

Works and Days

María Ruido

The Iron Age

“Thereafter, would that I were not among the men of the fifth generation, but either had died before or been born afterwards. For now truly is a race of iron, and men never rest from labour and sorrow by day, and from perishing by night; and the gods shall lay sore trouble upon them. [...] Keep watch against this, you princes, and make straight your judgements, you who devour bribes; put crooked judgements altogether from your thoughts. He does mischief to himself who does mischief to another, and evil planned harms the plotter most.”

Hesiod, *Works and Days* (Book I)

In his collection of proverbs and fables, the Greek poet Hesiod recounts, in the code of mythology, the twists and turns, labours and future of human existence through what the author describes as “the five ages of man.” Right at the start of the poem, what he calls *The Iron Age*, when men are plagued by exhausting labours and miserable conditions, feels like a time loop in relation to our own contemporary reality. The poet seems to evoke the strange unease of the latest of the devastating cycles and crises of the capitalist system, affecting the present, like previous eras... and maybe future ones.

Several months ago, Paula asked me to write a text about working conditions, hyperflexibility and some of the practices or actions taken which might assess the points of resistance and/or critiques of the present situation in which precarious subjects find themselves. Unavoidably, we spoke about a text I wrote for a book published by *Precarias a la Deriva* in 2004, “*Mamá, quiero ser artista!*”,¹ (Mum, I want to be an artist!) which considered the relations between the power of representation, of images, and the fragile working conditions that dominate the creative sector and all those involved in the

production of those images. Following our conversation, a battery of film projects and texts conceived and produced either individually or collectively, as well as a good number of films already seen and analyzed began to fill my note book, in chaotic and colourful array (which is habitual in my note books). My jottings cover a wide range of thoughts and ideas arising from all the different talks, writings and quickly convened meetings that we have attended or read in the last year, a year of 'living dangerously,' especially when the police are amassing.

"Wow!" I thought to myself... Despite the fact that my reply to Paula was at first reticent, judging from the documents on my PC desktop I have devoted much time to thinking about the world of work and how it is represented, precarity and its discourses, and I had accumulated a copious bibliography. Alongside "Mum, I want to be an artist!" were other essays: "*Los cuerpos ensamblados*" (Assembled bodies) (2005), "Just do it!" (2006), "In the mood for work" (2007)... curatorial and video projects (some actually brought to a conclusion, others not) including *Los trabajos y los días* (Works and Days) (2002), *Tiempo real* (Real Time) (2003), *Ficciones anfibias* (Amphibian Fictions) (2005) or *Zona Franca* (Zona Franca –an industrial estate in Barcelona) (2009). I reread them and they were useful for thinking about how and why precarity turned from an adjective into a noun during the nineties, and how this noun now defines not only our working lives but all of life and our relationships. 'Ikea lives' they are called jokingly, fragile lives in which decisions are constantly put off. "Life is short, capitalism is long..." I think to myself almost every day.

I reread them, and I saw unsettlingly that the shadows had not only failed to dissolve but had grown longer: classism, sexism, homophobia and ethnocentrism that, as I myself had explained, are the rule of thumb in art institutions and hegemonic culture (and sometimes in the supposed alternatives). Not only had these troubles not been corrected but they had been re-naturalized in the formalism of a new generation who had learnt to make use of a politicized sheep-skin, making work that is ferociously cynical, conservative and mainstream, works in which everything seems to change so that nothing changes (striped cats of many colours). Some months ago (in response to the 15-M's occupation of streets and squares), *El País* published an enthusiastic and optimistic article on a number of

publishing and art projects which seemed to point to a revitalization of the relations between political context and cultural production.² My habitual scepticism was reaffirmed when I reread the article and assessed the sad extent to which the films and texts make valid points.

