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Cool Istanbul

Urban Enclosures and Resistances

[transcript]

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The Value of Art and the Political Economy of Cool

ARAS ÖZGÜN

Cool is a very vague term in the way we use it in everyday language. It may function as an affirmative verbal cue, i.e. we use it instead of “ok” or “yes” It may function as an exclamation expressing different strengths of affirmation, i.e. “that’s cool!” or simply “cool, then...” It expresses subcultural identity in American English, and appears as a code switching device in other languages to inform a familiarity with that subcultural code, and therefore it signals an attitude, a way of life that is characterized by these types of familiarities. On the cover of *Newsweek*,¹ it attributes a particular type of value to a distant cultural signifier—Istanbul—by indiscernably associating it with all these affirmative transitional codes.

As vague and ephemeral as it is, cool appears to be a dominant form of value in contemporary cultural economy and urban culture—as the cover of the *Newsweek* illustrates. Therefore, in my view, a critical discussion of the production and circulation of *cool* can provide us with clues to understanding contemporary capitalist economy in general. This chapter pursues a discussion of the value of *cool* in a political economic context. I will examine its relationship with the global culture industry, post-fordist economic conditions, and neoliberal cultural policies.

I will begin by interrogating the meaning of the term more closely in order to reveal the parallelism it implies with another form of value dis-

1 See the chapter by Derya Özkan in this volume for a discussion about the cover of the international edition of *Newsweek* from 2005.

tinctly related with artistic production (rather than that of ordinary cultural artifacts). Following this lead, and drawing on that parallelism, I discuss how this distinct form of aesthetic value becomes translated into a dominant form of economic value, and then becomes incorporated within post-fordist production cycles. I will argue that the urban transformation of Istanbul over the past decades exemplifies this incorporation, and articulates the new economic logic perfectly. Yet, this articulation does not remain uncontested. While referring to a dominant form of value in a new political economic context, I will argue in conclusion that, cool originally affirms a subversive political ethos that continues to challenge the post-fordist accumulation regimes, and neoliberal governmentality—as the recent urban uprisings in Istanbul exemplify.

I. COOL & SUBLIME

According to the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, the definition of cool is “fashionably attractive, impressive.”² This is the fashionable use of the term that barely scratches the surface of the depth of its actual meaning, or the depth of the cultural relations it signifies. However, the common dictionary definition provides us with an entry point to our discussion; it refers to a value judgment that cannot be easily substituted with other positive attributes to signify aesthetic appeal. In the context of popular culture, cool is not beautiful, it’s not nice or pretty—it’s often times not even good. Fashionable is the key term here, i.e. *fashionably attractive*. Cool signifies a novelty, points to the temporariness of its object. In this sense, cool resembles the notion of the sublime in the context of aesthetics, and as I will argue, it also refers to a similar cultural economy.

In his discussion of the faculty of aesthetic judgment, Immanuel Kant refers to beauty as a normative, commonsensical form of value.³ Beauty is the result of a pleasure that stems from the shared desirability of an object; it is contingent upon its conformity with social codes and cultural norms. In this respect, the economy implied by beauty as an aesthetic category com-

2 *New Oxford American Dictionary*, version 2.2.1 (built 143.1)

3 Kant, Immanuel (1951 [1790]), *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard, London and New York: Hafner Publications, section 22.

plies with the supply-and-demand principle that governs the traditional market environment. The beauty of something, that is, the degree of its refinement in complying with the commonly agreed, codified norms, reflects its economic value in comparison to other objects of the same kind. In Kant's framing, beauty is normative. As it enters the circulation of commodities, beauty itself and its value become measurable.

For example, think of the value of a design object. The design process must do more than resolve functional issues structured by social relationships. It must also reflect the social codes that are produced within these social relations. The value of the design object is, then, contingent upon its capacity to respond to these socially constructed functions and relations. Yet, the notion of beauty as such neither entirely explains aesthetic affections nor sufficiently unravels the production and circulation of aesthetic objects, because it does not untangle the production or transformation of norms.

