

Art and government of life: human capital and self-invention within artistic and cultural fields^a

Arte e governo da vida: capital humano e invenção de si nos circuitos artísticos e culturais

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses artistic work based on the concepts of self-invention and governmentality analyzed by Foucault, Veyne and Bennett. Life, in liberal rationalities, is understood as a field of government and as a capital. Artists invest their lives, perceptions and feelings in their artworks. Such interest, however, may lead to identity politics. To avoid the fragmentation of the cultural field, the arts must be considered in their power relations and historical contingencies; understood as public and common goods that manifest more than mere capital but the human power of invention. However, the transformation of cultural habits is a long-term task that involves the State, the private initiative, and the civil society.

Keywords: Art, culture, self-invention, biopolitics

RESUMO

O artigo discorre sobre o trabalho artístico a partir dos conceitos de invenção de si e governamentalidade, analisados por Foucault, Veyne e Bennett. Nas racionalidades liberais, a vida é tomada como campo de governo e como capital. O artista investe sua vida, suas percepções e afetos na criação das obras. Mas esse interesse também pode conduzir a políticas identitárias. Para evitar que o campo se fragmente, as artes devem ser compreendidas, em suas relações de força e contingências históricas, como bens públicos e comuns, que manifestam, mais do que um capital, a potência humana de invenção. Contudo, transformar hábitos culturais é tarefa de longo prazo, que envolve o Estado, a iniciativa privada e a sociedade civil.

Palavras-chave: Arte, cultura, invenção de si, biopolítica

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REMBRANDT'S BRAND

IN 1641, THE Englishman John Evelyn (2015) recorded in his diary the impressions of a trip through Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The first memorable fact was his tour on a marketplace full of paintings (especially landscapes) and depictions of clowns or buffoons. The author says that the paintings for sale were cheap and that there was a high demand for goods, which he calls “commodities”: it was common to find a large amount of paintings in farmers’ houses, and artists made a considerable profit with their sale.

Shortly thereafter, in 1662, French historian Jean-Nicolas de Parival (as quoted in Zumthor, 1989) wrote in *Les délices de la Hollande* that perhaps there were not in “any country in the world. . . so many excellent pictures” (p. 238). Indeed, an important generation of painters lived at that time and place: Van Goyen, Rembrandt, Van Ostade, Vermeer, among others. The canvases were, to the Dutch, like furniture that covered the empty walls of houses, and their affordable prices made it possible for anyone, even peasants, to purchase them. For Zumthor (1989), in the eyes of the country’s bourgeoisie, the painter was a *supplier* like any other. For this reason, patronage was unusual: canvases were ordered and paid for or sold at fairs and markets by traders and middlemen. The painters integrated the social order without major conflicts, so that the image of the misunderstood artist or obstinate by originality made no sense:

Painters had their own guild, and membership was acquired by the usual process: the apprentice cleaned the master’s brushes and swept his studio; as a journeyman he had the chance to sketch in the backgrounds of the master’s canvases, to paint subsidiary figures and to execute work on the basis of the master’s sketches. When he at last became a master, he was subject to the usual laws of supply and demand, and his work as such was not deemed worthy of any particular consideration or honor (Zumthor, 1989, p. 240).

Amid this scenario, one artist stood out: Rembrandt. For the art historian Svetlana Alpers (2010), the painter knew how to take advantage, like few, of the characteristics of the capitalist system which was already emerging in the country. Instead of selling his works directly, he circulated papers that represented them, working like a credit and fund-raising system through borrowing, just as the financial market works today. However, his largest secret laid in technique: instead of the smooth finish of the paintings of the time, he preferred to make the brush strokes visible. More than a matter of

style, for Alpers, this was a way of transferring to the painter himself the decision about finishing the work. Since, at the time, it was common for the price of paintings to be calculated over the time needed to produce them, if the finishing was at the criterion of the artist, then he would define the value of the work. From the peculiar treatment of ink and the use of his signature as a trademark, Rembrandt distinguished his paintings from serialized goods and created a special object with an *aura* of individuality and therefore a high value¹. This tendency pointed to a still current issue: the fusion between work of art and artist.

To write her book, Alpers (2010) started from news that spread in the newspapers in 1985: experts had concluded that the painting *The man with the golden helmet* had not been painted by Rembrandt himself but by one of his students or assistants. The work, which for centuries had been canonical of the Dutch master, suddenly could no longer be attributed to any painter. Of course, this does not diminish its artistic qualities but it causes a great embarrassment: how to define the value of a work that has no known author? Alpers (2010) wonders if there really was anything special about Rembrandt that would set him apart from the artists of his day. The answer is positive, but it is not restricted to the painter's genius. After all, the story behind *The man with the golden helmet* had already shown that other artists were equally talented. But Alpers (2010) do not disregard Rembrandt's importance. With increasingly in-depth studies on art history, we are faced with a growing number of works that would be inconceivable without him. What happened was that Rembrandt endowed the painting with an individual character, leading other artists to wish to impersonate him. As Picasso was to do some centuries later, the Dutch painter "moved away from depicting actions to offer the act of painting itself as the performance we view." Both aim to "capture the substance of the model before them" (Alpers, 2010, p. 89):

But despite the idiosyncrasy of Rembrandt's painting, it would be misleading to conclude that he lacked understanding in his time. The spread of his style—which is marked in the number of paintings attributed to Rembrandt we now know to have been done instead by others under his impress—is a remarkable testimony to the contrary. If Rembrandt's manner of painting hardly outlived his presence, the isolate self that he invented in painting did. The idiosyncratic look of Rembrandt's painting. . . a claim to be distinguished, to start apart, to be himself and, in the format of the mature paintings, to even constitute a self. This self was not forced on Rembrandt by the world around him—as the romantic view of the lonely, rejected artist would have it—but it was very much his own invention.