However, there is no doubt that something has changed. In the last few years and especially during the last few months starting with the collapse of Lehman Brothers, we have seen: the *Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca* (Platform for people affected by mortgage trouble); the exciting 15-M mobilizations and the Arab spring; a risk premium that has sat down at the family dinner table; conditions of employment (if you still have a job) fading away to a point at which they are unrecognizable; concepts such as ‘financialization,’ ‘economies of scale’ or ‘public-private partnership’ habitually cropping up in conversation, as if we had all done a crash course in political economy. However, we are only minimally prepared to bounce back persuasive arguments against the followers of Milton Friedman and their latest assaults, or against the sectors of the media who set out to naturalize neo-conservative solutions as obvious and rational, although we know they are dealing marked cards...³

In *Corsair Writings* (1975), Pier Paolo Pasolini declared that in hegemonic audiovisual production and especially in our mass media, discrepancy only exists as spectacle, as simulacrum, as a bizarre contrived stagecraft. Television provokes a certain linguistic and representational aphasia (and this is increasingly true of terrestrial DTV broadcasting, which manages to be plural and homogenous at the same time) and generates a pretend language which discounts all forms of resistance or antagonism: “Decades ago violence was explicit, open: colonial conquest, the imposition of might. Today the ways of violence are much softer, adept and complex. The process is more mature and technically profound: television, for example.”⁴

Yes, it looks as if everything has got worse... But in response to this gloomy outlook, we have reoccupied the streets and squares after a long time during which entertainments, spectacles or those who call themselves ‘pro-lifers’ (as if some of us were *against life*...) were the only ones to take to the streets. We have reinvented the ossified militant

experience of the mystical '68; we have rebelled firmly and forcefully against control of the world wide web (one of our basic tools for action) and against the privatization of collective thought, questioning media hegemony and placing on the table certain evidence for real democracy. Ours is not (only) a struggle for jobs; ours is a struggle for free access to shared intelligence, welfare and services for all. When I wrote the texts mentioned earlier, I had already caught sight of the fact that the crisis in representative democracy seems to run parallel to the absence of representation or distortion of the new precarious working class, a large slice of the population who, in many cases lack paid work, or are employed in what is known as 'the informal economy', in temporary and discontinuous work for lower and lower pay and lacking the right to basic benefits. What can we expect from a colonized language of representation of a system that denies or invisibilizes dispute and discord? What power of agency do we, those of us who generate and use images, have to produce/distribute/consume alternative imaginaries within the imposed aphasia of which Pasolini spoke?

Although a few TV series and a handful of indy films have risked representing precarity – *Smoking Room*, by J. D. Wallowits and Roger Gual (2002), or Jo Sol's *El taxista ful* (The Full Taxi Driver) (2005)– we, the unregulated workforce (ranging from call centre operators to artists, from prostitutes to cleaners), are still waiting for a 'normalized' means of representation. However, this is impossible in a phantasmagorical labour regime and in a hegemonic visual economy in which the commercial cinema continues to define labour through traditional portrayals of victimization such as Peter Cattaneo's *The Full Monty* (1997), or Fernando León de Aranoa's *Los lunes al sol* (Mondays in the sun) (2002).

If during the sixties and seventies filmmakers such as Agnès Varda, Chantal Akerman, Bruno Muel or the Dziga Vertov group portrayed the relations between the sexual division of labour and the (patriarchal) social contract, between the scopic economy and the capitalist system, since the eighties a reactionary mirroring of the political context has taken place, a conservative retrocession to stereotypical positions, both in the representation of sexed subjects and the relations between labour and the construction of subjectivity. Films such as *Los lunes al sol* or *The Full Monty* interpret, with a sexualized anger, the new

global division of work (and more particularly the transformation of primary sectors), unleashing the frustration of the protagonists onto their womenfolk and translating the precariousization of existence into a game of emotional revenge (in both films) and, in the British film, a ridiculous inversion of the visual domain. The case of *The Full Monty* is especially interesting as in this production there is a more or less obvious nostalgia for a world in which the male provider had his own places and times (the pub, mainly) now subject to the contamination and feminization of homosocial spaces and the culture of power they represent. The traditional order, as Laura Mulvey would say, is artfully and cynically inverted: women become subjects with a voyeuristic gaze directed at male bodies, the men obliged to work as strippers to relieve their situation of unemployment for which women are indirectly blamed. In the same way as *Los lunes al sol*, instead of a revision of the forms of masculinity and their place in the system of production, the British film insists on a reaffirmation of roles and a soothing justification of them that, mixed with the proper tone of a comedy of manners, draws a panorama that is nothing more than stagnant.

