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The economy of creativity and the inhabitant

Abstract

Much of the contemporary economy is legitimized by invoking concepts whose recent genealogy is to be found in 20th-century arts and aesthetics. "Creativity" plays a prominent role: a dispositif *producing a society of singularities searching for the ever-new (Reckwitz), or a Web 2.0 "vector" to lead them toward and beyond* Kunstkommunismus *(Kaufmann), in a "post-capitalist" transition (Mason).*

The paper criticizes some effects of this "aestheticization" (Benjamin) on the economy, on habits ("perfectionism") and on certain arts, and suggests the need to deeply rethink creativity. Inhabiting is the key notion here. While sharing many aspects of Reckwitz's analysis, the paper criticizes his identification of aesthetics and aestheticization, his use of the genealogical method and his conclusion about the irreversibility of this individualistic singularity. The paper indicates a different genealogy of singularity and the existence of Western forms of life, as well as aesthetic experiences and artistic "creativities", in which singularity implies shared inhabiting.

Keywords
Aestheticization, Guilt, Inhabiting

1. *The "aura" of the new and of "creativity"*

Criticisms of Adorno's concept of "cultural industry" have been advanced for quite some time by musicologists and philosophers. However, nowadays the expression "cultural industry" carries a positive meaning, above all thanks to a great transformation in the economy, where the "cultural and creative industries" are claimed to play a strategic role (European Commission 2010). *Cultural industries* operate "irrespective of the commercial value they may have", while *Creative industries*

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Use culture as an input and have a cultural dimension, although their outputs are mainly functional. They include architecture and design, which integrate creative elements into wider processes, as well as subsectors such as graphic design, fashion design or advertising… tourism and the new technologies sector.

Marshall McLuhan reminds us that, when something works "functionally" (in this context: in an economically successful way), its media feed back into the content and the media of the "input". One effect on private and public exhibitions – always under fire from the art market – is the confusion of roles between artistic direction and management, in the name of "curatorship" and communication. Another result is the making of "creative clusters" or "districts", "creative cities", and "city marketing". This paper does not deal with the individual evaluation of any true or false "best practice". Its topic concerns a general condition of all these phenomena: a certain "aura" that hovers around this economy, expanding into ordinary life in many ways which, in turn, feed that aura.

1.1. *The aesthetic legitimation of the economy*
Economic reasons are invoked for this pursuit of innovation:

For Europe and other parts of the world, the rapid roll-out of new technologies and increased globalization has meant a striking shift away from traditional manufacturing towards services and innovation. Factory floors are progressively being replaced by creative communities whose raw material is their ability to imagine, create and innovate.

But the legitimization of the strategy does not take place only thanks to economic laws and moral, social or political reasons, as was for the case with Adam Smith or John M. Keynes. The eloquence of these reasons has been overtaken by a goal, which people can and must pursue as an inalienable quality of existence: "In this new digital economy, immaterial value increasingly determines material value, as consumers are looking for new and enriching 'experiences'. The ability to create social experiences and networking is now a factor of competitiveness".

In the course of modern Western culture, the center of gravity of existence has slowly shifted to the first person. Also for the common way of thinking, personal "experience" has become the yardstick for measuring the quality of one's life: having or not having "experiences"

is equivalent to having a life worth living or not. Walter Benjamin emphasized the modern lack of shared experiences linked to traditions and the way in which a culture and philosophy of *Erlebnis* sought to compensate for this lack (Benjamin 1991d and 1991e). The fact that in the *Green paper* the word "experiences" is in quotation marks indicates its transposition into a foreign language. Now its use describes the desire of "consumers": indeed, it prescribes it. "Experiential", "emotional" or even "existential" marketing complete the prescription (see Pine, Gilmore 1999, Kotler *et al.* 2010, Gnasso, Iabichino 2014). They are part of a permanent economic-sentimental education that replaces rational (according to Max Weber) capitalist calculation with a *dispostif* of affective involvement (Illouz 2007, Reckwitz 2017a: 89, 201 ff., Metelmannn, Beyes 2012).

"Experience" (*Erfahrung*) is the source for "art", as for example Benjamin, Heidegger in *Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* and Dewey in *Art as experience* say. This new economy flatters the consumer through the seduction of a word that combines a possible personal "passion" with the desire to express oneself: "creativity". "The main assumption here is that creativity is not exclusively an innate gift. Everyone is creative in some way or another, and can learn to use his/her creative potential". You feel like an artist.

At the beginning of this century, someone operating in the fashion industry could observe this transformation at work in a country at the forefront of these policies, and of the dismantling of welfare: the United Kingdom. A. McRobbie wrote *Everyone is creative. Artists as pioneers of the new economy?* (McRobbie 2001, see also Osborne 2003).