¹ Walter Benjamin (2008) was one of the main authors addressing the theme of the "aura" of the artwork. In the well-known essay "The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility," the author associates the term with the "here and now of the work of art, its unique existence, wherever it is" (p. 167). Also according to Benjamin, in reproductions, this element is absent.

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For Alpers, Rembrandt's own invention was staged in his studio. The painter was preparing the models he would pose for his paintings as if carefully assembling a theatrical scene with characters. Although he was a great observer of life and masterfully captured affections and human relationships, Rembrandt transformed the studio into his world, as if seeking to isolate his art. But that did not make him a lonely genius, for it was precisely through his studio that he related to the public and the market.

The insistence on creating his own image, his characteristic technique, the careful staging of his paintings, all contributed to Rembrandt's works being perceived as singular. On the other hand, just like a trademark can be counterfeited without losing its particularity, the Dutch master's style could be imitated by his disciples and other admiring artists (many of his self-portraits were paradoxically painted by his students or assistants) without losing their uniqueness. Alpers (2010) associates this tendency with the problem of *representation* in the capitalist system. After all, the most important dimension of a product or service is its image, precisely what sets it apart from its competitors and creates value. On the threshold between patronage and the art market, as a counterpoint to the anonymous vitality of Dutch artists, Rembrandt strove to build for himself a personality, a talent or a particular genius.

Much has happened since then. The guilds gave way to art academies; large museums, theaters and galleries were built; free markets and patronage still exist but trade in high-value works is now governed by large financial institutions; paintings and sculptures come at exorbitant prices on the international market, while many emerging artists strive to work with few resources. None of this is new. But there is, in Rembrandt's story as narrated by Alpers (2010), an outstanding element: the artist's self-construction, the way he invests in himself in search of an image that differentiates him from others, the transformation of his private brand in a capital.

THE SELF INVENTION

The Netherlands where Rembrandt lived was immersed in a well-developed capitalism, anchored in the export of consumer goods, port control and the financial market. It is precisely the way the painter took advantage of this context, in the reading of Alpers (2010), that points to our present. The author focuses her analysis on a fundamental element for the capitalist system: the image built by communication techniques, which differentiates a trademark, a political candidate, an ideology or a celebrity, among other

examples. But the way Rembrandt composed his own image, always in relation to the market and the art of his time, also encourages us to think about the actions of individuals related to themselves, the ways in which they conduct their lives, and the way they constitute themselves based on their own discourses and the power relations of an epoch.

As we all know, Foucault (2008) was one of the great thinkers to dwell on these subjects. Cultural policies researcher Tony Bennett (1998), inspired by Foucault's work, states that there are many Foucaults and that it may not be possible to unify them under a single "author effect." Bennett chooses not to follow the favorite of "libertarian thinkers," but the one who points to increasingly sophisticated mechanisms of governing life. Before his reading, however, we shall start from the Foucault presented by Paul Veyne (2014) as a great historian, who seeks to find what is unique in each epoch:

The term for Foucault's initial intuition is not structure, or break, or discourse: it is exceptionality, rarity, in the Latin sense of the word. Human phenomena are exceptional: they are not ensconced in the plenitude of reason; there is an empty space around them for other phenomena that we in our wisdom do not grasp; what is could be otherwise. Human phenomena are arbitrary, in Mauss's sense. They cannot be taken for granted, although for contemporaries and even for historians they seem to be so self-evident that neither the former nor the latter notice them at all. (p. 239)

For Foucault, as for Veyne (2011), the discourses and practices of a given epoch are nothing more than the result of chance, of series of events that meet and concatenate without necessarily having a continuity, an evolution or a linear sense. Also according to Veyne, Foucault does not deny the objectivity of historical facts—on the contrary, he pays special attention to our reality, to all that human beings produce, to the positivities of each epoch. By this same contingent character, the philosopher endeavors to show the arbitrariness of political and social structures, behavioral patterns and moral conduct.

Veyne (2011) also pays special attention to the concept of *discourse*. For the author, Foucault does not reveal to us something hidden, but invites us to listen to exactly what is said and that, being so immersed in our own time, we are no longer able to perceive. Although reality is objective, speeches make us see it in unique ways in each age. However, these are not just different ways of interpreting the objects to which the signs refer. Alongside other devices (such as laws, administrative measures, or architectural creations), the speeches delimit fields of knowledge and power, while constituting the

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objects themselves (such as madness, crime, and economics, in Foucault's examples). This does not mean that each era presents a single general paradigm. There is a constant dispute over the senses, evident in the media, in the divergent opinions of specialists, in the political field, in literary works and philosophical currents, among others. In fact, for Foucault, discourse is itself a matter of dispute, desire and power. However, as Veyne (2011) points out, it is not the sovereign subjects who produce and enunciate them. On the contrary, like objects, subjects are engendered by the devices and discourses of their own time—a process called subjectivation:

The constitution of a subject is accompanied by the constitution of his manners: one behaves and sees oneself as a faithful vassal, a loyal subject or a good citizen, and so on. The same set-up that constitutes its objects (madness, flesh, sex, the physical sciences, governmentalism, etc.) makes the self of each individual a particular subject. Physics makes a physicist. Just as, without a 'discourse,' there would be no known objects for us, similarly there would be no human subject without a process of 'subjectivation.' The subject, engendered by the set up of his period, is not sovereign, but a child of his time. One cannot become absolutely any subject at absolutely any time (p. 179).