However, it is neither the militant experiences of the seventies, nor the ruptures of contemporary independent cinema that have catalyzed the present text. Searching among my video collection...I find Marco Ferreri's *El pisito* (1959). No other film among the many I have watched again during these last weeks has seemed quite so up-to-the-minute as this acidic novel by Rafael Azcona, who later adapted it for cinema. No other characters better reflect our lives at the present time than this eccentric triangle brought together by self-interest made up of Petrita, Rodolfo and Doña Martina: the anxiety provoked by the passing of time with none of the signs of betterment promised by progress on the horizon; the sadness and insecurity; the putting off of life-changing decisions; the contamination of personal relationships by the precarity of employment; housing problems leading to the impossibility of having personal space. In this film, "bio/necro-political arithmetic,"⁵ a constant low-to-medium intensity violence provoked by economic cycles and political decision-making which seem to be completely beyond our control, take us back the impoverishment of this dictatorial scenario poised on the threshold of developmentalism.

But as I now recall, it is not exactly like that. If the symptoms are similar, the political horizon is quite different. The new cognitive proletariat, ourselves and others very different from ourselves, does not have an ideology that responds to the criteria of the traditional left and right. We do not have an alternative, a beyond; we have constructed a different political articulation more based on ‘elective affinities’ than on the unpaid work we carry out, more linked to our different transversal subjectivities than to traditional class-based articulations.⁶

Without class from the point of view of the traditional left, we are not, however, on the brink of some other ‘class struggle’ or some other ‘social class arrangement.’ “The problem of class composition in cognitive capitalism is that the clarity with which we can identify the centrality of the cognitive precariat impedes resorting to any “geometric” representation around a presumably stable centre of class composition. The certainty with which the cognitive precariat can be identified as the characterizing element of this productive system requires assuming – with just as much certainty – the inevitable fluidity, mobility, continual transformation and intersecting of each social figure. Technical class composition is formed from these extremely mobile, heterogeneous and decentralized characteristics. At the same time, the elements of subjectivity, central to the cognitive labour force, define actual labour in a crucial way, so that no analysis of class composition can disregard the continual intersection of class and gender lines, nor can it disregard the mechanisms of culturalization and racialization. The processes – open, cadenced and driven by the struggles over the last ten years – cognitivization of labour and exploitation, the tendency of life and labour to overlap, the explosion of the factory-form, the network and the metropolis as new spatial-temporal coordinates of production, the fully transnational and heterogeneous character of living labour, constitutively precarious and mobile, continually blur technical and political composition, overlapping them and distancing them at the same time. Consequently: the relationship between technical composition and political composition cannot be re-proposed in the same terms as in the 1960s.”⁷

No Culture without Social Rights!

“[...] the major enemy, the strategic adversary is fascism (whereas Anti-Oedipus' opposition to the others is more of a tactical engagement). And not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini, but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us” (Michel Foucault: “Introduction to the non-fascist life”, preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari).

There is no alternative (or, in abbreviation, TINA): one of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's favourite refrains. There is no alternative to the rule of the market, to the mandates of the School of Chicago, to global capitalism. This seems to be the tonic that surrounds us, a new liberal fascism that dealt its latest blows in the sphere of state-run culture on 20-24th September with the eviction and demolition of *gaztetxe Kukutza* (social and cultural association occupying squatted premises) in the Rekalde district of Bilbao and with the cancellation of the non-fiction film festival *Punto de Vista* in Navarra, both attacks for supposed economic motives and (as we all know) because the local authorities and oligarchies are using the ‘need for adjustment’ ideologically.

The attack on the more daring and issue-raising initiatives by different institutional authorities brings us closer to a scenario whereby the new neo-conservative oligarchies appear disposed to asphyxiate public-sector culture or culture as a social right. Instead they propose to continue to support the idea of culture as a resource, a primordial resource encompassing all merchandise. In this way, they propose to back the commercialization of culture as intuited by the situationists. Sickened by Richard Florida⁸ and his predecessors, I see how I myself, and almost all my friends, continue to uphold a contradictory struggle between the necessity to live from our work and the awareness and wish to put a stop to this commodification of our working practices. We maintain a constant debate between our professional labour and our lives, which are gradually being placed at the service of what are called “the new cultural factories.”⁹ “We work all the time and all over the place: at

home, in the office, in the production company or in the agency. But what is more, we have learnt to make the most of such experiences, subjecting our needs to the imperatives of a task that promises ‘vocational added value’ (“After all, you’re doing something you love, aren’t you?”) and so requires complete dedication. [...] Precarity in its many and diverse forms (flexibility, instability, indeterminate functions, the (self-) exploitation of experiences and emotions, extreme mobility, the lack of a fixed salary...), define almost all the jobs in the field of cultural production and communication (even the most economically advantageous, the best situated in the cultural hierarchy: exhibition curators, museum directors, media stars...).¹⁰

The general comment is: although the economic crisis and unemployment affect us greatly, workers in the cultural sector, just like all other sectors, spend more hours than ever in production (not only of our own work but in networking, establishing contacts...). Our work has suffered a gradual devaluation, which adds an even more worrying perspective to the outlook portrayed in the texts quoted above.

