoliberal self. The emergent characteristics of the ideal type accentuate various aspects of personal conduct and mundane existence for illustrative and analytical purposes. Leading celebrities, most notably high-tech entrepreneurs, for instance, operate in the popular imagination as models of achievement for the aspiring young. They are seldom emulated in real life, however, even unrealistically so. Still, their famed lifestyles and heavily publicised opinions provide guidelines to appropriate conduct in a ruthlessly competitive and unequal world. It is probably most evident in financial occupations, particularly so in what has come to be seen as an arcane and virtually sacred – or, at least, priestly – practice of stock-broking but also in the profanely popular work of the Devil, leisure-time gambling, which has become such a normalised feature of everyday

life. Neoliberal selfhood is especially discernible as well in the lifestyles, aspirations and frustrations of entrants to the 'creative industries'. Desire for full acceptance and inclusion, when it is flattened on a binary code of inclusion/exclusion regulated by diktat and status symbols then it is ratified and formalized through formulas of acclamation. It is not 'simply' a psychological issue but a matter of economics (and law).

Consensus, acclamation and line of flight

Giorgio Agamben wrote a genealogy of acclamation in *The Kingdom and the Glory*. The application of the paradigm of acclamation as set out by Agamben to the search of consensus and inclusion can help us understand how acclamation creates value through uncritical and emotional adhesion to phenomena that are proposed and managed by power apparatuses in post-Fordist economy. Agamben asks:

Why does power need glory? If it is essentially force and capacity for action and government, why does it assume the rigid, cumbersome and 'glorious' form of ceremonies, acclamations and protocols? What is the relation between economy and glory? (Agamben 2011, 169).

The ultimate structure of the governmental machine of the West in the relation between *oikonomia* and glory is investigated by Agamben in its theological dimension through the analysis of doxologies and liturgical acclamations, of ministries and angelical hymns, thus distancing himself from the theories about the sovereignty and the rule of law or the communicative procedures that regulate the formation of public opinion and political will. Agamben stresses the importance of the media in modern democracies, not only because they enable the control and governance of public opinion, but also and above all because they manage and dispense glory. Contemporary democracies are developed into the society of the spectacle in which power in its glorious aspect becomes indiscernible from *oikonomia* and government. Contemporary democracies and their government by consent have the specific task to completely integrate glory with *oikonomia* in the acclamative form of consensus (cum+sensus, to feel together). With his genealogy of acclamation, Agamben offers us a useful tool for understanding the mechanism of acclamation and consensus in post-Fordist society and its effect on the financial system. It is hard for us to be aware of the mechanism of consensus: response and management are very complicated at this level, since each of us is already involved well before we are able to draw up any strategy of autonomy and liberation. Acclamation is an exaltation of individuality framed by success and power which is not filtered by regulatory institutions but passes

only through the fame and admiration that one receives from others, through the consensus which in turn is often tied to a circle of sad passions as envy and contempt. Envy has been discussed in depth by sociologist Helmut Schoeck (1987) who wanted to demonstrate its positivity: envy has been considered as the cohesive element of groups and the driver of bourgeois society, functioning as an emotional boost for production. In this perspective, at the same time, envy is an emotion that allows imitation and differentiation as necessary factors for the production-consumption chain in capitalism. The 'positive' interpretation of envy poses the risk of canceling its effects on subjects and on society in general, namely the contempt as production of the 'other', i.e. the despised. It is very difficult to separate analytically the emotions due to their multifarious interactions. We can say that sad passions are often related to power (Rozin, Lowery, Imada and Haidt 1999) and that the multiplication of the wealth has been meant as derived from negative emotions (Mandeville 1989). Probably, we could also say that envy and contempt allow the conservation of social rules and laws, because the exclusion of those who are non-identifiable as part of a social group. But what happens today to those who cannot 'put their envy to production'? Contemporary rhetoric about social exclusion considers this the result of the unproductive subject. This *lazy* subject, not utilizing the supposedly emancipatory feature of envy, becomes the scapegoat, the bad (i.e. jobless and poor, unfashionable), deserving derision and contempt. Consider the so-called media mud-slinging machine of recent years, through which contempt is spreading on a large scale. It has an important political, but also economic function, because it is a way to reorganize the structure of power by leapfrogging every mediation and rule, axing many heads and replacing them with others, thus allowing the advance of executioners and populist gestures and dismantling the public ethic-political discourse on economy. The media mechanism of acclamation is aimed at celebrating the 'winners' by emotional consensus: one can consider it as a sort of "school of subjectivation", i.e. an exercise of contempt over the others which produces homologated subjects who work for social exclusion. Those subjects who are the object of contempt, often, instead of criticizing the apparatus, embrace the oppression and even desire it, so as to imitate the executioner, becoming like him in the exploitation mechanisms, thus perpetuating the post-Fordist rhetoric of self-empowerment (Rose 1999 and 2000) which requires a spectacularized, renewed and re-evaluated new self: the 'cool subject', as the only way to be socially accepted. Usefully, we can recall that success as exaltation of individuality, according to Pier Paolo Pasolini (1971), is only the other face of *martyrium*. Self-valorized subjects, who search for recognition and acclamation through consumption and media extra-exposition, show layers of internalized oppression and contempt. Deleuze and Guattari conceive of desire for the acquisition of an object as a symptom of repression that forces subjects in one direction,