Sociality is not forgotten, on the contrary it seems to balance narcissism: "Creative communities whose raw material is their ability to imagine, create and innovate… Art and culture have a unique capacity to create green jobs, raise awareness, challenge social habits and promote behavioral shifts in our societies, including our general attitude to nature".

Who could disagree with this goal? Precisely for this reason, some questions are unavoidable:
- how is this all a necessary result of "creative industries"?
- To whom do these indications speak? Who are the actors involved? One scholar, in the footsteps of Karl Polanyi, has argued that the great economic transformations of the last two centuries – from the very existence of the modern market to Silicon Valley – have been designed and made possible above all thanks to state decisions (Mazzucato

2013) and investments (the right words to use here would be "invention" and "planning" rather than "creativity"), while the policies we are talking about are essentially directed at private industries, fostering the creation of clusters, and, indirectly, to individual consumers, who are recruited as productive economical agents.

- What does "creativity" mean in this context? Are there other possible meanings?

2. Aestheticization[2]

2.1. *Web 2.0 post* Kunstkommunimus*? Postcapitalism*?

The availability on the Internet of immense archives of texts, images and music, and of software for their production, encourages people to move from consumption to production. While in the "society of spectacle" the *social being* was still modeled on the spectator in front of the actor (*star*, *étoile*, *vedette*), now it is modeled on the performer. The "consumption" of images, even in its "omnivorous" form (Peterson, Rossmann 2007), has gone beyond the frame that divided audience and performance.

The idea of breaking down the barrier between consumption and production is not new. It was theorized and exemplified by some artistic avant-gardes, from Vertov's cinema in the 1930s to theater, dance and musical improvisation between the 1950s and 1970s. This appropriation of avant-garde ideas by the new economy (on which relevant studies have already been published: Boltanski, Chiapello 2005, Reckwitz 2017a, Lipovetsky, Serroy 2013) has been seen, by one scholar, as a promising near future that will eliminate all aestheticizetion from society, because there will no longer be any separation between art and life:

With the delay of just few decades, the necessary technological conditions have finally arrived for a deaestheticization in line with these avant-garde conceptions […]. Now, all of these dreams may be possible, are possible, and what is possible can be realized: we call it creativity… It can also be understood as a vector towards the central myth of the avant-garde to which it owes its myth-

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[2] The concept of aestheticization is due to Benjamin 2012, in the context of the "aestheticization of politics". An application of his concept of aestheticization to economy is by Böhme 1995-2013: 43 ff., Reckwitz 2017a, Goldoni 2013 and 2015.

ical *aura*, as should be the case with myths: the aura of the utopian engage-ment for *Kunstkommunismus*, i.e. "man-made communism" or "communism in art". Yet, thanks to Web 2.0 we have arrived at precisely this horizon. We live within it and is no longer simply a horizon. (Kaufmann 2018: 118)

a) Does Web 2.0 really create a symmetry between providers and users? What about the availability of data? Will there be an immanent tendency of the Web toward the democratization of information? Or is the Internet used also by power groups that do not communicate their data, but use them to influence opinions and policies (see Cambridge Analytica), or even by national banking systems (see the announced "Libra" project)?

b) Web 2.0 post-communist creativity presupposes a widespread automation that should eliminate the division of labor.

One scholar has claimed that we already live in a "post-capitalist" economy (Mason 2016) which promises a happy transition: strenuous jobs will be automated; the development and sharing of digital skills will bring lower profits in many economic sectors to the point that they will no longer be profitable for capitalism, while other activities, of greater cultural and social relevance, will be managed outside financial circuits.

c) Could automation and digitalization replace – throughout the world, including the West (!) – types of work different from those traditionally associated with industrial production, but which require other traditional uses of time, skills, and the body? I am thinking here of fields such as education, caring for people, and the care and maintenance of residential areas and the environment, but also possibly agriculture and many other professions that require a physical presence. If substitution is not always possible, or even desirable, the point is to avoid attributing the notion of "creativity" – which is so ideologically charged with "immaterial value" – only to certain types of activity, thus maintaining the social preeminence and "aura" of intellectual activities *vis-à-vis* manual ones, of "art" *vis-à-vis* handcrafts, of the new *vis-à-vis* the old.

As long as this aura remains, an aestheticization of the economy remains.