Kant introduces the notion of the sublime in order to explain the entirely different set of affections we derive from a work of art. Sublime is different; it is what falls out of the threshold of common sense. Thus, it transcends aesthetic judgment shaped by common sense. According to Jean François Lyotard, sublime is something that has not yet been seen, is not yet known, and thus is not yet coded into social norms.⁴ It is uncanny in the sense that it doesn't provide the comfortable pleasure beauty does. On the contrary, it violates the norms that beauty is grounded upon, and thrills us by not fulfilling our commonsense expectations, throwing us into unknown territory. Two constitutive aspects of the sublime are important to my discussion. The first is its newness and thus temporariness, that is, anything new, different, not yet known as such eventually becomes recognized and coded into existing social language upon its impact. The second is its immeasurability: as long as its newness makes its occurrence unique, the sublime is beyond comparison, making it also immeasurable.

Cool resembles sublime in this respect. I argue that cool functions as a substitute for sublime in the cultural field. It is an intervention into the banality of everyday culture by a new signifier, or a syntactical disruption

4 Lyotard, Jean-François (1984), *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

of the signification process by a new arrangement of existing social codes. This is why cool is embraced by subcultural forms or subaltern identities— if not directly produced by them. As Dick Hebdige’s famous analysis shows, subcultural style appears as a set of codes, a new formula for coolness that challenges the hegemonic signification regime by either shifting the relations between signifiers, or introducing new ones.⁵

When the work of art falls within the circulation of commodities in modern times, it subverts the notion of use value that governs market economy. It becomes an absolute commodity, a commodity that is beyond value, as it appears in terms of the “pricelessness of a great work of art.” Antoon van den Braembussche points to Baudrillard and Baudelaire’s political affirmation of absolute commodity. Being “beyond value,” it carries the potential to subvert the market economy that it is forced to enter.⁶ By embodying an “indifference towards utility and value, towards instrumental and intrinsic value, towards exchange and use value,” absolute commodity imposes a crisis on the rationalities of economic value.⁷ Yet, Braembussche warns about the pitfalls of Baudrillard’s reaffirmation: the contestation embodied in the absolute commodity as such may not necessarily lead to the conquest of the sublime over the logic of value. Such absolute commodity can potentially be caught up in the logic of commodity fetishism, while pushing it to the extreme in order to transcend it. In Lyotard’s words, “[i]n this way, one thinks that one is expressing the spirit of the times, whereas one is merely reflecting the spirit of the market. Sublimity is no longer in art, but in speculation on art.”⁸ We frequently witness the leap Lyotard warns about in elite art markets, where the speculative value is succeeded by an actual price that symbolizes the fact that some can even afford the priceless.

5 Hebdige, Dick (1988), *Subculture. The Meaning of Style. New Accents*. London and New York: Routledge.

6 Van den Braembussche, Antoon (1997), “The Value of Art,” in *The Value of Culture: On the Relationship between Economics and Arts*, ed. Arjo Klamer, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 31-43, p. 40.

7 Ibid. p. 41.

8 Lyotard, Jean-François (1989), “The Sublime and the Avant/Garde,” in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, p. 210.

The parallelism between the meanings of the sublime in the realm of aesthetics and cool in the realm of everyday culture is followed by a similarity in the way the artifacts carrying their attributes circulate in the market environment, the economic value they translate into. Particularly, two intertwined constitutive characteristics of the sublime, its temporariness and its immeasurability, are crucially important when we consider cool as its substitute in popular cultural practices. Because by mimicking these characteristics, cool also creates an economy that resembles that of the sublime, and as soon as it starts to circulate in the market environment, the object of cool becomes an absolute commodity as such.