But the idea of subjectivation process, according to Veyne (2011), does not make Foucault a determinist author:

Nowhere we can escape from the relations of power. On the other hand, always and everywhere, we can modify them. For power is part of a bilateral relationship. It is coupled with the obedience that we are free (yes, free) to agree with either a greater or a lesser degree of resistance. But, of course, that freedom does not float in the void and cannot aim for absolutely anything or absolutely any given time. Liberty can bypass the set-up of the present moment, but what it bypasses is only that particular mental and social set-up. Ancient Christianity cannot be expected to have thought of abolishing slavery (pp. 168-169).

According to the metaphor used by Deleuze (2005), a great commentator of Foucault's work, it is as if the devices provoke a fold, a work of itself about itself, that certainly inclines the subjects to think and to act according to their time. However, bending over oneself can also lead to a process that Veyne (2011) distinguishes from subjectivation: aestheticization. This term is understood by the author not as the life of a dandy, but in the sense of the work of the artist who in Greek culture is confused with the artisan. Foucault

(as quoted in Veyne, 2011) does not believe in universal problems or that they “cross the centuries” (p. 182). Therefore, Veyne clarifies that the philosopher’s affinity with Greek culture is limited to “self-transformation” (p. 183), to *style*. Like insubmission or revolt, aestheticization is an exercise of freedom, which is not limited to ways of being totally imposed by devices, but leads to individual choices, *inventions*. The subject takes himself as *a work to be worked on*. Is this not how Rembrandt composed his own image and gave his paintings a unique tone?

LIFE, A CAPITAL

It happens that, for Foucault (2008), some objects—such as sexuality, madness and violence—are more illuminated in certain historical periods, becoming focus of interest. Even the figure of the artist who, like Rembrandt, makes his genius (rather than technique) the ultimate expression of his work, emerged from the confluence of several factors, including the approximation between artistic circuits and the marketplace. Another major insight from Foucault (2008) was that life has become a focus of interest at least since the late eighteenth century. For the author, social changes, such as the growth of cities, the industrialization and the decadency of absolutist regimes have brought to light a new problem of government: the life of the population, not only from the statistical point of view, involving birth rates, diseases and death, but mainly with regard to individual behavior or conduct—the fold about oneself of which Deleuze (2005) speaks.

This analysis leads to the concept of biopolitics, which, according to Thomas Lemke (2011), Foucault employs in different ways throughout his work: as a break with sovereign power; as a central element in the growth of racism; and finally, as an art of governing, which emerges with liberalism and turns to the rule of self-conduct. This last meaning—used in this article—inspires the studies on governmentality, initially proposed by a group of British researchers, among them Nikolas Rose (Miller & Rose, 2012) and the already cited Bennett (1998), aiming at analyzing rationalities of government that seek to produce specific forms of guided freedom.

Foucault (2008) does not understand liberalism as a doctrine or ideology, but as a practice, as objective-oriented *ways of doing* and constantly critical of the very act of governing. Government is oriented for society, in order to guarantee, among other things, the subject of law and individual freedoms. These general principles take different forms—as in the late eighteenth-century British liberalism or the mid-twentieth-century German liberalism—and are

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often achieved through economic or social policy interventions, as in welfare states. However, Foucault (2008) points out that it is American neoliberalism that emerges as “a whole way of being and thinking” (p. 301), and even as a certain utopia, with “right and left anchorage” (p. 301), since, in this regime, the relationship between rulers and ruled is founded not on the services the state offers its citizens, but on the problem of formal freedoms (private property, market, employment, among others).

One consequence of this way of understanding neoliberalism—linked, among others, to the Chicago School in the second half of the twentieth century—is the expansion of economic thinking to the most diverse aspects of life: from childbirth to health care, from education to career choices. However, Foucault (2008) points to a fundamental question: the economic pattern, in neoliberal rationalities, is not that of commodities, with their mass production and leveled consumption by the masses, but that of competition between companies, which seeks precisely the differential between possible alternatives. Miller and Rose (2012) point out that the techniques of conducting governance and the processes of subjectivation that accompany this discourse lead to the idea of a subject with *autonomy*, freedom and the ability to choose and self-actualize. In most cases, intervention in the behavior of individuals is not direct, but consists of subtle mechanisms of remote government, such as advertising, expert speeches, punishments or financial incentives. The initiatives also do not only come from the state, but involve various interest groups, supported by professionals such as journalists, publicists, educators, doctors, cultural managers, among others.

At this point, the relationship between self-government and government by others is very clear. In spite of local specificities and historical differences in neoliberal rationalities, the emphasis is not on a sovereign power that acts on subjugated lives, despite situations of violence, extreme poverty and prejudice, unfortunately common in the contemporary world. What neoliberal values advocate, according to philosopher Peter Pál Pelbart (2013), is the rule of lives capable of conduct. These ideas seem abstract, but they become evident in the productive field in which they are originated. Increasingly, business language reinforces characteristics such as proactivity, entrepreneurship, creativity, leadership, sociability and networking.