2.2. *New hierarchies and… lapses in "taste"*

A "creative class" distinguishes and separates itself from the rest of society in terms of relationships, places, and lifestyles. Creative cities

or areas are theorized, designed, and realized, wherever possible. One scholar who advocates collective creativity (co-creation) warns:

In its search for eventfulness, co-creation frequently creates new asymmetries and disparities. The search for desired novelty demands special places, supposedly special individuals, and eccentric practices – even if diversity is a principle, not everyone is eligible. The danger of co-creation is that it becomes a kind of lifestyle work for privileged innovation-elite imbued with social and cultural capital. (Müller 2018: 68)

"Areas" of creativity – downtown, or so-called gentrified areas, also preferred by "digital nomads" – are marked off by geographical boundaries from other urban or non-urban areas inhabited by people who, when not unemployed, have jobs with low economic, social, and cultural capital (see Edensor *et al.* 2015: 1 ff., Reckwitz 2017a: 173 ff., 220-30 ff.). In the Western context of the last forty years, the attack on welfare, the lack of opposition to financialization and the economic and symbolic weakness of "flexible security", where it exists (social economic support is considered a source of shame by unemployed people who have no hope of being reintegrated into the labor market), as well as the speed, indifference and often the violence with which "innovation" has discarded the more traditional types of work – emptying their social forms of life without seeking any reconciliation with their values or at least taking their inertia into account – have opened up an enormous space for resentment. This is fueled not only by considerations regarding one's income (the social gap is not always proportional to income), but by the perception that one's own values and lifestyles are despised[3]. Resentment is expressed no less symbolically than the neoliberal ideology of innovation: by claiming ethnic "identities" that have long ceased to exist, traditions that cannot be "revitalized" (despite the best intentions of UNESCO 2003), and even through the reactive appropriation of the "popular" element, with ways of speaking and gestures that clash with the "taste" of the new hierarchies.

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[3] Starting from the first European place where welfare policies were abandoned: England. *Middle England* by Jonathan Coe (2018) can be regarded as a literary testimony to this. See also Davies 2018, and, on certain methodological issues, see also Appiah 2010: 175 ff.

2.3. *Guilt. All are called, few are chosen*

Even for creatives, not everything is working out great. At a master's course lecture, a student publicly shared the anxiety she felt owing to the combination between expectations of enthusiasm on her part and the perspective of a guilty failure. Such symptoms belong to the "struggle to be oneself", to socially prescribed perfectionism (see Ehrenberg 2000, Hewitt, Flett, Mikail 2017).

Usually, the risk of failure is neither subjectively nor socially estimated through economic analysis, although it is quite evident that one's chances of economic success do not depend only on one's personal talent and disposition: successful start-ups (in fields as diverse as fashion, design, digital technology, big data analysis, communication, robotics, mobility, e-commerce, tourism) operate within at least medium term economic strategies. So, a person might have a creative individual disposition, but the economic and political circumstances may not favor it. Creativity as a personal disposition and creativity as a successful economic enterprise are two different things. The constitutive contradiction is manifest in the fact that creativity is defined as an internal quality of the subject but one that can only be proven *a posteriori*, provided that the creative act is successful. Nevertheless, the same word is used ambiguously, so that each failure is experienced as a negative judgment on one's personal existence.

This circumstance can better be understood by considering the double religious genealogy of the use of the word "creativity" in economics (see also Goldoni 2018a). a) Theological creation becomes "creativity", understood as *production*, with the Renaissance affirmation of the human origin of the arts and crafts (see Blumenberg 2000). b) This meaning has merged with the religious imperative of personal spiritual self-renewal, aimed at redeeming natural existence from its deficiencies ("original sin"). The creativity *dispositif* is first and foremost a legitimation *dispositif* – in fact, to the extent that being creative serves to justify the singularity of existence. What is theological about this is that it updates the basic idea that existence is not good *in itself*. Modern man "would rather feel guilty than feel bad for no reason" (Nietzsche 1988: 23). Therefore, he experiences his existence as a form of penance.

To the extent to which "rebirth" can only be felt, as Weber puts it, "in taking spiritual possession" (Weber 2017: 169, my translation from the German) of salvation, self-renewal needs to be continuously re-

peated at every moment. In religious and ecclesiastical life, self-renewal must be continually repeated and publicly testified to. Max Weber has provided some elements for a genealogy of the political and economic culture of the United States, starting from the Baptists and Puritanism (Weber 2017: 168 ff.). Elements of this genealogy are recognizable in the current attitude oscillating between self-reliance (Emerson 1841) and the need to challenge limits. Contemporary society demands that the reason for anyone's existence be measured in "objective" terms of creativity. The double genealogy has created a link – so far unbroken – between judgement on one's social and economic success and judgment on one's intimate disposition; hence, shame and guilt arise when one fails in the attempt to be "creative".

In *Kapitalismus als Religion* Benjamin (1991a) argued that capitalism is not only a secularization of religion but is itself a religion of "pure worship". This seems to have become the case today, beyond all expectations. The ministers of the capitalist cult – the common use of the word "guru" seems to suggest a playful lightness, but in fact this term is to be taken seriously – are successful entrepreneurs and managers, economists, "stars", coaches, influencers, journalists, essayists, intellectuals... How can an individual person prove her/his obedience? First of all, she/he *must believe* in her/his own creativity. When she/he fails, she/he is told that it happened because she/he didn't believe in it enough. Thus, the sense of guilt and even failure become *proof of the truth of faith:* "all are called, few are chosen".

