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Immaterial Labor

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A significant amount of empirical research has been conducted concerning the new forms of the organization of work. This, combined with a corresponding wealth of theoretical reflection, has made possible the identification of a new conception of what work is nowadays and what new power relations it implies.

An initial synthesis of these results—framed in terms of an attempt to define the technical and subjective-political composition of the working class—can be expressed in the concept of *immaterial labor*, which is defined as the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity. The concept of immaterial labor refers to *two different aspects* of labor. On the one hand, as regards the "informational content" of the commodity, it refers directly to the changes taking place in workers' labor processes in big companies in the industrial and tertiary sectors, where the skills involved in direct labor are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control (and horizontal and vertical communication). On the other hand, as regards the activity that produces the "cultural content" of the commodity, immaterial labor involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as "work"—in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion. Once the privileged domain of the bourgeoisie and its children, these activities have since the end of the 1970s become the

domain of what we have come to define as "mass intellectuality." The profound changes in these strategic sectors have radically modified not only the composition, management, and regulation of the workforce—the organization of production—but also, and more deeply, the role and function of intellectuals and their activities within society.

The "great transformation" that began at the start of the 1970s has changed the very terms in which the question is posed. Manual labor is increasingly coming to involve procedures that could be defined as "intellectual," and the new communications technologies increasingly require subjectivities that are rich in knowledge. It is not simply that intellectual labor has become subjected to the norms of capitalist production. What has happened is that a new "mass intellectuality" has come into being, created out of a combination of the demands of capitalist production and the forms of "self-valorization" that the struggle against work has produced. The old dichotomy between "mental and manual labor," or between "material labor and immaterial labor," risks failing to grasp the new nature of productive activity, which takes this separation on board and transforms it. The split between conception and execution, between labor and creativity, between author and audience, is simultaneously transcended within the "labor process" and reimposed as political command within the "process of valorization."

The Restructured Worker

Twenty years of restructuring of the big factories has led to a curious paradox. The various different post-Fordist models have been constructed both on the defeat of the Fordist worker and on the recognition of the centrality of (an ever increasingly intellectualized) living labor within production. In today's large restructured company, a worker's work increasingly involves, at various levels, an ability to choose among different alternatives and thus a degree of responsibility regarding decision making. The concept of "interface" used by communications sociologists provides a fair definition of the activities of this kind of worker—as an interface between different functions, between different work teams, between different levels of the hierarchy, and so forth. What modern management techniques are looking for is for "the worker's soul to become part of the factory." The worker's personality and subjectivity have to be made susceptible to organization and command. It is around immateriality that the quality and quantity of labor are organized. This transformation of working-class labor into a labor of control, of handling information, into a decision-making capacity that involves the investment of subjectivity, affects workers in varying ways according to their positions within the factory hierarchy, but it

is nevertheless present as an irreversible process. Work can thus be defined as the capacity to activate and manage productive cooperation. In this phase, workers are expected to become "active subjects" in the coordination of the various functions of production, instead of being subjected to it as simple command. We arrive at a point where a collective learning process becomes the heart of productivity, because it is no longer a matter of finding different ways of composing or organizing already existing job functions, but of looking for new ones.

The problem, however, of subjectivity and its collective form, its constitution and its development, has immediately expressed itself as a clash between social classes within the organization of work. I should point out that what I am describing is not some utopian vision of recomposition, but the very real terrain and conditions of the conflict between social classes.