Creating images is a political activity, one framed in different ways in the system of production. The production of representation is a labour that produces both economic and symbolic capital gains; these entail well-interiorized frameworks of censorship and self-censorship. Given these premises, I wonder to what point this new conservative offensive will influence future imaginaries.

In 1975 Foucault wrote that we end up loving that which dominates and exploits us. If we end up interiorizing and reproducing a merely complicit (re)presentation (whether consciously or unconsciously) of signifiers and signified which seem to offer the possibility of being ‘understood’ and ‘accepted’ by the public, these will become the only ones admitted into the established circuits (by the media, by the art establishment), perhaps the only ones we are capable of imagining. The faces of local corporations wear innocent expressions and place the blame on multinationals and the global crisis, but the elites of this shameless partnership that uses public money to privatise *the commons* are quite clear about who is worth helping and who not.

Some years ago, considering the state of affairs as regards the colonization of work and the precariousization, not of our working conditions, but of our lives in general, I entered into an intense e-mail exchange with some friends of mine: “Dear Marta y Publio, we have had so many conversations about the conditions of production in our work over the last few years and this has occupied (and still does) such an important space in our latest projects, that it is difficult to sum up in few words all we have said. What is certain is that precarity (in work and in our personal lives) has entered the institutional political agenda and is being used thematically by art institutions, but without any real consequences for art practice. That art practice should form a part of the economic dynamics of post-Fordist capitalism (with its legacy from capitalism and pre-capitalism) is a fact we cannot ignore without running the risk of falling into a dangerous naivety.”¹¹

This is not just a question of being aware of our position on the edge of the market place, of generating capital gain, but of being aware of the nature of our role in the production of symbolic value and to what extent our projects offer a potential for resistance when faced with phagocytosis or worse –misrepresentation or spurious utilization. We need to be fully aware of our responsibilities with regard to each and every part of the production-distribution-consumption loop. There is no place outside the system, but there is, I like to think, a certain capacity for resistance, which requires continually moving, changes of strategy, dodging capture, mechanisms of infiltration which seek small scale shifts, the use of open and/or polysemic languages as in poetics and/or irony (providing these do not end up as hollow metaphors or pure cynicism). Another possible response might be, paradoxically, to place oneself in circumstances of ‘invisibility’ or rather, a lack of visibility, accompanied by a displacement of the usual mechanisms of legitimation or of any evidence of these.

In 2007, putting four hands and two heads together to write a text, we wondered about the cultural producers popular mainstream imaginaries and their possible relation to the valorisation of our work.¹² The characters in *Sex and the City* came to mind, or *Northern Exposure*; today I think we would write about the painfully cynical presentation of advertising executives in *Mad Men* or a review of the Thatcherite de-pauperization which

sets the scene in *The Young Ones*. Yes, our lives are beginning to resemble these ironic young *declassés*, broadcast by the BBC in 1982. The post-punk *no future* has turned into the chanting of “They do not represent us”, or “The System is not in crisis –the System IS the crisis and it’s permanent.”

The relations of traditional production are changing, cities and squares have become the sites of a strident productivity, generating knowledge and wisdom in free circulation. All of us have become productive forces without involvement in labour relations. The workers are continuing to be fully productive even when unemployed (but not unoccupied). If in industrial capitalism the main variables were salary and profit, for cognitive capitalism they are yield and income which –given the gradual financialization of just about everything– makes capitalism’s parasitic dimension evident.

