

Annoyed May 68

BY JEAN-BAPTISTE GANNE

At the time of the symbolic passage of the 50th anniversary of May 68 in France, Switch (on Paper) wishes to bring back to light a text by Jean-Baptiste Ganne (born in 1972), published ten years earlier, in which the artist engages in an enlightening and compared portrait of the last French “revolution”. This text was written as an answer to a question of Maja and Reuben Fowkes about the connection between the artist and the 1968 movement.

Forty years after, the leaders of the French sixty-eight movement are more or less ruling the country, in the mass media, in advertising, as much as in politics itself. The French minister of foreign affairs was a sixty-eight leader and “Dany le Rouge” (Daniel Cohn-Bendit) is now “Dany das Grüne”, leader of the european green political group. Cohn-Bendit said something very interesting about the 68 movement, he said that it was the taking of power by a generation. That’s what they did, they bring to power a generation of baby-boomers who now still overrun the system of communication. The most interesting parts of that moment in western europe were in fact marginals to the movement, the situationists proposals, the questioning of the idea of work, and the raise of “desire” as a goal (and later on the analysis of Deleuze). In a way, this sixty-eight generation used the situationist idea of “détournement” (roughly translated by “diversion”) as a tool for advertising. The so-called “spirit of 68” became the biggest tool to use the principle of desire for consumption conditioning and gave a kind of new deal to contemporary capitalism. Marx analysis of the fetish character of commodities reached his highest level of transparency through this stealing of desire.

Another recent historical moment I am more interested in is that particular time at the very end of second world war in Italy when “Partigiani” (partisans) were propagandizing for sabotage of the work through “Volantini”. Those small leaflets were sent in the wind anonymously in cities and villages of fascist Italy. In this emergency moment, the tool for fighting the oppression was a “not working” or a “working badly or slowly” attitude. In a leninist way, this attack against the holy idea of work is an exception. Usually Work is pride, Work is honor, Work is freedom. But in those months of forty-four and forty-five, work is the enemy as much as the Nazis.

I look to a lot of those small historical objects with an intense emotion at the Instituto Gramsci and Fondazione Basso in Rome. On one of them, I read “Disòccupati !” (“Make yourself not busy !”) instead of “Disoccupati!” (“Unemployed !”). In fact the difference is only in the position of the accentuation when you say it. The italian verb “Disoccuparsi” is for me the symbol of that beautiful position. There is no real translation in french or in english of this. My computer roughly translate as “to vacate itself”, maybe something like “to make oneself not busy” is closer. Somehow the “Fare Niente” is a more complex thing than the “Ne travaillez jamais”. It’s a real activity to “make yourself not busy”. In Italian, grammatically, it’s an active form.

As an artist, I don’t think it is necessary to add objects to the world. I don’t believe on an artist as a “producer”. I have an activity which sometimes will end in an object and some times not. Anyhow, I do believe that the artist activity should lead to questioning the idea of Work itself, or at least, include that problematic. Somehow I search how can I des-occupied myself. All of this is not so much about Revolution but about the desire of Revolution and so on, its impossibility. Desire and Revolution have the same color, the read of a lipstick on my mirror on an hangover morning.