The capitalist needs to find an unmediated way of establishing command over subjectivity itself; the prescription and definition of tasks transforms into a prescription of subjectivities. The new slogan of Western societies is that we should all "become subjects." Participative management is a technology of power, a technology for creating and controlling the "subjective processes." As it is no longer possible to confine subjectivity merely to tasks of execution, it becomes necessary for the subject's competence in the areas of management, communication, and creativity to be made compatible with the conditions of "production for production's sake." Thus the slogan "become subjects," far from eliminating the antagonism between hierarchy and cooperation, between autonomy and command, actually re-poses the antagonism at a higher level, because it both mobilizes and clashes with the very personality of the individual worker. First and foremost, we have here a discourse that is authoritarian: one *has to* express oneself, one *has to* speak, communicate, cooperate, and so forth. The "tone" is that of the people who were in executive command under Taylorization; all that has changed is the content. Second, if it is no longer possible to lay down and specify jobs and responsibilities rigidly (in the way that was once done with "scientific" studies of work), but if, on the contrary, jobs now require cooperation and collective coordination, then the subjects of that production must be capable of communication—they must be active participants within a work team. The communicational relationship (both vertically and horizontally) is thus completely predetermined in both form and content; it is subordinated to the "circulation of information" and is not expected to be anything other. The subject becomes a simple relayer of codification and decodification, whose transmitted messages must be "clear and free of ambiguity," within a communications context that has been completely normalized by management. The

necessity of imposing command and the violence that goes along with it here take on a normative communicative form.

The management mandate to "become subjects of communication" threatens to be even more totalitarian than the earlier rigid division between mental and manual labor (ideas and execution), because capitalism seeks to involve even the worker's personality and subjectivity within the production of value. Capital wants a situation where command resides within the subject him- or herself, and within the communicative process. The worker is to be responsible for his or her own control and motivation within the work group without a foreman needing to intervene, and the foreman's role is redefined into that of a facilitator. In fact, employers are extremely worried by the double problem this creates: on one hand, they are forced to recognize the autonomy and freedom of labor as the only possible form of cooperation in production, but on the other hand, at the same time, they are obliged (a life-and-death necessity for the capitalist) not to "redistribute" the power that the new quality of labor and its organization imply. Today's management thinking takes workers' subjectivity into consideration only in order to codify it in line with the requirements of production. And once again this phase of transformation succeeds in concealing the fact that the individual and collective interests of workers and those of the company are not identical.

I have defined working-class labor as an abstract activity that nowadays involves the application of subjectivity. In order to avoid misunderstandings, however, I should add that this form of productive activity is not limited only to highly skilled workers; it refers to a use value of labor power today, and, more generally, to the form of activity of every productive subject within postindustrial society. One could say that in the highly skilled, qualified worker, the "communicational model" is already given, already constituted, and that its potentialities are already defined. In the young worker, however, the "precarious" worker, and the unemployed youth, we are dealing with a pure virtuality, a capacity that is as yet undetermined but that already shares all the characteristics of postindustrial productive subjectivity. The virtuality of this capacity is neither empty nor ahistoric; it is, rather, an opening and a potentiality that have as their historical origins and antecedents the "struggle against work" of the Fordist worker and, in more recent times, the processes of socialization, educational formation, and cultural self-valorization.

This transformation of the world of work appears even more evident when one studies the social cycle of production: the "diffuse factory" and decentralization of production on the one hand and the various forms of tertiariza-

tion on the other. Here one can measure the extent to which the cycle of immaterial labor has come to assume a strategic role within the global organization of production. The various activities of research, conceptualization, management of human resources, and so forth, together with all the various tertiary activities, are organized within computerized and multimedia networks. These are the terms in which we have to understand the cycle of production and the organization of labor. The integration of scientific labor into industrial and tertiary labor has become one of the principal sources of productivity, and it is becoming a growing factor in the cycles of production that organize it.

"Immaterial Labor" in the Classic Definition

All the characteristics of the postindustrial economy (both in industry and society as a whole) are highly present within the classic forms of "immaterial" production: audiovisual production, advertising, fashion, the production of software, photography, cultural activities, and so forth. The activities of this kind of immaterial labor force us to question the classic definitions of *work* and *workforce*, because they combine the results of various different types of work skill: intellectual skills, as regards the cultural-informational content; manual skills for the ability to combine creativity, imagination, and technical and manual labor; and entrepreneurial skills in the management of social relations and the structuring of that social cooperation of which they are a part. This immaterial labor constitutes itself in forms that are immediately collective, and we might say that it exists only in the form of networks and flows. The organization of the cycle of production of immaterial labor (because this is exactly what it is, once we abandon our factoryist prejudices—a cycle of production) is not obviously apparent to the eye, because it is not defined by the four walls of a factory. The location in which it operates is outside in the society at large, at a territorial level that we could call "the basin of immaterial labor." Small and sometimes very small "productive units" (often consisting of only one individual) are organized for specific ad hoc projects, and may exist only for the duration of those particular jobs. The cycle of production comes into operation only when it is required by the capitalist; once the job has been done, the cycle dissolves back into the networks and flows that make possible the reproduction and enrichment of its productive capacities. Precariousness, hyperexploitation, mobility, and hierarchy are the most obvious characteristics of metropolitan immaterial labor. Behind the label of the independent "self-employed" worker, what we actually find is an intellectual proletarian, but who is recognized as such only by the employers who exploit him