Another important concept is human capital, proposed by Gary Becker in the 1970s (as quoted in Foucault, 2008) and widely adopted by managers, businessmen and economists. According to the theory, investment in itself (in education, health and culture) becomes a source of income and a resource to be offered in the market, i.e. a capital. It is noteworthy that authors such as Adam

Smith and Karl Marx (also quoted in Foucault, 2008) already measured labor for the time socially necessary to produce goods. But with the development of communication, knowledge, culture or technology industries, such as the creative economy, employees' knowledge and skills became more prominent in their professional relationships.

For Foucault (2008), more than a business management approach, the concept of human capital points to the tendency to interpret in economic terms an entire field considered *non-economic* and, in this sense, composes a politics of life. According to researcher Rogério da Costa (2008), the emphasis on human capital indicates that for the economic production to function, it is no longer sufficient to “dig up its natural resources” or “extract energy from the human body” (p. 64). It is necessary to look for resources in one's own subjectivity. For the author, the existence of the worker is entirely implicated in his activity, which involves not only his motor skills, but mainly his cognition and affection. The problem is that human capital is not always harnessed to expand the possibilities of self-invention, as suggested by Veyne (2011), contributing to the expansion of human power and the practice of freedom (in its broadest sense). Many times, what is observed is life becoming another source of resources converted into purely economic gains. There is also an important difference: while the body's natural resources and energy are finite, the ability to think, imagine, or relate to others seems to have no well-defined boundaries. This situation intensifies with the development of mass and digital media. Mobile devices constantly connected to the Internet blur the boundaries between work, rest, education and leisure, leading to a condition that Costa (2008) calls “self-abuse”—in the extreme, this condition can even lead to exhaustion, stress and depression. In any case, life turns out to be a virtually inexhaustible source of resources and thus a constant object of government.

It is no coincidence that these questions cross the artistic field. After all, perhaps more intensely than so many professionals, is it not in life itself that an artist invests his work in? Is it not his perceptions of the world, his affections, inventiveness and fabulation, technique or virtuosity, if not the body itself, that are used in the composition or presentation of a work? In Alpers's (2010) view, was it not precisely the particular way of merging his life with the unique style of his paintings that made Rembrandt a great painter? Notwithstanding the differences, in capitalist environments—such as in the seventeenth-century Holland or contemporary Western countries—, are many of these works not transformed into sources of financial resources? Is this not the essence of concepts such as *creative economy* or *economy of culture*? But it would be superficial to keep the debate only on the economic level.

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Several movements, such as Arts and Crafts and Bauhaus, and several authors, including Ruskin (2004) and Schiller (2011), have already proposed, each in his own way, the fusion of life and art. From Fernando Pessoa (with its profusion of heteronyms) to Sterlac (in performances that push life to the limit), countless artists invent themselves daily. But with even greater intensity, it is possible to see, in some trends in the contemporary art scene, that crucial aspects of life are vigorously invested in art: body, socio-racial issues, gender discussions, multiple identities, economics, society, and politics. When a black artist denounces racism in his works, when a woman talks about feminism in her works or when students do a play about the occupations of public schools, hip-hop, graffiti, among many other examples, is it not life itself, in all its materiality, in its daily struggles and affections, that breaks out and composes a new aesthetics?

Canclini (2012) suggests that instead of seeking consensus, many contemporary artists listen to the various voices that rise in society and imagine disagreements. Therefore, even when it seems to be far from the priorities of government and society in general, it is in the artistic field that the yearnings and conflicts of our time are most strongly and clearly expressed. In some situations, this is evident. In 2017, artist Wagner Schwartz was involved in a controversy after a child touched his body during the *La Bête* performance, in which he performed nude. The episode led to a tense debate about body, freedom of expression and the rights of children and adolescents. The year before, the violence against blacks motivated the performance *Em legítima defesa* (Lima, 2016) that took the corridors of the São Paulo Cultural Center after the performances at the São Paulo International Theater Show. Gender issues are the theme of the play *Manifesto inapropriado* (Mercadante, 2018), by the Histriônica theater company. Similar discussions permeate edicts and tax incentive laws, art education actions, among other examples.

Of course, artistic production is very diverse and cannot be reduced to one language and some predominant themes. However, even in the most traditional circuits, in classical dance or in concert music, for example, life is invested in exhaustive rehearsals, in the experience necessary for a certain interpretation of a text or musical score, in studies and language research. More than that, life is invested in the often-precarious working relationships, the choice of modes of financing, the struggle for public and private resources, and the very decision to pursue a career. The movement *Profissão artista* held in Brazil in 2018 against the Ação de Descumprimento do Preceito Fundamental 293 [Action of Noncompliance with Fundamental Precept 293], which proposed the extinction of the professional artist record (DRT), illustrates the class engagement and the

relevance of these debates (Recaldes, 2018). After all, even if it is understood that culture is woven collectively (as in Rembrandt's Holland), even if one discusses the author's role (a theme so dear to Foucault), one cannot help but notice that, in practice, it is his particular experiences, his social relations, his affections, his uniqueness—this life transformed into capital—that an artist invests in his works.