channeling the potential of new energy away from new production processes of desiring. Repression is an experience in which the paranoid desire is forced to control and manage itself, and to which would correspond the parallel refusal of the scapegoat as the product of such labor. In case of repression, desiring machines become logically organized as bodies and institutions in capitalism, so that experimentation of desiring production is limited to a singular object, a moralized-valORIZED object (commodified souls). Consequently, because of the continuum between desire, sexuality and production, contempt affects these three levels of subjectivity all at once. Sexuality is a wave that faces the categorizations and the social judgments about what is despicable and what is not, what is "natural" or presumed natural and what is not. On this level as well, contempt plays a not so obvious role; think of masochism (Deleuze 1989), for example, in which judgment on emotions and contempt may become a desiring tool. Deleuze and Guattari define the masochist body as poorly understood in terms of pain. According to them, it is wrong to say that the masochist is looking for pain, as well as it is wrong to say that he is looking for pleasure in a particularly suspensive or roundabout way (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). We can consider, for instance, Rousseau's erotic experience: Rousseau in *The Confessions* (Rousseau 1953) admits that the punishment and the humiliation he received in his childhood increased his affection for the person who had inflicted them on him. In this frame, Rousseau's desire is an autonomous process of production which works positively in freeing him from the common sense about dynamics of judgment and contempt against the despised. Desire, thus, acts independently of social and economic expectations: it is a strength for the production on new outcomes. When the repressive setting is not assumed as the dominant mode of production of desire, desire is experimental, but also indiscriminate: it produces in every way possible and in any material available. Deleuze and Guattari explain that this kind of joy is fundamentally different from pleasure. They argue that the suffering of Rousseau was the unpleasant experience he had to undergo, not to achieve pleasure, but to dissolve the "pseudobond" between desire and pleasure (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 155). Rousseau productively actualizes the repression and threat of the corporal punishment, reversing the humiliation and its effects, when he declares that he "merited corrections" instead of "received or suffered" the punishments that were inflicted on him (Rousseau 1953, 21-25). Rousseau explores feelings, emotions and experiences in a different direction than the social schemes, by using the circle of victim-victimizer for the intensification of his desires rather than the limitation of them. Would this model represent a subtraction from the capitalist valorization? This reasoning is controversial and it offers a starting point for reflection on the involvement of passions in the dynamics of repression, by opening up areas of complexity in order to find ways of re-appropriating desire's mechanism of production that today is absorbed by processes of exclusion, contempt

and guilt that we all internalize. The humiliation of Rousseau that stemmed from a negative and despising judgment over his behavior, instead of stimulating exploitation and unsupporting acts of struggle against all, determined his tastes, desires and passions in a direction diametrically opposed to the one in which they should 'normally' have developed by adopting the logic of contempt (Kaufman and Heller 1998, 198). Rousseau reacted to humiliation with exposition of the self instead of accepting the exclusion through a sort of comicality and anticonformism: Gilles Deleuze, in his interpretation (Deleuze 1980), highlights Rousseau's love for the moral, his desire of writing a book on the sensitive moral ('la morale sensitive'), and his "method" in which «we will understand the passing of time, and we will finally desire the future, rather than be enamored of the past» and the ways one might misconstrue Rousseau is «by ignoring his power and his comic genius, from which his work draws most of its anticonformist efficiency» (Deleuze 2002, 73). The mechanism whereby we become the victims of our sad passions is far from marginal in the post-Fordist economy in which the self-valorisation via signs and symbols of acclamation is the prerequisite for well-acceptance in society and in the apparatuses of power. Maybe we are facing a sort of primitive accumulation on the subjective level. The 'product' is something material even though it is not an object but has a social feature and is linked to the need to overturn suffered contempt and to despise the other. The judgment as a form of definitive truth based on a fixed image of 'cool subject' ties us in a condition which restricts our desiring production and makes us subject to the new chain of post-Fordist enhancement. Post-Fordism does not provide anymore the discipline of the people as a group but the inner discipline, the self-education, the 'long life learning', which means that, basically, we accept the idea that our life is an exercise of approximation to an internalized 'model' of subject. The effects of judgment would be: the increasing of the value of one who follows the model of acclaimed subject; the exclusion and disempowerment of the despised subject. This is a scheme in which we do not have many options and we are forced to choose whether to stay on the side of the oppressed or the envious, the despised or the executioner, in favor of the economic exploitation or the unproductive subject excluded from society, the moral active subject or the lazy one. The binary system we have seen in the disciplinary society seems to recur on a psychic level as a form of exploitation of the plan of the desire in the post-Fordism that creates a plan of exclusion through the judgment and contempt which is an useful training in the self-modeling for recruitment. As there are no real criteria, the selection is subject to envy and contempt. The selection acclamation-based is just a tool that legitimizes the production of the scapegoat. This, however, happens already at the individual as a self-selection: each judge himself on the basis of the model of the 'cool subject' and acts in response and/or adapting to it.