2.4. *Some effects on the arts*

Many opportunities are offered by the Web. Indeed, "creativity" can be developed by discovering analogies across disciplinary boundaries. This discovery is usually made by people who have already learned to do something through a specific, focused job: they have experienced its limits and know where to cross them and find new connections. Anyone who practices some craft, art or profession knows how long it takes for an idea to grow and flourish. On the contrary, the narcissistic practice of the Internet suggests (Shane 2000) that anyone can do anything in a short time and with minimal effort. The result can be seen in the proliferation, on the Web, of self-produced content without any ideas behind it. While the avant-garde public was relatively cultivated, at least in some disciplines, now the culture of the ordinary public is built by social media and "influencers". These have come to replace criticism.

The distance from 1950s consumerism can be exemplified by comparing Richard Hamilton's *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*, where the closed private interior is presented as a place of the imagination and of consumption, with *How "Instagram traps" are changing art museums*[4], where a new type of museum, which has become *part* of the space-time of the Web, is the setting for personal performances.

I cannot see in this process any realization of the avant-garde utopias, least of all of Debord's ideas (how Kaufmann claims). The process in question also involves certain features of "professional" contemporary art exhibitions, which are playful, sometimes brazen. If the lever of criticism lacks (or is believed to lack) the pivot of society, given that the only society considered is the self-performing synthesis of communication media and creative consumers/producers, on the stage it remains a self-reflection that moves in a narrow interval between parody (the rest of drama that every staging evokes) and cynicism[5].

When, on the other hand, society offers an ugly or even terrible show of itself, the artistic gesture risks to be reduced to a commentary on the drama that journalistic information has already made known by other means. The images of political, human tragedies shown by the press, TV, Internet are more rapid and powerful, both in revealing things and deceiving people, than some artistic metaphors or "vile and mawkish spectacles"[6]. In the face of the information overload, the most proper or least ineffective form of artistic commentary is a rapid, gag-like one; but usually – as happens with comic strips in newspapers – this kind of commentary is an "information parasite"[7]. Fortunately,

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[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qx_r-dP22Ps&feature=youtu.be.

[5] From the *Palazzo enciclopedico* by Gioni (Biennale Venezia 2014) to Hirst's *The wreck of the unbelievable*.

[6] I will recall two examples: Bradford's installation in the USA pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale of Visual Arts, which reminded one of bowel cancer – the audience had already got sufficient information about Trump's politics – and the migrant boat exhibited at the 2019 Biennale of Visual Arts ("I found Buchel's appropriation of the boat in which so many migrants lost their lives a vile and mawkish spectacle in the context of the Biennale": Searle 2019).

[7] At the 2019 Venice Biennale of Visual Arts, while the installations by Sun Yuan and Peng Yu are vivid (the chair of the American president whipping violently and randomly at 360° makes you laugh bitterly, the animal-machine that fails to collect and clean blood makes you shudder) a sawed motorbike as a gesture of female

there are other ways of working in the arts, with a depth that goes beyond the topicality of information and beyond the market[8].

While music archives on the Web and digital music software offer unprecedented information and tools to people wishing to study and make music, the prevailing offerings and uses are codified as never before, thanks to a selection of the musical material that has received an authoritative aura from communication, the market and schools. Thus, even in traditional 20th-century art music, including contemporary music, "avant-garde" jazz and "improvisation", a certain "closure" within codified and easily recognizable languages, virtuosity as an end in itself, prevail over the search for poetic invention. Pop music has also reached high artistic levels; while the market has long promoted – through "trap" music, which originated in the USA – a tendency towards elementary, raw rhythms, and coarse language (see De Bernard 2019).

The current "capitalism" is both creative and destructive (Schumpeter 1942, Calcagno 2018: 162) through economic exploitation and the rapid elimination of old forms of life. It makes "creative" people fluctuate between euphoria, the excitement of success and depression. If this capitalism behaves like an "artist" (Lipovetsky, Serroy 2013), its parody of some avant-garde gestures appears grotesque, even though it does not make one laugh or even smile; it is not able to make people feel joyous without producing also "bad taste" or aggressive reactions; it is sad without the capacity to be melancholic; it is terrible without the capacity to be tragic. Not surprisingly, this reality is reflected in some way in the art world.

3. *Rethinking creativity*

3.1. *Any "emancipatory social project" for citizens?*
An already quoted text affirming the idea of co-creation states: "The participants would not, or not merely, be addressed as private con-

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emancipation is a futile "gag". "We are in the realm of the stupid": "dumb art for dumb times": Searle 2019.

