

LE VITE

Via Privata Don Bartolomeo Grazioli 49, IT 20161 Milan

Opening hours: Thursday-Saturday 12.00-6.00 pm

mail@levite.it

Gianluca Belloni

1.182,5 kW h

September 20, 2019

1. STRUGGLING AGAINST THEMSELVES¹

In the chapter “*The Struggle against Labour!*” included in *Workers and Capital* written in 1966, Mario Tronti reiterates from the beginning that one speaks of “labour” as a class that is a component of capital, as an individual that is part of the system. By considering this person as a producer, no longer for the labour contained within the produced goods, but rather for the labour they contain in themselves as a workforce.

This paradigm explains how at the time “being inside” represented, an extreme form of productivity that was reached through the capitalist system. The strikes and the collective abstention from work testify to this, in the fact that the individual worker recognized himself as a source of energy, useful to the functioning of “the machine” and to the maintenance of its structure. Understanding the impossibility of separating yourself from your work, going on strike meant to “deny yourself” and “to set yourself aside”. Production was equivalent to “participating in the construction of history”.

This concerns a form of production that occurs through human existence, in the same moment a role is assumed within that framework. The “human essence” itself was identified as a product of work and therefore with being an immanent part of the working world. Capitalist production moved ahead through a precise idea of development that was supported by binary oppositions, dictated by dualism. From science to industry, from geography to art, production increased out of a dialectical tension between the outside and the inside, the old and the new, the advanced and the obsolete and between what already existed and what had yet to be created. Human energy and resources were employed, invested in and exploited, in order for these manufacturing processes to take the next step and surpass what already existed.

With its vivid forms of representation, intermediate figures and national identities, this development gave way to an increasing social enrichment, an advancement of civilization. Modernity became the vessel in which these aims accumulated and contributed decisively to Western identity. It didn’t present a peaceful reality, but instead became the cornerstone on which the creation of a monopoly and cultural sovereignty were built. Considering that a large part of that modernity had been constructed by taking advantage of individuals, inside and outside its boundaries. Thus, the phenomenon of the strike represents not only the abstention of people from work, but the abstention of people from the production of history. This was the leading motive that brought to the exploitation of people for progress and the creation of an institutional identity placed above the single individual. These forms of opposition and revolt arose from the widespread feeling that production meant working hard and making unprecedented sacrifices for the interests of others. What is exploitation if not this? What does it constitute from the worker, if not to remove the property in his own work, to subordinate him and place him at the service of someone else who is not himself?

These men and women cultivated the idea that nothing could remain in their hands; since it wasn’t theirs, nothing they produced would give them improvement. Alienation is the result of this relationship or rather this non-relationship, in which the things that should have belonged to them were taken away.

Since the late seventies Francesco Matarrese (Molfetta, 1950) has been in “the struggle against himself³”. In art, he has shown to be one of the clearest examples in the transition from work (artwork/commodity) to workforce, (artist/worker). His research represents the highest form of expressing “non-participation” as an action, recognized as a productive presence inside a totality. His refusal became famous with the “Telegram of Rejection” in 1978 and was made visible thanks to that dialectical tension between inside and outside we discussed before. His not being there is a linguistic action, a form of productive living (“a way to give, without giving”), alternative to the one imposed as the only one.

The “struggle against themselves” mentioned by Matarrese in the publication “Greenberg and Tronti: Being Really Outside?” proposed for the occasion of Documenta 13, can be paraphrased as “working on something that is totally of one’s own”. Being that the idea of “themselves” they struggle against, indicates something that is not theirs, something they aren’t allowed to belong to.

The resistance in his refusal opens up and constitutes a totally partial dimension, a “partial absolute truth”. The energy that was extracted from us, to feed that authoritarian, institutional identity, that is “absolute in general” and placed above the individual, is diverted towards oneself.

2. “NOT” STRUGGLING FOR THEMSELVES

The completion of modernization affirms an end to binary oppositions, or for the most part they become weaker. In terms of production, modernity’s conclusion coincides with the transition from a qualitative dialectic to a quantitative one.

