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Escapism has its price, The artist has his income

Non Fides

27 July 2009

- « – He’s already two hours late.
- Ah, but you know he’s an artist, and artists...
- Oh that, the artists...
- That’s the way they are, these artists.»

It’s difficult not to soften and melt under the charm of artists and to not envy them in a society founded on forbiddance and the threat of jail. Certain manners of behaviour which no one else can get away with are permitted to the artist.

The supposed madness of a Salvador Dalí would gain you hospitalization without your consent in the dungeons of psychiatry. And whereas not producing anything useful, through work, for this utilitarian society would bring you only misery, harassment by the social services and getting considered “guilty”, artists are allowed by society to loaf around despite their (at times profitable) unproductivity. While your rent rises until you can no longer pay it, the artist finds himself favoured by the authorities to take your place.

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Let's be clear, the artist is privileged, he belongs to a special caste: he holds the monopoly of creativity and originality, desire and creation belong to him. So no need to create: the artists will see to it according to the same process as the one which consists in leaving the thinking to the philosophers or history to those who govern us; they thus dispossess us of our own lives. The privatization of creativity is typical of the world which produces it, of the constant delegation of all that which would make us what we would be if we were still anything after so many assaults on individual autonomy.

In relation to capital, the mission of the artist is to enrich it, and — while he's at it — to make himself richer in order to take on his role of consumer, reinjecting his wealth. The artist de facto finds his place in consumer society, his integration into the system is an obvious fact. Even though the show business often likes to pass off our dear artists as rebels, this only strengthens the system a bit more; their vices are permitted to grow until feigning criticism towards the system, only to eventually fortify it through a powerful systematic return of normality. It's with the show business that the artist finds himself given the most value, socially at least. Indeed, who upon hearing the word "Culture" doesn't draw his wallet straight away?

«Making money is art and working is art and good
business is the best art. »

Andy Warhol

Escapism has its price and the artist has his income. And it's always easier to escape this endless social war than to actively contribute to it. Exploited by money in favour of social peace, the artist can then go to sell his support for a candidate in the elections, for a brand which suits him so well, for the progress cult or for humanitarian wars. For each of progress', of the state's or of capital's lost causes: its own appointed artist, its "sponsor of the cause". Art, when it is not only the Sunday leisure of the bourgeois classes, is

the best consolation for human misery; reinforcements for the social peace. Alfred de Musset said that “an unhappy population creates great artists”; in society unhappiness is treated with blows of Prozac.

The artists labeled as “politically committed” serve to give relief to the consciences of the few left-wing citizens. A Léo Ferré diatribe against prisons, felt and partaken by the listener, gives the justification for apathy. The tyranny of democratic opinion has succeeded in making its citizens believe that to have an opinion it is enough to express an idea, and that, in the performative style, the opinion has the value of a social transformation: the politically committed artist is the media reflection not of the impotence of the citizens but rather of their desire for impotence. Stuck in his small comfort, all the honest citizen can now do is listen to his great Léo, his little Manu Chao, his red Ferrat, all he can do is send ten euros to the soup kitchens after his favourite politically committed artist has commanded him to do so.

The humanitarian artist who shows his dirty mug next to some African children weighing less than his wallet, he’s the one who, easing his conscience, enables his “fans” to ease theirs by proxy; and this — always according to the same patterns which delimit the various stages of democracy — like with the elections. If in order to rebel it’s enough to listen to a “left-wing” CD, to read a poem which glorifies Aragon’s Style, to watch a Ken Loach social film so as to live the struggle by proxy or if it’s enough to quote a situationist jingle so as to shine in the pantheon of enlightened extreme leftism: then the authorities need not worry ever again. Politically committed art is an anti-rebellion anesthetic, the good left-wing citizen’s chloroform which removes guilty feelings.

«The artist must love life and show us that it is beautiful. Without him we would be in doubt.»

Anatole France.

The artist is also the mainstay of a whole social milieu — called a “scene” — which allows him to exist and which he keeps alive. A very special ecosystem: agents, press attachés, art directors, marketing agents, critics, collectors, patrons, art gallery managers, cultural mediators, consumers... birds of prey sponge off artists in the joyous horror of showbiz. A scene with its codes, norms, outcasts, favourites, ministry, exploiters and exploited, profiteers and admirers. A scene which has the monopoly on good taste, exerting aesthetic terrorism upon all that which is not profitable, or upon all that which doesn't come from a very specific mentality within which subversion must only be superficial, of course at the risk of subverting. A milieu which is named Culture. Each regime has its official art just as each regime has its Entartete Kuntz¹. It could be thought that to earn money in the artistic circles it is necessary to have talent, but that to spend it one only needs culture; and culture is a huge money machine, the bottomless well of the human stupidity and of its capacity to worship, admire, to run on charisma or to follow leaders, be they political, social or cultural.

« — Could you give me a glass of water?
— You're out... One drinks directly blood now.»

Social Warhol.

¹In German: “Degenerate art” — official position adopted by the Nazi regime to forbid selfless/disinterested creativity, in favour of an official art: the heroic art.