To confront the system’s parasitic aspect, and in the hope that collective work might support a common prosperity, as the Manifesto of the Nomadic Universities explains, “The salary should expand over the totality of time and life to become income, in other words, bio-income that recognizes the general productive dimension of the work of ‘pollinating.’”¹³

In recent years much activity has been devoted to the redefinition of work, and to precariousization in its many forms in the world of cultural production and the art institution. To name but a few more or less adjacent projects: “A Small Postfordian Drama”, a project initiated by Marion von Osten in 2004; Onda Prekaria, a radio-based project still active in Madrid; Precarias a la Deriva (Precarious women *à la dérive*) in Madrid; Carrot Workers and the Precarious Workers Brigade in London.¹⁴ Each and every one of these initiatives have made important contributions to the ongoing discussion. All have questioned the established imaginaries of labour and the devaluation of those activities considered ‘non-work’ (as occurring in certain ambits of cultural production, in which ‘realization’ overlaps ‘vocation’) and have provided material for critical analysis and resistance. One initiative among these seems to me particularly remarkable and useful: a study of intermittent workers of the spectacle, underway in France since 2003. Not only because it pinpoints the specificities of precarity in a wide range of occupations (artists, musicians, filmmakers... but also circus performers, technicians in the mass media etc.) but

also because it also draws attention to hyper-flexibility, intermittence, discontinuity, and the connivance of expertise and concessionary policies in the state unemployment benefit system for cost-cutting purposes, as well as other issues which hinder any possibility that reasonable conditions will ever adapt to the new ‘informal’ forms of know-how. A resounding cry is heard alongside the apt critique by Maurizio Lazzarato of the opposition between political criticism and art criticism as proclaimed by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*: Culture is a basic right. No culture without social rights!

Boltanski and Chiapello’s scorn for art criticism can only be explained when culture is perceived as superfluous, as something produced for a determined elite disinterested in material concerns; a scorn, obviously produced by ignorance of the changes that the cultural sector has suffered (where the cognitariat has gradually been proletarianized) and, just as surely, by an acritical and unqualified assumption of this sector’s eccentricity or ‘geniality’, which takes us back to a conception of art and cultural activity that is merely institutional, antiquated and perhaps, in the terms put forward by Boltanski and Chiapello, never even existed in the first place.¹⁵ If it is true that there is in fact a hegemonic culture still marked by values that might be called bourgeois and western, we cannot ignore the fact that there are other cultures external to ethnocentrism and traditional forms of legitimization, and that we are all generators of culture (even though this may not be our job). Clearly, there is also the issue of how other forms of legitimation and recognition might be articulated, but this a topic which deserves another essay...¹⁶

The casual workforce is at the centre of issues surrounding pay and hyper-flexibilization as imposed by cognitive capitalism, so that this generates a complex struggle on different fronts (ranging from direct action and media presence to theoretical thinking) to denounce the multiplicity of economic, migratory, sexual and racial anomalies which have brought us one step further away from the traditional class struggle. These changes affect large parts of the population including students, those researchers whose wares no longer find a buyer in the knowledge marketplace, false or ‘untitled’ artists, immigrants with or without papers, sex workers, misfits, the aged, the sick, the unemployed...

“What is an intermittent worker of the spectacle? “Manufacturing the sensory”, an intermittent worker of the spectacle is a wage labourer discontinuously employed by multiple employers at rates that vary according to the projects and the employers. Since the sixties, these wage labourers who are “not like the others” have benefited from an “exceptional” regime of unemployment compensation, in the sense that the relative flexibility of the conditions of access to the right to unemployment compensation allowed a growing number of people to assure themselves of continuous income in a situation of radical discontinuity of employment. [...] The challenge to their specific regime of unemployment compensation already loomed as a real threat, but this is only the mark of the reform protocol, out of which a movement of great breadth has arisen. Its strength derives from its duration and from the fact that it has taken the organizational form of coordination, which is quite distinct from that of hierarchical organizational structures. Its strength also derives from the fact that it has taken into account the multiple subjectivities that compose it.”¹⁷

Real Time

“It was funny, how those blokes were arguing on the telly. [...] ‘It’s pure theatre’, repeated another, ‘they don’t work, they just make more work.’ Someone else chipped in that, yes, there was production because what they produced was their own job and he listed various examples of unproductive jobs. But when a union member piped up saying that this was unacceptable, he’d had enough. “Exploitation, dignity...” he began; at this point, the other decided to turn in for the night.” (Isaac Rosa: *La mano invisible* [The Invisible Hand]. Our translation.

A few years ago, in 2003, I made a film and an archive called *Tiempo real* (Real Time). This project explored the possibility of making politically active representations of the new forms of non-work, reoccupying representation from the point of view of precarity. At present –this is not by chance– I find myself in the process of elaborating a new project,

this time for television (in Bilbao), which asks the same questions as well as attempting to assess what these last decades of cognitive capitalism have meant for all of us and how our lives have changed with the new global division of labour. Its title, making a musical reference to the early days of the transformation –the eighties– is *ElectroClass*.