In a similar way, development was acknowledged in terms of “increasing what already exists as much as possible”, abandoning a form of renewal that characterized the exchange between old/new and existent/non-existent. A uniform surface, free of dualistic division, substitutes the enclosed spaces of modern life. There no longer appear to be borders, because everything is re-connected to the singularity of the individual. It goes without saying that under these terms, the effort put

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in accumulating has even more obvious results. The energy that is produced is then stored privately, to make use of it and recapitalize on it, to be able to produce more. As a result, for this type of production to have effect, it must remain in the hands of the producer since it is implied that production and accumulation are both consequences of the other. In terms of quantity, development is reached through an individual monopoly created on manufactured goods, its counterpart being the negation of something else through calculated sacrifice. In this way, isolation becomes a condition necessary for production and is expressed not only in a lack of participation in society but in the exclusion from society. This is an affirmative fact, not a negative one. This exclusion doesn't just happen, but is instead caused by relational actions, that enforce this elimination with the interest to maintain certain standards.

Representative structures disappear. The idea of unity constructed by "the people" - an actively present reality in the modern age - leaves the scene. The collective identity fades into the very misleading concept of "the masses". Representing a reality in which the main forms of association and of identification, through character and function are increasingly less visible and less relevant: meanwhile, individual characterization prevails, in the comparison of a single individual next to another single individual. In each of its manifestations there is a totalitarian mindset: to be however you are, for yourself and that's it⁴. This explains the extreme difficulty in seeing yourself in others, not due to immeasurable differences but because of the fear of being consumed and of losing a bit of what's yours.

Thereby, if alienation was previously the result of having goods taken away, including the impossibility that man could claim his own worth, then what now stands before us, seems to be the other side of the same coin. Alienation is no longer found in the relationship between man and what he has been deprived of, but rather in the relation between what he has and what he can't have. In the relation to a domain, a sense of ownership that seems to be inherent to his spirit. Today, alienation is demonstrated in the impossibility of not having any forms of ownership, in the overwhelming voice that says "everything I do and everything I am, can only be mine and it can only ever stay inside me and over my head". A practice that can't be freed from a sense of entitlement. This state of being occurs inside a closed-loop, with no external outlets, contributing to the superfluous, sterile and self-referential attitudes concerning the production process and our relations to others.

The "struggle against themselves" we spoke about, can only be applied when read in different terms. If at the beginning it indicated something that "wasn't their own", now this entity belongs to us and it lives in us. This means enacting a calculated sacrifice in regards to yourself and in regards to what is yours. To "struggle against yourself" can also be described as "not struggling for yourself" or "not working for yourself". In no way does this mean having to adopt extreme moralistic views, it instead implies thinking about ways of life - "forms of human life that are devoid of any sense of property, in which any claim of appropriation, in the use of our bodies and of the world, couldn't be substantiated. It means thinking about life only in terms of the common use of things, without defining them as property."

An exercise like this requires a theoretical understanding of usage, starting from a natural state, when things were shared among people and not just the habit to possess them. Property should be managed with a spirit capable of refusing a sense of domain, through a relation to things that shows no intention of acquiring ownership. By limiting our interpretation of usage within the moment of use and not in the right to use."⁵

A strong willpower is necessary to avoid "the alienation of language, that relies on the deceitfulness of an individual's word. Since it is clear that an individual aspect is determined by the fact that it is the speaker who puts the word back in function. The effort that the single speaker applies can be considered individual, in the same way that the work of a single craftsman can also be considered so. The craftsman produces a pair of shoes by reapplying a design to the materials and without a doubt his tools and his environment have social significance. The work process, his work process is individual because it's considered individually but the model that the work process follows is, and remains of social value."⁶

¹ Francesco Matarrese, "Struggling against Themsehves" in *Greenberg and Tronti: Being Really Outside?*, Hatje Cantz, Berlin 2012, pp.4

² Mario Tronti, "The Struggle against Labour!" in *Workers and Capital*, Giulio Einaudi Editore, Torino 1971, pp. 259

³ Matarrese, *op. cit.*, pp.4

⁴ Alberto Asor Rosa, "The people dissolved in the mass" in "La Repubblica", Milano, 5 Aprile 2018. Press

⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, Neri Pozza Editore, Vicenza 2011

⁶ Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, *Language As Work and Trade*, Bompiani, Milano, 1968