or her. It is worth noting that in this kind of working existence it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish leisure time from work time. In a sense, life becomes inseparable from work.

This labor form is also characterized by real managerial functions that consist in (1) a certain ability to manage its social relations and (2) the eliciting of social cooperation within the structures of the basin of immaterial labor. The quality of this kind of labor power is thus defined not only by its professional capacities (which make possible the construction of the cultural-informational content of the commodity), but also by its ability to "manage" its own activity and act as the coordinator of the immaterial labor of others (production and management of the cycle). This immaterial labor appears as a real mutation of "living labor." Here we are quite far from the Taylorist model of organization.

Immaterial labor finds itself at the crossroads (or rather, it is the interface) of a new relationship between production and consumption. The activation of both productive cooperation and the social relationship with the consumer is materialized within and by the process of communication. The role of immaterial labor is to promote continual innovation in the forms and conditions of communication (and thus in work and consumption). It gives form to and materializes needs, the imaginary, consumer tastes, and so forth, and these products in turn become powerful producers of needs, images, and tastes. The particularity of the commodity produced through immaterial labor (its essential use value being given by its value as informational and cultural content) consists in the fact that it is not destroyed in the act of consumption, but rather it enlarges, transforms, and creates the "ideological" and cultural environment of the consumer. This commodity does not produce the physical capacity of labor power; instead, it transforms the person who uses it. Immaterial labor produces first and foremost a "social relationship" (a relationship of innovation, production, and consumption). Only if it succeeds in this production does its activity have an economic value. This activity makes immediately apparent something that material production had "hidden," namely, that labor produces not only commodities, but first and foremost it produces the capital relation.

The Autonomy of the Productive Synergies of Immaterial Labor

My working hypothesis, then, is that the cycle of immaterial labor takes as its starting point a social labor power that is independent and able to organize both its own work and its relations with business entities. Industry does not form or create this new labor power, but simply takes it on board and adapts it. Industry's control

over this new labor power presupposes the independent organization and "free entrepreneurial activity" of the labor power. Advancing further on this terrain brings us into the debate on the nature of work in the post-Fordist phase of the organization of labor. Among economists, the predominant view of this problematic can be expressed in a single statement: immaterial labor operates within the forms of organization that the centralization of industry allows. Moving from this common basis, there are two differing schools of thought: one is the extension of neoclassical analysis; the other is that of systems theory.

In the former, the attempt to solve the problem comes through a redefinition of the problematic of the market. It is suggested that in order to explain the phenomena of communication and the new dimensions of organization one should introduce not only cooperation and intensity of labor, but also other analytic variables (anthropological variables? immaterial variables?) and that on this basis one might introduce other objectives of optimization and so forth. In fact, the neoclassical model has considerable difficulty in freeing itself from the coherence constraints imposed by the theory of general equilibrium. The new phenomenologies of labor, the new dimensions of organization, communication, the potentiality of spontaneous synergies, the autonomy of the subjects involved, and the independence of the networks were neither foreseen nor foreseeable by a general theory that believed that material labor and an industrial economy were indispensable. Today, with the new data available, we find the microeconomy in revolt against the macroeconomy, and the classical model is corroded by a new and irreducible anthropological reality.