PUBLIC AND COMMON GOODS

The approach of human capital and self-invention points to the uniqueness of each artist and to the investment of his own life in the activity performed, whether amateur or professional. Therefore, authors such as Pierre-Michel Menger (2002) suggest that artists have become a kind of model for other professional categories that require characteristics such as autonomy and creativity. This is a very narrow sense for the idea of self-invention. However, it is not possible to disregard its unfolding, either in the concepts of creative economy or economy of culture (which bet on cultural or creative work for the generation of wealth) as well as in the movement of professionalization of the artistic field, which is still today resisted.

Kate Oakley (2009) points out that only in the mid-twentieth century did artistic activity come to be treated as a work in itself by researchers, as well as by managers and politicians. In Brazil, for example, Law 3,857, which creates the *Ordem dos Músicos* [Order of Musicians] and regulates the profession, was enacted in 1960. Law 6,533, known as the artist law, which regulates the profession of performers and entertainers, was enacted only in 1978, largely in response to the exploitation of work in radio and television studios. However, informal work, often performed in precarious conditions, still predominates, and ambivalence between professional relationships and the vocation or activity pursued for pleasure persists. Understanding an artist as a professional, who invests in his power of invention and, therefore, in his human capital, is an important step towards creating decent working conditions and sustainability strategies in the artistic and cultural field.

However, the idea of professionalizing the artistic field—linked, on the one hand, to the investment in human capital and, on the other, to the precariousness of work and the various forms of *self-abuse*—should not obscure a fundamental characteristic of the arts, in particular, and culture in general: their character as *common goods*, which emerge from cooperation between people and are not exhausted when consumed, such as paintings or plays. In addition, arts and culture can be considered public goods, which in economic language are *non-rival*—its use by one person does not preclude the use by others—and *non-exclusive*—they

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do not belong to anyone in particular (Lazzarato, 2006). These characteristics make culture and the arts everyone's rights, that must be ensured by the state as well as health and education, and also a responsibility to be shared by private enterprise and civil society.

For example, the State can take fomentation action to boost emerging artists; act in professional regulation; reduce taxes on the area, encourage audience formation in conjunction with the field of education; and insist on partnerships between federal, states and municipalities governments. It is up to the private sector to invest in artists and cultural equipments through donations, equity funds and other actions. And the public can collaborate by attending the cultural spaces of their region, paying tickets or buying works at fair prices, monitoring and charging actions of the public and private initiative. It is also the role of artists and producers to struggle for public policies and funding for the area.

Care must also be taken so that these ideas do not lead to cultural democratization initiatives that, while effective, end up imposing some exclusive aesthetic standards, such as concert music or classical painting. It is crucial that everyone has access to these artistic languages, not as a hegemonic or ideal standard, but as fruits of the power of human creation, as well as scientific discoveries and technological inventions. That is, arts and culture must be understood as public and common goods, which expand from sharing, making up inventions, and creating communities or networks that span spatial and temporal boundaries (Lazzarato, 2006)—and, in this sense, they aim for universality. But, for this understanding to be possible, it is essential that local and contemporary production is not only taken as a source of wealth (as capital), but also appropriated by the various groups that make up society, as part of their practices and discourses in everyday life. After all, contemporary art emerges from the affections and perceptions of our own time and place; it is therefore directly implicated in one's life.

The emphasis on contemporary artistic and cultural production cannot also consider the different languages, the uniqueness of each artist or collective and the disputes over these issues. These themes are especially visible when artwork is understood as an investment in life itself, as human capital or self-invention, as this article proposes. However, the interest in life can lead to a situation that often conflicts with the proposal of public and common goods: the reinforcement of identity issues, when power and knowledge devices produce subjects excessively linked to socio-racial, biological, and gender characteristics, among others (Costa, 2014). In the case of arts and culture, these identifications can also lead to exacerbated competition between artistic languages, various styles and currents of action.

Miller and Rose (2012) suggest that, in neoliberalism, networks formed from shared interests replace sociability based on collective rights and duties. Thus, there is a risk that the competitive pattern adopted by many identitary groups will eventually impede the construction of a common base of languages, perceptions and affections—fundamental for fostering the arts to become one of public policy priorities and to be among the population’s main interests, not as a hegemonic proposal, but in an environment of coexistence and exchange, which makes room for the invention of oneself and the affirmation of differences. These questions underlie many studies undertaken by the cultural studies, which present points of convergence and divergence with Foucault’s ideas. The debate also leads once again to the concepts of biopolitics and governmentality adopted by Bennett (1998). While cultural studies generally emphasize the resilience of artistic languages and diverse lifestyles against a hegemonic culture, Bennett (1998, 2018) suggests that government technologies themselves largely produce the cultural field.

A GOVERNMENT FIELD

In the article “Cultural studies: two paradigms”, Stuart Hall (1980) even considers Foucault’s work, alongside the culturalist and structuralist currents, as one of the main sources of influence for cultural studies. In fact, this fragmented and multidisciplinary line of research shifted the gaze of the aesthetic tradition, understood as an ideal of perfection to themes such as *representations*, *identities*, *subjectivities*, and *authorities*, present in multiple social groups. These interests certainly resonate with some of Foucault’s ideas. In any case, Hall starts from a very specific context: the debate about Marxist notions of infrastructure and superstructure. The well-known concept of “culture” as “whole way of life” proposed by Raymond Williams (1967), for example, derives from an anthropological view that the author was able to make compatible with Marxism precisely because of his position—critical of these notions.