II. POST-FORDISM AND GLOBAL CULTURE INDUSTRY

One of the distinct features of the new form of capitalism is a new productive logic that transposes aesthetic values into economic production. Post-fordism, in this sense, not only refers to a global reconfiguration of production sites and markets, the shifting of industrial production to underdeveloped peripheries where there is an abundance of cheap labor, and the concentration of administrative functions in global finance centers, but also to a qualitative shift in productive labor processes and forms of value. In post-fordist capitalism, the hegemonic form of productive labor increasingly shifts from the model of unskilled labor deployed in the factory, to a new type that bears cognitive, linguistic and affective qualities.⁹ Productive activities, as such, used to be confined to factories as the ultimate sites of economic production in the fordist model. In post-fordism, economic productivity spreads into every sphere of everyday life, and becomes inseparable from other social activities, including reproduction and leisure.¹⁰ This in turn effectively shapes social relations, even primary or intimate ones. The economic value labor processes are entangled with, is also expressed in different terms. Unlike fordist operational logic, post-fordist

9 Lazzarato, Maurizio (1996), "Immaterial Labor," in *Radical thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 132-146.

10 Deleuze, Gilles (1992), "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59, pp. 3-7.

industry is no longer directed towards producing merely simple commodities that bear use value. Instead, it produces more complex commodities: brands, events, life-styles, and things that appear to consumers as “social” and “aesthetic” experiences.¹¹

In this respect, post-fordism reverses the condition that is critically identified by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer as culture industry.¹² Culture industry, in Adorno and Horkheimer’s criticism, refers to the mature state of modern capitalism, in which not only subsistence related social activities and economic production in general are defined by industrial mass production, but mass produced commodities also invade the cultural field, and define social reproduction. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the grave threat culture industry poses against enlightenment ideas is that commodities impose their sameness onto the social subjects who consume them, and thus reproduce conformist and docile social identities. In response, Scott Lash and Celia Lury interpret the transformation of the culture industry as a new form of cultural production and circulation, into a global culture industry where, according to them, brands replace mass produced cultural commodities, things replace representations and difference replaces identity.¹³

According to Lash and Lury, whether it is subsistence related or a cultural artifact, a commodity has a finitude that ultimately refers to use value. The exchange value of a commodity is an abstraction of its use value, which becomes expressed in another abstract equivalent, which is money. Therefore, exchange value is in fact a question of quantity that is derived from the quality of use value—which means that the value of commodities have an abstract equivalence, expressed in terms of money, which makes them measurable against each other in the same market environment. In its finitude, a commodity is “a single, discrete, fixed product” whereas, the brand is the “source of production,” which “instantiates itself in a range of

11 Lash, Scott and Celia Lury (2007), *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things*. Cambridge, UK, and Malden, MA: Polity, pp. 4-10.

12 Adorno, Theodor and Max Horkheimer, “Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectics of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments (1993 [1944])*, New York: Continuum, pp. 94-136.

13 Lash and Lury (2007), *Global Culture Industry*, p.6.

products,” which is “generated across a range of products.”¹⁴ Unlike the commodity whose value is determined in reference to the use value generated by its consumption, the value of a brand is related to its productive potential. In the economy of brands, the reproduction of codes, meanings, differences and identities overlaps with the production of economic value. Commodities are “homogeneities,” according to Lash and Lury, they “only have value in the way they resemble every other commodity,” whereas brands “are not alike,” they “have value only in their difference—their distinctiveness—from other brands.”¹⁵

In this way, Lash and Lury’s exposition of global culture industry contextualizes the profit motive in the transformation of economic logic. Unlike commodities, the value of brands is not limited; brands keep on producing an almost endless range/series of products which become things that imply difference in their circulation, and therefore embody a value that makes the discussion of their cost (and thus their price) irrelevant. They become part of lifestyles, meaning a life-long consumption pattern in terms of marketing. That is, when you sell a brand to a consumer, this potentially means that you have made a business deal with an indefinite future.

Lash and Lury’s work also contextualizes the economic function of the cool in this new model. Cool, in the way I associated it with the notion of sublime above, is that difference that is essentially productive of value in the economy of brands. Difference is necessary for the brand, yet it implies an almost ideal form (that can only be approximated in reality) in the sense that, as soon as it is expressed and materialized in the thing—the industrial, mass produced commodity—it becomes the same, due to the nature of that very thing. Therefore, while difference as such is endlessly productive of economic value, it also has to be reproduced constantly, endlessly. The vagueness of cool facilitates this type of endless reproduction; anything can be cool because it potentially refers to something else. The cool of the previous decade can be cool again now to the degree it has been abandoned for being not-so-cool in the last decade. When coolness that is implied by smartness (in whatever form it materializes in) has been saturated enough, even simple stupidity can be cool—as shown by the clothing brand Diesel’s

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

advertisement campaign since 2011.¹⁶ Cool, in this sense, refers to the stripping off of the subalternity of the different, and its domestication under the economy of brands.