Systems theory, by eliminating the constraint of the market and giving pride of place to organization, is more open to the new phenomenology of labor and in particular to the emergence of immaterial labor. In more developed systemic theories, organization is conceived as an ensemble of factors, both material and immaterial, both individual and collective, that can permit a given group to reach objectives. The success of this organizational process requires instruments of regulation, either voluntary or automatic. It becomes possible to look at things from the point of view of social synergies, and immaterial labor can be taken on board by virtue of its global efficacy. These viewpoints, however, are still tied to an image of the organization of work and its social territory within which effective activity from an economic viewpoint (in other words, the activity conforming to the objective) must inevitably be considered as a surplus in relation to collective cognitive mechanisms. Sociology and labor economics, being systemic disciplines, are both incapable of detaching themselves from this position.

I believe that an analysis of immaterial labor and a description of its organization can lead us beyond the presuppositions of business theory—whether in its neoclassical school or its systems theory school. It can lead us to define, at a territorial level, a space for a radical autonomy of the productive synergies of immaterial labor. We can thus move against the old schools of thought to establish, decisively, the viewpoint of an "anthropo-sociology" that is constitutive.

Once this viewpoint comes to dominate within social production, we find that we have an interruption in the continuity of models of production. By this I mean that, unlike the position held by many theoreticians of post-Fordism, I do not believe that this new labor power is merely functional to a new historical phase of capitalism and its processes of accumulation and reproduction. This labor power is the product of a "silent revolution" taking place within the anthropological realities of work and within the reconfiguration of its meanings. Waged labor and direct subjugation (to organization) no longer constitute the principal form of the contractual relationship between capitalist and worker. A polymorphous self-employed autonomous work has emerged as the dominant form, a kind of "intellectual worker" who is him- or herself an entrepreneur, inserted within a market that is constantly shifting and within networks that are changeable in time and space.

The Cycle of Immaterial Production

Up to this point I have been analyzing and constructing the concept of immaterial labor from a point of view that could be defined, so to speak, as "microeconomic." If now we consider immaterial labor within the globality of the production cycle, of which it is the strategic stage, we will be able to see a series of characteristics of post-Taylorist production that have not yet been taken into consideration.

I want to demonstrate in particular how the process of valorization tends to be identified with the process of the production of social communication and how the two stages (valorization and communication) immediately have a social and territorial dimension. The concept of immaterial labor presupposes and results in an enlargement of productive cooperation that even includes the production and reproduction of communication and hence of its most important contents: subjectivity. If Fordism integrated consumption into the cycle of the reproduction of capital, post-Fordism integrates communication into it. From a strictly economic point of view, the cycle of reproduction of immaterial labor dislocates the production-consumption relationship as it is defined as much by the "virtuous Keynesian circle" as by the Marxist reproduction schemes of the second volume of

Capital. Now, rather than speaking of the toppling of "supply and demand," we should speak about a redefinition of the production-consumption relationship. As we saw earlier, the consumer is inscribed in the manufacturing of the product from its conception. The consumer is no longer limited to consuming commodities (destroying them in the act of consumption). On the contrary, his or her consumption should be productive in accordance to the necessary conditions and the new products. Consumption is then first of all a consumption of information. Consumption is no longer only the "realization" of a product, but a real and proper social process that for the moment is defined with the term *communication.*

Large-Scale Industry and Services

To recognize the new characteristics of the production cycle of immaterial labor, we should compare it with the production of large-scale industry and services. If the cycle of immaterial production immediately demonstrates to us the secret of post-Taylorist production (that is to say, that social communication and the social relationship that constitutes it become productive), then it would be interesting to examine how these new social relationships innervate even industry and services, and how they oblige us to reformulate and reorganize even the classical forms of "production."

Large-Scale Industry

The postindustrial enterprise and economy are founded on the manipulation of information. Rather than ensuring (as nineteenth-century enterprises did) the surveillance of the inner workings of the production process and the supervision of the markets of raw materials (labor included), business is focused on the terrain outside of the production process: sales and the relationship with the consumer. It always leans more toward commercialization and financing than toward production. Prior to being manufactured, a product must be sold, even in "heavy" industries such as automobile manufacturing; a car is put into production only after the sales network orders it. This strategy is based on the production and consumption of information. It mobilizes important communication and marketing strategies in order to gather information (recognizing the tendencies of the market) and circulate it (constructing a market). In the Taylorist and Fordist systems of production, by introducing the mass consumption of standardized commodities, Ford could still say that the consumer has the choice between one black model T5 and another black model T5. "Today the standard commodity is no longer the recipe to success, and the automobile industry itself, which used to be the champion of the great 'low price' series, would want to boast about having become a neoindustry