[8] For example, at the 2019 Venice Biennale of Visual Arts, the installation *For, in your tongue, I cannot fit* by Shilpa Gupta, *Swinguerra* in the Brasilian pavilion and the Lithuanian pavilion.

sumers, but also as citizens: as bearers of an emancipatory social project" (Müller 2018: 68). How could this be a "social emancipation project"? What should we emancipate ourselves from? What does it mean to be a "citizen", if it is true that cities have been and are *dispositifs* of power (see Cantillon 1956, Marx 1966, Cusinato 2016)? Shouldn't the concept of the citizen be thought of in relation to the inhabiting of a place?

I think that, above all, we should emancipate ourselves from the concept of existence as a "productive force". The 19th-century idea of measuring the emancipation of life on the development of productive forces has made life itself the maximum productive force. That creative/destructive (Schumpeter 1942) process unceasingly produces and reinforces social fragmentation through differences in speed, perspectives and goals, even mutually conflicting ones, thereby establishing hierarchies. The space-time of the city – traditionally a "map" made up of areas reflecting differences related to social class, property and urban rent – explodes even beyond the geographical boundaries in the space-time of the Web. For some people, the streets, squares and meeting places of cities are becoming "prostheses" (McLuhan) of the Web. Is this a place to inhabit?

I think that we should emancipate ourselves: a) by separating the current way of measuring creativity on the basis of success from natural and spontaneous creativity; b) by recognizing that there is a close connection between natural creativity and the fact of inhabiting a place. In a shared life experience, necessary work is part of life, but it does not exhaust its essence.

a) Natural existence is not inactive; indeed, it is very active and "creative". We see this creativity in childhood games and in life, as D.W. Winnicott says in his *Playing and reality*:

I am hoping that the reader will accept a general reference to creativity, not letting the word get lost in the successful or acclaimed creation but keeping it to the meaning that refers to a colouring of the whole attitude to external reality.
It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living. (Winnicott 1991: 65)

b) This creativity is based on confidence, reliability and familiarity, relaxation. It constitutes the core of the "transitional zone", it builds a place and a time, it is the basis of culture (Winnicott 1991: 52, see also Winnicot 1991: chapters 4, 7, 8, Goldoni 2017). From this change of

perspective, a kind of creativity can be established that also socially involves citizens as inhabitants of a reliable place. This creativity acquires an "economic" sense according to the "law" (*nomos*) of creating a home (*oikos*), a place to live.

But who would ever want to emancipate himself from the use of existence as a productive force? And this not only because of the need for money, if it is true that "singularity" (apparently, the only "space" where today desire takes word and imagination) is constituted by such a *dispositif*, so that individuals no longer seek to produce real social innovation but rather a "now" (*Jetzt*), having become addicted to its exciting novelties. Would thinking of something else be "pure nostalgia", as Reckwitz claims (Reckwitz 2017a, Reckwitz 2017b: 431, 442, Reckwitz 2018: 241-52)?

3.2. *On the method. Different genealogies of singularity*
In a text from 1929 dedicated to surrealism, after speaking about the limits of conceiving art as a reaction of surprise, Walter Benjamin continues:

We succeed in penetrating the mystery to the extent that we find it in everyday life, thanks to a dialectical perspective that recognizes the everyday as impenetrable, and the impenetrable as everyday […]. The reader, the thinker, the one who waits, and the *flâneur* are types of enlightened men no less than the opium eater, the dreamer, and the inebriated. And they are more profane forms. Not to mention the most terrible drug, ourselves, which we take in solitude. (Benjamin 1991b: 331, my translation from the German)

Later, in Benjamin's notes for his book on Baudelaire, the *flâneur* finds his moment of enjoyment and surprise, finds something new, within the metropolitan regime of the commodity.

The conclusion of Reckwitz's *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten* (*The society of singularities*) recalls Benjamin's diagnosis, in a way: the current individual pursuit of the new seems to be the extreme outcome of that history of the 19th century. But *flânerie* is replaced by compulsive behaviors (see also Türcke 2012). The metropolis no longer offers the kind of rhythm and space required for dreaming when people are walking or looking around themselves, to the extent that their places and paths become part of films, photographs, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp… Is this the only possible outcome?

The way in which Reckwitz employs the notion of *dispositif* is retrospectively totalizing. Even the "countercultures" and artistic research

of the 1960s – which were explicitly foreign or antagonistic to capitalism – are considered modes of "aestheticization" and even "agents" of the dispositive (Reckwitz 2017a: 83-4). In an earlier text Reckwitz wrote that "meditative Erfahrungen" had become "a libidonous experience to be satisfied in the moment. The subject shifts from "social action" to "aesthetic experience" (*Erleben*) (Reckwitz 2010: 481-2, my translation from the German).