In our narrative economy, the work-consumption loop is the mark of visibility, the guarantee of existence for a citizenship that has been sold off by a franchising state. If until a few decades ago we still thought of the term ‘work’ as production, as opposed to reproduction, something closely linked to paid employment, now we do not only speak of *just in time* or of “stable exceptionality,” but of how traditional divergences dilute, and the spatial and conceptual oppositions between leisure time/spaces and work are no longer operative. Biowork now defines these relations; precarity erodes and rearticulates our personal decisions, as well as the constitution of subjectivity. Since the seventies, instead of traditional trade unionism and militant demands, as the inhabitants of total work perhaps we should think of something along the lines of bio-unionism, a different relation between production and reproduction that, without forgetting the struggles of earlier times and the critiques produced by feminist and post-colonial praxis, might transform our relations with the present time of consumption-production.

As German filmmaker Ulrike Ottinger said, in response to the tribute paid her at the 1983 Festival d’Avignon:

“I consider that traditional dramatic forms will no longer work for new content. I refer to the language of images. The decodification of this language varies from époque to époque.”

As an integral element of a genealogy of which I consider myself a part and in the awareness of the need to produce new representations for the new sorts of labour that have emerged, Chantal Akerman’s emblematic film, *Jeanne Dielman*, of 1975 and in its wake two recent films made by women might well offer possible representations of these new forms of bio-unionism, of the embodied struggle that I mentioned earlier: Joanne Richardson and Andrea Carnu’s *Precarious Lives* (2008) and Uqui Permui’s *Doli, doli, doli... coas conserveiras. Rexistro de traballo* (2010) (Doli, doli, doli...with the canning factory. Work register).

The key question is: Does sex matter to capital? To the new cognitive capitalism? The answer to this might be: Sex becomes capital. Not only because merchandise has been wrapped in the cellophane of sexuality since more than a century ago, but because the sex of the workers, as Silvia Federici explains in a biting criticism of Toni Negri's *neo-operaismo*, is of vital importance to the new labour division.¹⁸

The strategies employed in these two films are different but both address precarious subjectivities and personal experiences in order to construct a new political imaginary, an *other* activism: *Precarious Lives*, a Rumanian/North American production, recounts the evolutions, mutations and life/work decisions of ten Rumanian women working in the urban service sector, mixing archive footage with life stories. *Doli, doli, doli...*, a Galician production, reclaims some old amateur footage filmed by women workers at the Odoxa canning plant on the island of Arousa to record their hunger strike. The film gives these excitingly militant and critical women a voice as they recount in first person their awakening to political articulation through their personal relationships and through confrontation with the established trade union and its male members who removed themselves from the women's specific demands.

How may we pursue the necessary renewal of filmic language noted by Ottinger and produce new images out of precarity? How to reoccupy the media space contaminated by reactionary commercial interests and react effectively to the stereotypes of victimization alluded to earlier in this essay?

In the eighties, when Ulrike Ottinger articulated these illuminating words and the women workers at the Odoxa factory acted in ways that years later make me shed tears of sheer pride, I was a teenager, hypnotized by the images of a Galicia in full industrial redevelopment, where the *Movida* (translator's note: the explosion of creative energy in Spain that followed in the wake of political transition from dictatorship to democracy and the life-style of its protagonists) and post-modernity had just landed. In my opinion, standards in television have deteriorated since then, with a gradual homogenization towards

formats dictated by private channels (which arrived in Spain in 1990) and by audience ratings. There was a time (in the seventies, the first decade of video) when artists were fully aware of the relation between video and TV and the potential of the video medium as a political tool, of the importance of not renouncing this medium. It was not long before official Art History, serving the dynamics of the art market, co-opted video as an instrument of artistic expression, emptying it of its communicative capacity while erasing all traces of its ‘original sin,’ its direct relation with television, that populist and vulgar medium that had to be pushed out of the way in order to reconfigure video as a new technology that might be accepted into the canons of Art History.