of singularization"—and quality.[1] For the majority of businesses, survival involves the permanent search for new commercial openings that lead to the identification of always more ample or differentiated product lines. Innovation is no longer subordinated only to the rationalization of labor, but also to commercial imperatives. It seems, then, that the postindustrial commodity is the result of a creative process that involves both the producer and the consumer.

Services

If from industry proper we move on to the "services" sector (large banking services, insurance, and so forth), the characteristics of the process I have described appear even more clearly. We are witnessing today not really a growth of services, but rather a development of the "relations of service." The move beyond the Taylorist organization of services is characterized by the integration of the relationship between production and consumption, where in fact the consumer intervenes in an active way in the composition of the product. The product "service" becomes a social construction and a social process of "conception" and innovation. In service industries, the "back-office" tasks (the classic work of services) have diminished and the tasks of the "front office" (the relationship with clients) have grown. There has been thus a shift of human resources toward the outer part of business. As recent sociological analyses tell us, the more a product handled by the service sector is characterized as an immaterial product, the more it distances itself from the model of industrial organization of the relationship between production and consumption. The change in this relationship between production and consumption has direct consequences for the organization of the Taylorist labor of production of services, because it draws into question both the contents of labor and the division of labor (and thus the relationship between conception and execution loses its unilateral character). If the product is defined through the intervention of the consumer, and is therefore in permanent evolution, it becomes always more difficult to define the norms of the production of services and establish an "objective" measure of productivity.

Immaterial Labor

All of these characteristics of postindustrial economics (present both in large-scale industry and the tertiary sector) are accentuated in the form of properly "immaterial" production. Audiovisual production, advertising, fashion, software, the management of territory, and so forth are all defined by means of the particular relationship between production and its market or consumers. Here we are

at the furthest point from the Taylorist model. Immaterial labor continually creates and modifies the forms and conditions of communication, which in turn acts as the interface that negotiates the relationship between production and consumption. As I noted earlier, immaterial labor produces first and foremost a social relation—it produces not only commodities, but also the capital relation.

If production today is directly the production of a social relation, then the "raw material" of immaterial labor is subjectivity and the "ideological" environment in which this subjectivity lives and reproduces. The production of subjectivity ceases to be only an instrument of social control (for the reproduction of mercantile relationships) and becomes directly productive, because the goal of our postindustrial society is to construct the consumer/communicator—and to construct it as "active." Immaterial workers (those who work in advertising, fashion, marketing, television, cybernetics, and so forth) satisfy a demand by the consumer and at the same time establish that demand. The fact that immaterial labor produces subjectivity and economic value at the same time demonstrates how capitalist production has invaded our lives and has broken down all the oppositions among economy, power, and knowledge. The process of social communication (and its principal content, the production of subjectivity) becomes here directly productive because in a certain way it "produces" production. The process by which the "social" (and what is even more social, that is, language, communication, and so forth) becomes "economic" has not yet been sufficiently studied. In effect, on the one hand, we are familiar with an analysis of the production of subjectivity defined as the constitutive "process" specific to a "relation to the self" with respect to the forms of production particular to knowledge and power (as in a certain vein of poststructuralist French philosophy), but this analysis never intersects sufficiently with the forms of capitalist valorization. On the other hand, in the 1980s a network of economists and sociologists (and before them the Italian postworkerist tradition) developed an extensive analysis of the "social form of production," but that analysis does not integrate sufficiently the production of subjectivity as the content of valorization. Now, the post-Taylorist mode of production is defined precisely by putting subjectivity to work both in the activation of productive cooperation and in the production of the "cultural" contents of commodities.