While superficial takes on Buddhism were common during the 1960s, they do not exhaust the influence of meditation experiences on habits and on the arts, also because they reconnect with certain mystic Western tradition. For example, John Cage referred to Eckhart as well as to Zen Buddhism and Indian meditation (Cage 1994). So, although Reckwitz's view may be supported by many examples, its generalization is arbitrary, above all when attributed to experimental music, like "New Dada in music" (Reckwitz 2017a: 71, n. 49). My question is: how can a historical event – some features of which may have become elements of a *dispositif* in the art world and market – be retrospectively and unambiguously defined as an "agent"? I do not find any analysis that presupposes only one origin and a necessary direction for history to be methodologically convincing. A historical event can unambiguously be interpreted as an agent of a strategy only according to a causal-substantial way of thinking, as in the philosophies of history and the history of ideas (see Foucault 2008). On the contrary, a genealogy has ancestors, each of which may have more than one descendant. These may present similarities with other descendants or even have opposite characters. Benjamin himself (2012) placed the possibility of alternatives at the center of his investigations into the effects of media on society: for example, the alternative between the "aestheticization of politics" and the "politicization of art", by taking the example of the possibility for workers and ordinary people to use a camera.

Shared ancestors of all forms of modern singularity can be found in the dissolution of the European Christian universe. The cultural premises are provided by Duns Scotus and Wilhelm Ockham (see Courtine 2015), but Calvinistic Protestantism (Weber 2017), the "great transformation" (Polanyi 2002), the market and industrial metropolises may be considered the ancestors of the *individualistic* form of singularity, up to the current taste for challenges, search for success and fair of failure. However, the modern singular form of life also has other features: the experience of contingent immanence in an infinite or not fully knowable

world. Renaissance and Baroque Neoplatonism, from Bruno to Spinoza, from Leibniz to Herder, suggest that every single space-time existence is the *possible* contingent center of an infinite universe, a "monad".

While the denial of a unique origin of history frees people from the weight of original sin and guilt, a collapse of faith in the "divine economy" and the possibility of a full knowledge of history favors the birth of the singular experience of contingence. Singularity may be felt as solitude verging on nihilism.

Different answers have been given. If life no longer has meaning, it should at the very least be felt with the greatest possible intensity. The imperative to have *intense experience* inherits the theological doctrine of justification. Life, will, affect and emotional intensity, awakening, redemption and (self-)creation all blend into each other and mingle. Divine creation and modern creativity are entangled to the point of being indistinguishable. A new kind of "artist" is he who creates the art of a "feeling of fullness and power in intoxication" (Nietzsche 1988: 529, my translation from the German).

This poetics can partly be recognized as one of the antecedents of the later poetics of surprise, of the search for the extraordinary in the ordinary and for novelty, when they are conceived as solitary techniques to feel alive. But the experience of immanence is not necessarily characterized by this autoreferentiality. It may coincide with the appreciation of life beyond the possibility of knowing and controlling it as a totality. As an example of this ethic and aesthetic attitude I would refer to Wittgenstein's attitude towards everyday life:

Nothing could be more remarkable than seeing someone who thinks himself unobserved engaged in some quite simple everyday activity. Let's imagine a theatre, the curtain goes up and we see someone alone in his room walking up and down, lighting a cigarette, seating himself etc. so that suddenly we are observing a human being from outside in a way that ordinarily we can never observe ourselves; as if we were watching a chapter from a biography with our own eyes – surely this would be at once uncanny and wonderful. More wonderful than anything that a playwright could cause to be acted or spoken on the stage. We should be seeing life itself. (Wittgenstein 1998: 6)

It is not an aestheticization (according to Benjamin's use of the term) of life. I would interpret Wittgenstein's attitude as a premise to his statement that "The language-game is so to say something unpredictable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. It is not reasonable (or

unreasonable)" It is there – like our life (Wittgenstein 1998c: 73). With respect to the arts, I would recall the following statement: "Having lost any interest in grand illustration, the artist of our time has rediscovered the gift of naturalness and poetic simplicity. A lemon is a source of ecstasy today as much as a Venus"[9].

Is this aestheticization? I do not think so. It is a search for a new beginning from an elementary basis. While it has to do with *aesthetics*, to the extent that this discourse and poetics live in the same space as the more traditional arts, it has nothing to do with *aestheticization*. The above statement by Arturo Martini can be taken to exemplify many others previous and later poetics: in painting, in poetry, etc., for example, from the very late Hölderlin's poems to… *Le parti pris des choses* by Francis Ponge.