Ranging from the well-known “video is not television” put forward by the purists, to the experiences of pirate TV or community TV, the work of artist filmmakers such as Alexander Kluge, Rainer M. Fassbinder, Harum Farocki, Martha Rosler, Peter Watkins... about TV and broadcast on TV, the mass media *par excellence* formed a part of the then panorama of critiquing conventional representation. It was in the eighties, in the course of neoliberal restructuring and the dismembering of labour relations, when this intense debate began to dilute: artists renounced television, and turned “apocalyptic” as Humberto Eco would say. The idea of *another* television disappeared or was reduced to minority experiences or those of resistance, whilst television as a medium of pure entertainment spread, regarded with disdain or suspicion by an increasingly obsolete traditional left wing, and utilized by our rulers as one more institution of imposed consensus (“*banalissima televisione*”, as our beloved Pasolini would call it).

“Where is the future forged by the older generation? Is it the mess we are living in now?” asked Eskorbuto in one of his emblematic songs. In the case of the Basque country and of Bilbao in particular, the dismantling of the old industrial economy has given way to a service economy (prioritized at the request of the European Union), which has materialized in the form of the Guggenheim-Bilbao, although in reality this franchise museum is nothing more than a symptom of the shift from a society of producers to one of consumers.

This change of system is the focus of our research in the *ElectroClass* project (produced by

Consonni in collaboration with Basque TV), in an attempt to rethink, through a reshuffling of Basque television's own archives, an imaginary of workers in the informational economy to which we belong. AT the intersection between a renewed interest among researchers and artists provoked by digital TV (not for nothing have we witnessed a flood of exhibitions and texts on the relations between art and Television, like, for example *¿Estáis listos para la televisión?* [Are you ready for TV?] [2010-2011] at MACBA [Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art]) and the desire to delve into our recent collective memory in order to visualize the construction mechanisms of (self)-representation (and by doing so perhaps help reformulate our politics), this investigation looks at the new electronic working class. And as French philosopher Jacques Rancière says, "Collective understanding of emancipation is not the comprehension of a total process of subjection. It is the collectivization of capacities invested in scenes of dissensus. It is the employment of the capacity of anyone whatsoever, of the quality of human beings without qualities."¹⁹ or, in other words, that our critical work applied to media imaginary does not involve confrontation or the naive and sterile evidence of the fetichization that television produces, but rather by generating estrangement, a distancing that makes its constructive framework, or more concretely, its fictional quality evident.

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P. S. This summer I read a text by Chuck Kleinhans in the e-magazine *Jump Cut*. In the article, "Creative industries', neoliberal fantasies, and the cold, hard facts of global recession: some basic lessons",²⁰ the author gives an example of a representation of work in the virtual era –"The Social Network". Although a fervent user of Facebook, I experienced some discomfort, both because of the film's lack of quality and the deference paid to the enterprising and rather silly geek who is its main protagonist (not to mention its naturalization of savage work conditions). However, Kleinhans also addresses *Toy Story 3*, the latest in the saga, as a metaphor for a possible social revolt. In the film, battered and discarded toys, relegated to early retirement, join forces and rebel in a highly unsettling test of strength for the micro-society of the playroom. It hits a nerve and in a brief but intense

return to my adolescence I thought of one of those programmes I saw in the eighties and which remains in my/our mind: *¡Viva el mal, viva el capital!* (Long live evil, long live capital!).

Notes

1 See Ruido, María: “Mamá, quiero ser artista!” (Mum, I want to be an artist!) (2004), in Precarias a la Deriva (eds.): *A la deriva por los circuitos de la precariedad femenina. (À la dérive in the circuits of feminine precarity)*. Traficantes de Sueños, Madrid; also available at <http://www.workandwords.net/es/texts/view/497>

Other texts and projects mentioned by the author in this text are available at www.workandwords.net

2 Lenore, Víctor: “2011: el año de la acción directa”. (2011, the year of direct action) *El País*, 3-VI-2011; available at http://www.elpais.com/articulo/portada/2011/ano/accion/directa/elpepisupep3/20110603elp_tenpor_2/Tes#despiece4

3 To give one recent example of the medias’ collusion, we might speak of the embarrassing interview that journalist Manel Fuentes gave the economist Vicenç Navarro on Catalanian radio on September 7th, 2011: <http://www.catradio.cat/audio/562842/Entrevista-a-Vicenc-Navarro>

I would like to take advantage of this note to show my gratitude for all I have learnt during the last months from books such as those by Isidro López and Emmanuel Rodríguez (2010): *Fin de siglo* (Traficantes de Sueños, Madrid) or Observatorio Metropolitano (2011): *La crisis que viene* (Traficantes de Sueños, Madrid), as well as the debates at the Taifa Seminar of Critical Economics. And a special thank you to Miren Etxezarreta and Vicenç Navarro, for your lucidity and your time.