The Aesthetic Model

But how is the production process of social communication formed? How does the production of subjectivity take place within this process? How does the production of subjectivity become the production of the consumer/communicator and its capac-

ities to consume and communicate? What role does immaterial labor have in this process? As I have already said, my hypothesis is this: *the process of the production of communication tends to become immediately the process of valorization.* If in the past communication was organized fundamentally by means of language and the institutions of ideological and literary/artistic production, today, because it is invested with industrial production, communication is reproduced by means of specific technological schemes (knowledge, thought, image, sound, and language reproduction technologies) and by means of forms of organization and "management" that are bearers of a new mode of production.

It is more useful, in attempting to grasp the process of the formation of social communication and its subsumption within the "economic," to use, rather than the "material" model of production, the "aesthetic" model that involves author, reproduction, and reception. This model reveals aspects that traditional economic categories tend to obscure and that, as I will show, constitute the "specific differences" of the post-Taylorist means of production.[2] The "aesthetic/ideological" model of production will be transformed into a small-scale sociological model with all the limits and difficulties that such a sociological transformation brings. The model of author, reproduction, and reception requires a double transformation: in the first place, the three stages of this creation process must be immediately characterized by their social form; in the second place, the three stages must be understood as the articulations of an actual productive cycle.[3]

The "author" must lose its individual dimension and be transformed into an industrially organized production process (with a division of labor, investments, orders, and so forth), "reproduction" becomes a mass reproduction organized according to the imperatives of profitability, and the audience ("reception") tends to become the consumer/communicator. In this process of socialization and subsumption within the economy of intellectual activity the "ideological" product tends to assume the form of a commodity. I should emphasize, however, that the subsumption of this process under capitalist logic and the transformation of its products into commodities does not abolish the specificity of aesthetic production, that is to say, the creative relationship between author and audience.

The Specific Differences of the Immaterial Labor Cycle

Allow me to underline briefly the *specific differences* of the "stages" that make up the production cycle of immaterial labor (immaterial labor itself, its "ideological/commodity products," and the "public/consumer") in relation to the classical forms of the reproduction of "capital."

As far as immaterial labor being an "author" is concerned, it is necessary to emphasize *the radical autonomy of its productive synergies.* As we have seen, immaterial labor forces us to question the classical definitions of *work* and *workforce,* because it results from a synthesis of different types of know-how: intellectual skills, manual skills, and entrepreneurial skills. Immaterial labor constitutes itself in immediately collective forms that exist as networks and flows. The subjugation of this form of cooperation and the "use value" of these skills to capitalist logic does not take away the autonomy of the constitution and meaning of immaterial labor. On the contrary, it opens up antagonisms and contradictions that, to use once again a Marxist formula, demand at least a "new form of exposition."

The "ideological product" becomes in every respect a commodity. The term *ideological* does not characterize the product as a "reflection" of reality, as false or true consciousness of reality. Ideological products produce, on the contrary, new stratifications of reality; they are the intersection where human power, knowledge, and action meet. New modes of seeing and knowing demand new technologies, and new technologies demand new forms of seeing and knowing. These ideological products are completely internal to the processes of the formation of social communication; that is, they are at once the results and the prerequisites of these processes. The ensemble of ideological products constitutes the human ideological environment. Ideological products are transformed into commodities without ever losing their specificity; that is, *they are always addressed to someone, they are "ideally signifying,"* and thus they pose the problem of "meaning."

The general public tends to become the model for the consumer (audience/client). The public (in the sense of the user—the reader, the music listener, the television audience) whom the author addresses has as such a double productive function. In the first place, as the addressee of the ideological product, the public is a constitutive element of the production process. In the second place, the public is productive by means of the reception that gives the product "a place in life" (in other words, integrates it into social communication) and allows it to live and evolve. *Reception is thus, from this point of view, a creative act* and an integrative part of the product. The transformation of the product into a commodity cannot abolish this double process of "creativity"; it must rather assume it as it is, and attempt to control it and subordinate it to its own values.