What was also at stake at the turn of the 19th century was an ambivalence between self-centered aestheticizing and a more radical experience of immanence. Does *Le paysan de Paris* by Aragon (taken as a model of *flânerie* by Benjamin) not fluctuate somewhat ambivalently between "dream-like" memories and a "concrete" view of the world? I think that the text is to be understood in this way – unless the "theory" of history as "dialectic materialism" and the "structure" as the true basis of the "superstructure" are taken as a paradigm for understanding the "concrete", against the "astonished representation of facticity", as Adorno argues in his criticism of the method Benjamin adopted when writing his book on Baudelaire. Benjamin responded that wondering (*Verwundern*) is an "excellent object" of understanding, and that it has to be constructed from a *historical perspective* as a "monad" (see Adorno, Benjamin 1994: 364-7, 379-80).

I would say that the different emphases on modern experiences of singularity – some more aestheticizing, others more open to the historically contingent experience of life – also depend on the different *historical perspectives and political possibilities* of inhabiting a place.

I will now return to more recent topics and problems. Some art practices of the 1960s produced in the participants an awareness of own attitudes toward others, as well as the space and setting, thanks

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[9] My translation from the original Italian text: "Caduto l'interesse per i grandi fatti illustrativi, l'artista del nostro tempo ritrova il dono della naturalezza e della poetica semplicità. Fonte d'estasi oggi un limone quanto una Venere" (Martini 2001: 27).

to the social and political context of movements aiming to free people from capitalism. I will limit myself to an example taken from so-called "indeterminacy" in music (which is closely associated with so-called "New Dada" in music). *Paragraph seven* of Cardew's *The great learning* foresees that even non-professionals can sing ensemble music, according to very simple yet at the same time strict rules[10]. The result can be of the highest poetical level. Pauline Oliveros and the "psychedelic" Terry Riley proposed similar poetics, which could often be practiced even without great instrumental or vocal training. Their kind of "creativity" experiences life as a "presence": "in music, we try to eliminate time psychologically to work in time in such a way that it loses its hold on us, relaxes its pressure" (Cardew 1971)[11].

Their artistic practices create a community, a place for experience. They are still practiced in many places around the world, with slight differences compared to the 1950s and 1960s, due to the different context and musical "material" (Goldoni 2018b, 2018c). These artistic practices have to do with *aesthetics*, while having nothing to do with *aestheticization*. In a sense, they were – and are – examples of the "politicization of art" (Benjamin 2012). They should be accomplished through social transformation. Their defeat in the 1980s is sometimes due to poetic naivety, but above all to political weakness. Thus, their legacy has to some extent become (indirectly aestheticized) market material, while their current practice is not favored – or even hindered – by the art and media world.

If an alternative between aestheticizing singularity and the experience of immanence depends on the different historical perspectives and political possibilities of inhabiting a place, this has to be understood and defended.

4. *The inhabitant*

4.1. *The antiquity of living*
Benjamin noted that Paris had become the "land of the *flâneur*", not for foreigners, but for Parisians. A "dialectical" relationship between

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[10] Recently performed in Venice (December 15, 2018), at the Auditorium Santa Margherita, by the Ca' Foscari University Choir and student musical groups.
[11] Cardew quotes also the proposition 6.4311 of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein 2019).

the external gaze on the metropolis as a landscape and the private, isolated character of this gaze and feeling, is represented through the image of the room. To the Parisian the city "opens up as a landscape, enclosing it as a room" (Benjamin 1991f: 525, my translation from the German). Benjamin finds it remarkable (*sonderbar*) that Paris, not Rome, gave birth to the *flaneur*:

Is [Rome] not a city too full of temples, enclosed squares and national shrines to be able to enter the dream of passersby together with every paving-stone, every shop-sign, every step, and every gate? Also, something may be due to the national character of the Italians. (Benjamin 1991f: 525, M 1, 4, my translation from the German)

The reference to the "national character of Italians" remains a hint. The contrast with the "Nordic" form of existence becomes explicit in Benjamin's remarks on Naples. "Existence, which for the Northern European is the most private of matters, is here... a collective matter... As the home environment is recreated on the street, with chairs, hearth and altar, so, only in a more noisy way, the road penetrates houses" (Benjamin, 1991c: 314, my translation from the German).
    Benjamin speaks of the "porosity" of the city:

The architecture is as porous as this stone. Construction and action merge into courtyards, arcades and stairs. In everything a suitable space is maintained that makes it possible for it to become the scene of new unforeseen constellations [...]. Porosity meets not only the indolence of the southern craftsman, but above all the passion for improvisation. (1991c: 310, my translation from the German)

This character, still so evident in many places in Naples, is present to lesser and varying degrees in many small or medium-sized Italian towns. This is partly due to the urban planning features – of ancient Greek, Roman, medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque origin – and to the way in which houses were conceived and built in relation to public space. Squares, streets and arcades favor unplanned but also habitual encounters, in which citizens recognize themselves in some way, even without knowing each other. One feels in any case recognized as an inhabitant.
    While existence in "Northern Europe" is marked even today by the Protestant ethics in its individualistic version, various forms of Italian life have not been deeply touched by it. A spirit has survived that, before being "Catholic", is ancient. The idea of being able to profoundly

change the meaning of existence through the development of certain techniques (or "productive forces") has not taken root everywhere.