Contrary to the reductionist view of Marx’s work, which states that relations of production determine cultural practices, Williams (1973) suggests a rereading of it. For the author, the base or infrastructure should not be understood as an invariable economic or technological abstraction, but as a set of “specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships” (p. 6), which are always in dynamic state and therefore subject to all kinds of contradictions. While productive or economic relations exert pressure and set some boundaries, the superstructure should not be viewed as a mere reflection of the infrastructure. Therefore, culture is not just a practice among many others or simply the set of

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uses and customs of a society, but something that permeates all social practices, the sum of their interrelationships.

However, as Hall (1980) points out, Williams's notion of culture cannot be correctly understood without taking into account the struggle between different ways of life in a society. This approach is structured and acquires density mainly from the concept of *hegemony*, which Williams draws from Antonio Gramsci's work (1982), but unfolds it, taking it to its ultimate potential. In the essay "Base and superstructure in Marxist cultural theory", written in 1973, these ideas are presented more clearly. While recognizing Gramsci's great contribution and depth with which he addressed the subject, Williams regrets that discussions on the idea of hegemony have reduced the notion to something simple, uniform, and static, as had been the case with the superstructure concept. He also emphasizes that hegemonic culture is not unique because "its own internal structures are highly complex" and "have continually to be renewed, recreated and defended" (Williams, 1973, p. 8). His theoretical model then predicts "a central system of practices, meanings and values, which we can properly call dominant and effective" (pp. 8-9). The educational network, cultural facilities, and the media, among other resources contribute to their widespread transmission. Alternative values and meanings can be accommodated and tolerated in society as long as they do not exceed certain limits. In turn, the possibility of effective opposition depends on the articulation of political and social forces. There is a constant reaffirmation of hegemonic culture, so that "deeply saturating the consciousness of a society" is reached (p. 8), i.e. the formation of a consensus.

For Bennett (1998), at some points Foucault's thought has similarities with these ideas. The emphasis on everyday practices and social interactions is common to both approaches. In turn, the readings about the liberal regime would have affinity with the notion of hegemony, since they rest on the need for individuals to voluntarily follow norms of action and thought through self-government. The author refers to the concept initially proposed by Gramsci (1982), but the comparison becomes more accurate considering the formulation of Williams (1973), which shifts the debate within the subject itself: according to the author, culture hegemonic "constitutes a sense of reality for most people. . . beyond which it is very difficult for most members of the society to move" (p. 9).

It was precisely within this debate that Hall (1980) referred to Foucault's work, whose effect on cultural studies was taken as "positive": "in suspending the nearly insoluble problems of determination Foucault has made possible a welcome return to the concrete analysis of particular ideological and discursive

formations, and the sites of their elaboration” (p. 71). But Foucault’s approach also brought new questions: by abandoning the centrality of the struggle between social classes and investigating the ways in which power relations spread throughout society, the philosopher turned away from Marxism, pointing out ways for identity research, cultural diversity, communities, among other themes that permeate the work of the new generations of cultural studies. On the other hand, this same trend marks a break with the pioneers from the area, who did not completely abandon the notion of determination. For Hall (1980), this was a critical point:

Foucault so resolutely suspends judgment, and adopts so thoroughgoing a scepticism about any determinacy or relationship between practices, other than the largely contingent, that we are entitled to see him, not as an agnostic on these questions, but as deeply committed to the necessary non correspondence of all practices to one another. (p. 71)

Bennett (1998) agrees that, despite the possible parallel, there is a crucial point at which the similarities between Foucault’s thinking and Gramsci’s ideas that inspired generations of researchers in cultural studies cease: understanding State and social formation. If Gramsci insists on the creation of a consensus in democratic societies, whose aim would be to strengthen the power of the dominant groups, Foucault emphasizes the development of forms of government that “goes beyond the problematic of political obedience to replace it with a concern with knowing, regulating and changing the conditions of the population” (as quoted in Bennett, 1998, p. 70). The aims of these techniques of government may or may not converge, as they may or may not correspond to class interests, since they involve multiple social actors. In the artistic field, for example, there often come into play divergent interests of governments, non-governmental organizations, foundations, cultural centers, cooperatives, associations, organized movements, among others. They are institutions and professionals that create strategies with different purposes, seeking to influence the conduct of artists and the general public.

According to Bennett (1998), these theoretical differences displace the debate, moving away from the perspective of cultural resistance towards a hegemonic domain and moving closer to concrete analyses of a “highly governmentalized” field. The influence exerted by *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality* (Burchell, Gordon & Miller, 1991) is considered a milestone of this new approach, which focuses attention on “the ways in which the relations between persons and cultural resources are organised within the context of



particular cultural technologies, and the variable forms of work on the self, or practices of subjectification, which such relations support” (Bennett, 1998, p. 71). Starting with Foucault’s view that history emerges from a network of contingent events, Bennett suggests that culture should be studied not only on ideological bias, but mainly on its daily, densely historical issues and particular power relations.

In a more recent collection, Bennett (2018) presents a series of examples. The author analyzes the role that some museums, such as South Kensington, England, played in the nineteenth century, both as disciplinary devices and exhibitionist complexes. For him, these and other cultural facilities, such as theaters and libraries, were thought of as “civic machinations” and sought to shape the behavior of the lower classes of the population according to the behavioral patterns observed by all their visitors: staying sober, walking slowly, contemplating the works, among others. Bennett also cites places viewed as “modernity machines,” such as the *Musée de l’Homme* in Paris. Built for their visitors to grasp the evolutionary theory in vogue in the early twentieth century, these museums reinforced the biopolitical distinction between primitive and modern societies (the latter being viewed as the most advanced, as an ideal to be achieved by others). Other readings by the author adopt the concepts of territorialization and deterritorialization, by Deleuze and Guattari, to verify the role of government techniques in colonial contexts. An example is the negotiations that were necessary to form the collection of colonial museums in New Zealand.