What the transformation of the product into a commodity cannot remove, then, is the *character of event,* the open process of creation that is established between immaterial labor and the public and organized by communication. If the innovation in immaterial production is introduced by this open process of

creation, the entrepreneur, in order to further consumption and its perpetual renewal, will be constrained to draw from the "values" that the public/consumer produces. These values presuppose the modes of being, modes of existing, and forms of life that support them. From these considerations there emerge two principal consequences. First, values are "put to work." The transformation of the ideological product into a commodity distorts or deflects the social imaginary that is produced in the forms of life, but at the same time, commodity production must recognize itself as powerless as far as its own production is concerned. The second consequence is that the forms of life (in their collective and cooperative forms) are now the source of innovation.

The analysis of the different "stages" of the cycle of immaterial labor permits me to advance the hypothesis that what is "productive" is the whole of the social relation (here represented by the author-work-audience relationship) according to modalities that directly bring into play the "meaning." The specificity of this type of production not only leaves its imprint on the "form" of the process of production by establishing a new relationship between production and consumption, but it also poses a problem of legitimacy for the capitalist appropriation of this process. This cooperation can in no case be predetermined by economics, because it deals with the very life of society. "Economics" can only appropriate the forms and products of this cooperation, normalizing and standardizing them. The creative and innovative elements are tightly linked to the values that only the forms of life produce. Creativity and productivity in postindustrial societies reside, on the one hand, in the dialectic between the forms of life and values they produce and, on the other, in the activities of subjects that constitute them. The legitimation that the (Schumpeterian) entrepreneur found in his or her capacity for innovation has lost its foundation. Because the capitalist entrepreneur does not produce the forms and contents of immaterial labor, he or she does not even produce innovation. For economics there remains only the possibility of managing and regulating the activity of immaterial labor and creating some devices for the control and creation of the public/consumer by means of the control of communication and information technologies and their organizational processes.

Creation and Intellectual Labor

These brief considerations permit us to begin questioning the model of creation and diffusion specific to intellectual labor and to get beyond the concept of creativity as an expression of "individuality" or as the patrimony of the "superior" classes. The works of Simmel and Bakhtin, conceived in a time when immaterial production

had just begun to become "productive," present us with two completely different ways of posing the relationship between immaterial labor and society. The first, Simmel's, remain completely invested in the division between manual labor and intellectual labor and give us a theory of the creativity of intellectual labor. The second, Bakhtin's, in refusing to accept the capitalist division of labor as a given, elaborate a theory of social creativity. Simmel, in effect, explains the function of "fashion" by means of the phenomenon of imitation or distinction as regulated and commanded by class relationships. Thus the superior levels of the middle classes are the ones that create fashion, and the lower classes attempt to imitate them. Fashion here functions like a barrier that incessantly comes up because it is incessantly battered down. What is interesting for this discussion is that, according to this conception, the immaterial labor of creation is limited to a specific social group and is not diffused except through imitation. At a deeper level, this model accepts the division of labor founded on the opposition between manual and intellectual labor that has as its end the regulation and "mystification" of the social process of creation and innovation. If this model had some probability of corresponding to the dynamics of the market of immaterial labor at the moment of the birth of mass consumption (whose effects Simmel very intelligently anticipates), it could not be utilized to account for the relationship between immaterial labor and consumer-public in postindustrial society. Bakhtin, on the contrary, defines immaterial labor as the superseding of the division between "material labor and intellectual labor" and demonstrates how creativity is a social process. In fact, the work on "aesthetic production" of Bakhtin and the rest of the Leningrad circle has this same social focus. This is the line of investigation that seems most promising for developing a theory of the social cycle of immaterial production.

Translated by Paul Colilli and Ed Emory

Notes

1. Yves Clot, "Renouveau de l'industrialisme et activité philosophique," *Futur antérieur*, no. 10 (1992): 22.

2. Both the creative and the social elements of this production encourage me to venture the use of the "aesthetic model." It is interesting to see how one could arrive at this new concept of labor by starting either from artistic activity (following the situationists) or from the traditional activity of the factory (following Italian workerist theories), both relying on the very Marxist concept of "living labor."

3. Walter Benjamin has already analyzed how since the end of the nineteenth century both artistic production and reproduction, along with its perception, have assumed collective forms. I cannot pause here to consider his works, but they are certainly fundamental for any genealogy of immaterial labor and its forms of reproduction.