4 Pasolini, Pier Paolo (2009): “El genocidio”, en *Escritos Corsarios*. Ediciones del Oriente

y del Mediterráneo, Madrid, p. 271. Our translation.

5 See the writings of Mitropoulos, Angela (2005): “Precari-Us?”; available at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0704/mitropoulos/en> and http://www.republicart.net/disc/precariat/mitropoulos01_en.htm;

Mbembe, Achille (2003): “Necropolitics”. *Public Culture*, vol. 15, nº 1, pp. 11-40;

Grzanic, Marina (2009): “From Biopolitics to Necropolitics”, at <http://www.tkh-generator.net/openedsources/from-biopolitics-to-necropolitics>

6 See Galcerán, Montserrat: “Reinventando la política: 15-M”. *Diagonal*, 28-IX-2011; available at <http://www.diagonalperiodico.net/Reinventando-la-politica-15M.html>

7 Fragment of text by the UniNomade collective (2011): “Class Composition and the Organization of the Common” available at <http://uninomade.org/class-composition/>

8 See Florida, Richard (2002): *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Basic Books, New York.

9 Carrillo, Jesús (2009): “Las nuevas fábricas de la cultura: los lugares de la creación y la producción cultural en la España contemporánea” (New culture factories: sites of creation and cultural production in contemporary Spain), available at http://www.ypsite.net/recursos/biblioteca/documentos/Jesus_Carrillo_nuevas_fabricas_de_la_cultura.pdf.

10 See Ruido, María: “Mamá, quiero ser artista!” (Mum, I want to be an artist!) (2004), in Precarias a la Deriva (eds.): *A la deriva por los circuitos de la precariedad femenina*. A la derive in the circuits of feminine precarity. Traficantes de Sueños, Madrid; also available at <http://www.workandwords.net/es/texts/view/497>

11 Taken from text written as part of “El incremento”, an art and publishing project by Marta de Gonzalo and Publio Pérez Prieto, published by Fundació Espais de Girona en

2004. Our translation.

12 See Ruido, María - Rowan, Jaron (2007): “In the mood for work. ¿Puede la representación alterar los procesos de valorización del trabajo cultural?” (Can representation alter the evaluation processes applied to cultural work?), in *Producta 50*, CASM/Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona; also available at <http://www.workandwords.net/es/texts/view/500>

13 “Manifiesto global de las universidades nómadas: Revolución 2.0” (Nomad Universities’ Global manifesto: Revolution 2) (2011), available at <http://www.universidadnomada.net/spip.php?article375> Our translation.

14 Read about these collectives and projects at:

www.sindominio.net/karakola/antigua_casa/precarias.htm;

<http://carrotworkers.wordpress.com/>;

<http://precariousworkersbrigade.tumblr.com/>

15 See Lazzarato, Maurizio (2007): “The Misfortunes of the “Artistic Critique” and of Cultural Employment”, available at

<http://roundtable.kein.org/http://%252Feipcp.net/transversal/0207/lazzarato/en>

16 On the wave of cultural production outside ethno-hegemonic culture, see, for example, Lenore, Víctor - López, Isidro (2011): “Ecos del gueto”, in which he analyzes the case of world music. *Diagonal*, 9-IX-2011; available at <http://www.diagonalperiodico.net/Ecoos-del-gueto.html>

17 Corsani, Antonella (2006): “Knowledge production and new forms of political action.

The experience of the intermittent workers in France”, available at

<http://eipcp.net/transversal/0406/corsani/en>

18 Federici, Silvia (2010): “Precarious Labor: A Feminist Viewpoint”, available at

<http://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/precarious-labor-a-feminist-viewpoint/>

19 Rancière, Jacques (2008): “Misadventures in critical thinking”, in *The Emancipated Spectator*. Verso.

20 Kleinhans, Chuck (2011): “‘Creative industries’, neoliberal fantasies, and the cold, hard facts of global recession: some basic lessons”. *Jump Cut*. A review of contemporary media, n° 53; available at <http://www.ejumpcut.org/currentissue/kleinhans-creatIndus/index.html>