More than relations of hegemony or actions of resistance, what can be observed are biopolitical and governing techniques that not only relate to the multiplicity of identities and cultures, but also contribute to producing them. Many of these techniques are based on social issues, others rely on aesthetics as a technique in itself. In any case, the important thing is to realize that they are always the result of the intersection of diverse interests, constant negotiations and disputes over meanings. Certainly, there are stronger sectors of society with economic or political interests that oppose minority groups, often rendering the game of forces profoundly unequal. However, power relations are never unilateral—which, on the other hand, allows the less favored sectors to manifest their power as well² Moreover, it is worth repeating, there is a network of institutions and professionals, with often divergent interests, that seek to govern the conduct, as there are several communities that are formed from the most diverse factors, such as ways of life, cultural habits, social and economic issues, professional aspects, health conditions, among others³. Specifically in the artistic and cultural fields, these forces are articulated to

² Here it is possible to propose a relationship with the works of Gramsci (1982) and Williams (1973)

³ It is also possible to draw a parallel with the concept of intellectual, as approached by Gramsci (1982).

produce both their own works and languages as well as professional working conditions and public policies for the area.

ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL MOVEMENTS IN BRAZIL

In view of the discussion undertaken so far, it is possible to state that Brazilian cultural policies do not only reflect ideological and partisan political inclinations, on the one hand, or principles of cultural management, on the other. While these factors are fundamental, they blend in with international conjunctures, economic conditions, the market, and civil society movements. In their articulations, all these elements contribute to the constitution of fields of government, which involve sometimes convergent, sometimes divergent interests. In some historical periods, culture reaches a leading role, as in the early 2000s, marked by the focus on ideas such as creative economy and culture economy. In other times, especially recessionary ones, it seems that these issues stay in the background. But in one way or another, they are present in society and are part of the tangle of strategies and techniques of governing life, which focus directly on artists and cultural workers, and, secondly, on the public and the public society in general.

By the way, after a period of growth, investments in arts and culture fell in Brazil, especially since 2016. Provisional Measure 870, published on January 2, 2019, extinguished the Ministry of Culture, transformed into a special secretary of the Ministry of Citizenship, which also covers programs in the social and sports areas. In 2018, the presidential dispute, which elected a conservative government, sparked a critical view of Law 8,313, of December 23, 1991, the country's largest funding mechanism for artistic projects, based on tax renunciation. Public and private investments in the cultural field were cut and many well-known or early-career artists had their work challenged. However, due to the exposure of the theme in the media and social networks, many artistic and cultural groups (some more progressive and others more conservative) articulated themselves and formulated new statements proposing new actions. In the first half of 2019, for example, museum attendance increased by 61% (Matos, 2019). Among the main reasons were precisely the reaction to budget cuts and exposures that give relief to minorities and underrepresented groups.

The return to the discourse on creative or cultural economy has been also largely leveraged by the recession that began in 2016. One example is the *Cultura gera futuro* federal campaign, launched in 2018, and certainly inspired by late British and Australian policies of 1990s and 2000s (Torres, 2018). The purpose of the campaign was to show how the cultural and creative sectors



⁴ In Brazil, the creative economy sector as a whole accounts for approximately 2.6% of gross domestic product, according to Firjan (2016).

can generate economic gains. On the same line, events such as the Mercado das Indústrias Criativas do Sul (MIC Sul), created in 2014 that was held every two years by Latin American cultural managers (IMS, 2018), also reinforce the circulation of cultural goods between countries aiming at promoting economic and social development⁴. This trend contributes to the production of an artistic field based, in many respects, on the business and financial language, which sees in the artist the figure of the entrepreneur himself. As stated above, although it is an important feature of arts and culture in the contemporary world, this view leaves little room for the power of invention, for multiplicity and for differences.

This scene is mixed with social and artistic movements that gained strength in the 1990s and contributed to the development of many promotion models in force in the country to this day. The Art against Barbarism movement, for example, launched in 1999, brought together São Paulo theater groups that opposed the selection criteria for artistic projects adopted by the Incentive Law (Law 8,313/1991). The proposal led to the creation of new mechanisms, such as the Municipal Program for the Promotion of the Theater of the City of São Paulo (Law 13,278, of January 8, 2002) and the Program for the Appreciation of Cultural Initiatives (VAI; Law 13,540, of 24 March 2003), also from the city of São Paulo. The articulation of dance professionals, still in São Paulo, led to the Dance Promotion Law (Law 14,071, of October 18, 2005), of the Municipal Secretariat of Culture. Nationally, civil movements contributed to the elaboration of occupation edicts for the cultural spaces at the National Arts Foundation (Funarte), in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Belo Horizonte and Brasília.