That experience of time has not taken root everywhere – especially not in the countryside. Even in modern industrial times work has been – quite apart from the need to overcome challenges together with solidarity – a means to socialize in the workplace and in inhabited places.

4.2. *Return to the place*

While the most recent modernity has produced distance relationships and tourism without distances, other types of habits continue, every day. Everyday life, in this sense, is not that found on the calendar; nor it is only the wonder of the ordinary, sought by the new *flâneur*: it is the reliability of a place (on the everyday aesthetics see Haapala 2005, Leddy 2012, Matteucci 2015). Even more than thanks to the knowledge of historical facts concerning the ancient building of the near place, inhabiting a place is the experience of the shared use – without discontinuity – of streets, squares, walls, stones, old plaster and modern buildings, even ones that may be "ugly" but become part of the city through their use. The reliable essence of a place is particularly evident when it is denied, while, when it is lived peacefully, it may lie outside our consciousness. Inhabitants have habits that arise from repetitions. Usually they do not know the moment when a habit originated – just as one can hardly remember the moment when the "transitional area" creates a place. Inhabiting does not belong to the time of memories. It is more like a concrete "transcendental" condition of memories, a present that never passes away by turning into the past. Therefore, "under" and "behind" what happens, inhabiting is a familiar background to which one returns, even if the particular event that is occurring has never been experienced before (conversely, every return is different: it occurs now).

> Sono tornato là
> dove non ero mai stato.
> Nulla da come non fu, è mutato[12].

The experience of inhabiting may transform some new encounters into invitations to "return" to the familiarity that is proper to the being-

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[12] Caproni, *Ritorno*, 1998: 374: "I came back there / where I had never been. / Nothing, from how it was not, has changed" (my translation from the Italian).

a-place of every place: into the desire to make new acquaintances, friends, a home, a family... Perhaps this is the essence of any "nostalgia".

The inhabiting is usually "absent-minded", as habits are, and thus becomes the source of a spontaneous "creativity", not measured on success. This creativity expresses itself above all in volatile moments, which emerge and disappear in conversations in different languages, in one's mother tongue, in dialects, in gestures, in the exercising of good humor or invective, in improvising (Benjamin 1991c: 310), on the margins, in intervals, after work. These moments attest to the existence of the place, which is like the background tone (the *Grundstimmung*, as the Germans would say) to those voices. Inhabiting is like sleeping in the arms of the "sweet noise of life" (Penna 1989: 59, *Io vivere vorrei addormentato*). The arts bring it to our attention and thought without destroying its delicate nature. Some vernacular "creativity" (Edensor *et al.* 2015) gives a place explicit expression and intensifies its singularity, from which its inhabitants can draw something of their own.

But inhabiting, insofar as it is absent-minded, is a fragile practice, and so it is easily exposed to destruction. Many creative/destructive aspects of late modernity clashed and still clash without mediation with vestiges of traditions, turning them into wrecks. Even dialects are now being deformed, mostly in the direction of vulgar expressiveness. Some traditions, despite the unlikely promises of "revitalization", are reduced to folklore for the benefit of tourists.

Inhabiting is not something to describe. It is something to experience, to practice and for which to fight (now). The arts too may help.

4.3. *A note on tourism*

As the historical architecture in a city is an allegory of the place and of the practice of inhabiting, citizen rightly defend it as such, until they risk turning it into a fetish and, thus, into a tourist bait.

The pleasure of the mass tourist in the midst of an urban landscape – triggered by tourism marketing, films and, in rare and best cases, by art history and influential thoughts on antiquity (from Ruskin to Brandi and to Cecchi 1953) – does not generally reflect any desire to learn about art, history and geography. What the tourist mostly seeks amidst antiquities and nature is a moment of release from pressure.

The tourist's distracted perception has something in common with that of the inhabitant: the perceiving of an immemorial dwelling. This is granted to him for a moment. Therefore, mass tourism might be very instructive for inhabitants, insofar as it shows the common need for

dwelling, while obstructing its very experience with a huge traffic and number of images: the mass tourist gives the inhabitant a mirror in which he can see his own current poverty of experience. The latter could learn to defend not only his right/duty to contribute to the community through his work, the right to be a citizen, but also – and above all – his right to defend the basic condition for living.

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