Conclusions

The oppression of desire occurs in liberal enunciations about the free self-modeling realized in the post-Fordist society, in which the basic dynamic of judgment and contempt is hidden but it is imposed through the acclamation as vehicle for inclusion/exclusion of subjects in society. Judgment predicates conformity to a given order, a sort of 'sacrificial pyramid of power'. Non judgmental emotions such as Rousseau's affects would configure a space of multiplicity and action upon which judgmental activity do not take place through a refusal over the unpredictable desires. The post-Fordist production system encourages the financial self-promotions that feed on individualism and self-exposition disconnected from joyful and liberating assemblages. This way, subjectivity plays a resentful role that builds horizons of exaltation (a new way of creating value) and contempt. Acclamation and contempt are factors of inclusion and exclusion of contemporary subjectivity; they are simultaneously the commodity of exchange and source of value. Output from the mechanism of contempt (which tends to separate what is true worth from what is not through an appeal to consensus, based on disempowering drives) qualifies, in the wake of Spinozist and Deleuzian thought, an investigation of affective states. The affective states, such as strengthening of joy, go beyond judgment, and their operation is no longer mediated by a formal process, but is directly lived in the cleft between the misunderstanding of approval in the acclamatory exaltation of successful people and contempt as ending up without the possibility of offering a *Gegenwort*. The transitive nature of affection (Deleuze 1988) involves a transformation of subjectivity and its capacity to create an ethical world. It can drive the production of connections and thus increase the power of action. In the post-Fordist system, however, sadness is the dominant feeling. The accepted dominant drive is the acquisition of a prestigious role to the humiliation of others, which results in the creation of oppressive and destructive patterns of behavior. The joy of intensive production occurs in affective, i.e., non-representative, relations. These are transitive connections in which the obsessions of identity dissolve in potential landscapes. The body without strata-judgment as principle of organization, can set the limits to the power that reduces the production (*potestas versus potentia*) by a model over the differences. This model usually takes the form of a resentful, contemptuous, white, male, capitalist accumulator. Affections are the status of a body and mind caused by a modification. For Spinoza the new state may be worse or better than the previous state, or it may be an increase or a reduction of the power to act. Affects are images in motion while judgment and contempt fix the images limiting the possibility of such modification. Affect includes the potentiation or the depotentiation of the power to act both in the mind and in the body. The affect thus includes the transformation of the image and contains the power to act. The passions have an important role not only in the wellbeing of individuals, but also in

economic output. Financial economy is based on transactions that function without institutional mediation and through relational contacts in which desire is not shared but accumulated. *Affectus* could have the power to create a crisis of capitalism. The weakening of intensity of the positive is due to the negative effect of judgment which are sad passions. Focusing attention on the positive relationship can be a way to sabotage the system that produces alienation and contempt. Deleuze's philosophy helps us to think how to mobilize the affective flows. Also, describing Deleuze and Guattari's position on subjectivity and personal accountability, Brian Massumi writes:

A human subject in the broad sense is a superindividual composed of a multitude of subindividuals comparable to muck and sedimentary rock, but doubled by surplus-value layers of larval and fledgling selves [...] In other words, there is no self-sufficient agency that can qualify as intentional. There are varying degrees of choice at successive threshold states. The "will" to change or to stay the same is not an act of determination on the part of a unified subject in simple response to self-reflection or an internal impulse. It is a state of self-organized indeterminacy in response to complex causal constraints. It constitutes a real degree of freedom, but the choice belongs to the overall dissipative system with its plurality of selves, and not to the person; it is objectively co-caused at the crossroads of chance and determinacy (Massumi 1992, 81).

A dissipative horizon can include the affective actualization of feelings, turning them into a non-judgmental frame, hence transforming them into a productive force for action. This discourse is related to masochistic actualization of contempt and pleasure as a desiring means for escaping the inevitability of economic oppression.

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