Since the late 1990s, artistic movements linked to socio-racial or gender issues have also intensified. In an article in which he mixes academic foundations with his own experience, artist and researcher Salloma Salomão (2016-2017) cites peripheral movements that gain strength in large Brazilian cities, such as artistic-literary soils (among them, Sarau do Binho, in Campo Limpo region, São Paulo), the black literature (which has among its exponents the writer Paulo Lins), the music and theater of African matrixes (as produced by the Capulanas Companhia de Artes Negras). Salomão also mentions other groups and artists that stand out in the country, such as Racionais MC's, Pedro Vaz and Chico Science. The affirmation of these languages is not without conflict, as the author points out. But the movements themselves are fundamental to the constitution of a political and cultural field that contributes to public debate and leads to government actions, such as the financing of projects aimed at women, blacks, members of the LGBTQIA community, among other interest groups, whether through public notices, awards or tax waiver mechanisms.

An initiative that seeks to expand this power is the Política Nacional de Cultura Viva (Law 13,018, of July 22, 2014). Its flagship is the culture points, entities and collectives that develop activities in their communities and networks, being certified by the Federal Government. In addition to guaranteeing an institutional seal, this recognition allows culture points to participate in municipal, state and federal edicts to obtain financial resources. The basis of this policy is not *cultural democratization* because it is not part of the proposal to give access to the great canons of art and universal culture. On the contrary, the action values the artistic and cultural practices of the communities, the aesthetics and languages that concern the life of the various social groups.

Returning to Bennett's ideas (1998), cultural policies, as well as the configuration of the artistic field, are the result of power relations, tools and techniques of government, which may or may not result in laws, edicts and other fostering mechanisms. Although the financial and social difficulties persist, this dynamic has been fundamental for the creation of works with great aesthetic quality, as Salomão (2016-2017) recalls, and for the affirmation of minority groups, who find opportunities to produce and diffuse their works. This article advances the debate by suggesting that artists and other cultural professionals invest in these actions all of their human capital, their power of invention, and thus their own lives. In fact, in recent years, Brazilian public policies have favored the promotion of artistic and cultural production, contributing to the strengthening of civil movements, especially in São Paulo. However, this same scenario often presents itself as a fragmented environment in which artistic currents compete for funding and end up closing in on their own circuits. The problem is that parts of the population that are not directly involved with these networks do not always give meaning to their artistic and cultural production, which ends up causing a great distance from the public.

According to the survey *Cultura nas capitais: Como 33 milhões de brasileiros consomem diversão e arte* (Leiva & Meireles, 2018), 30% of the population of the Brazilian capitals never went to a museum and 37% never attended a theater. About one-fifth of respondents never entered a library and most never went to a soiree or a concert. To overcome these barriers, the promotion of artwork is not enough. If the cultural habits of the population are not active and consistent, artistic production loses its sustainability and ends up entering a negative cycle of lack of investment and low social and financial returns, as has been the case in recent years. However, changing people's habits is not an easy task and involves several factors: from formal education to sociocultural issues. It is certainly a long-term work that requires large investments in public policies, which will not be discussed here.



For the purposes of this article, it is sufficient to reinforce that the arts will only be part of the habits of the population when the perceptions and affections they carry, the forces they mobilize and the disputes they trigger are shared and not only involved in the lives of artists and workers in the cultural sector, but mainly in the daily lives of the public, politicians and managers. Just as artists invest in themselves to create their works, it is necessary to invest in human and cultural capital for the formation of the public—and this is one of the great roles of education. But more than that, we need to map this field of government and the reality it produces. Only when the various social groups shall in fact be included in the circuits of art and know how to assign meaning to this reality, will artistic and cultural production truly be taken as a public and common good.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

If Veyne (2011) points out that subjects are constituted by the devices of each era, it is not to reinforce a deterministic reading of Foucault's work, but to show that truths can be understood and—why not?—undone, if we know how to move away for a moment from the discourses in which we are immersed and look at the web of contingent events in history that make up our present. In the same way, the arts and culture of our time will only be valued if governments, institutions, professionals and the various social groups can at least map the force games that cross the field or, as Bennett (1998) argues, the daily problems from a deeply governed area. But what, in fact, is object of government in the current artistic field, especially in Brazil? Amidst a tangle of diverse practices and discourses (from galleries with international visibility to local art education actions), one sense stands out: life, that is so heavily invested in art. It is this life that transforms the daily life of the peripheries and centers, exposes gender and socio-racial issues, organizes political movements, struggles for public and private resources and—most importantly—invents itself, amplifying the so many dissonant voices from the society.

It is possible to list several reasons why the promotion of arts and culture is important: education, social transformation, job and income generation, right to aesthetic enjoyment and leisure, formation of communities, among many others. But Veyne (2011), when referring to Foucault, refers to something else: a deep curiosity, a certain fascination with everything that human beings produce, always amidst the contingencies of history and the conditions of possibilities that emerge from their own time. If, for Foucault, everything that exists has been done and can be undone, there is always a possibility of invention, which

manifests itself in architectural constructions, philosophical concepts, techniques of government and in the subject himself. The arts and culture, the work with languages, are a beautiful expression of this human power, as shown by the works of great artists, Rembrandt among them. Therefore, the acts of creating and spreading signs are present in the most diverse societies, contributing, in different ways, to give meaning to life. This in itself is a fundamental reason for being among the main responsibilities of both the public power and the private sector. But in order to do so, there needs to be a common base of perceptions and affections that makes arts and culture understood as public goods, which belong to everyone and which, in their differences, concern one's life. Perhaps the best path to this is still integrated investment in culture and education, capable of creating possibilities beyond human capital—essentially economic—and of making room, under the conditions of our time, for the conscious invention of oneself and of a part of the world around us. ■

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