III. WAYS OF DOING

Whenever we discuss the economy of art and culture, the overwhelming anomaly of the value embodied in the material existence of the absolute commodity forces us to preoccupy ourselves with the sublime object. We are compelled to inquire upon the effects of such sublimity on the circulation of the object as it shatters laws of supply and demand, use value and exchange value. With an understandable fascination for such formidable intervention in the capitalist rationale, critical cultural studies, and social theory from Adorno and Horkheimer to Pierre Bourdieu have been concerned with the disjunction and resulting crisis of value between the work of art and the cultural commodity.¹⁷

Scholars of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, on the other hand, saw popular culture as a site of social reproduction where codes and meanings were produced, rather than centering their inquiry on the production and circulation of cultural commodities. By paying attention to the ideological processes and temporalities in the field of popular culture, Birmingham cultural studies made a unique contribution to thinking beyond and beneath the cultural economy, without the shadow of the cultural commodity. Following Stuart Hall, we have to consider the production of meaning (and therefore the production of all kinds of aesthetic forms) as labor process, and try to understand the political economy of culture not by focusing on the products (commodities or brands) but by looking into the production relations.¹⁸ In other words, the question concerning the political

16 See “The Official Be Stupid Philosophy” advertisement video and Diesel ad campaign: <http://www.diesel.com/be-stupid/> (accessed 15 April 2014).

17 Bourdieu, Pierre (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

18 See Stuart Hall (1980), “Encoding/decoding,” in *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Love and Paul Willis, London: Hutchinson, pp. 128-38.

economy of culture is not only “what is produced?” but also “how is it produced?” because the relationship of economic production in this field is simultaneously the relationship of social reproduction.

In the modern era, contemporary art has been a site of resistance and contestation against capitalism, not only by harboring regimes of representation that challenge capitalist value systems, but also by providing alternative technologies of production and alternative labor processes. In this sense, the work of art is not merely an absolute commodity that escapes capitalist value even when it is commodified.¹⁹ The more important challenge the work of art provides lies in the way that it harbors multiple logics of production, creative strategies, assemblages of ways of doing—all of which are resistant to, and surpass those of capitalism, by being productive of something that cannot be contained or ordered by the capitalist rationale. When we look into the social relations and creative labor practices deployed in aesthetic production throughout the long twentieth century, it becomes clear that such temporalities constituted alternative ontologies of labor. They made use of and produced gestures and activities, practices and procedures that are alternative to those of modern capitalist industrial production, and the market economy of the same period.

In other words, it was not only the exchange value of a Jackson Pollock painting (when it entered the art market as an object) that shattered the modern economic logic, but it was also the creative process, the gesture that Pollock’s artistic practice embodied, its methodical randomness and absolute contingency. Pollock’s work of art rose in this framework as an impenetrable alternative organization of productive knowledge, skills and activities challenging the dehumanizing Taylorist ontology of industrial production.

In a different temporal and geographical context, but in a similar way, Bauhaus appeared as a creative gesture that meticulously formulated the idea of design around the essential functions of an object, and also disciplined the creative activity itself in its most physical/bodily form. A striking

19 We need to keep in mind that a significant number of threads in various modern art movements were self-consciously invested in developing strategies against commodification of the works of art. Part of the artistic strategy in Fluxus’s *happening* format, for instance, was not to create a product that could be commodified after the temporality of the aesthetic experience itself.

example of the latter is that Bauhaus members had to begin the day with physical exercises.²⁰ Such alternative technologies of production were perhaps best embodied in Godard's concept of "process" in its diametrical opposition to Pollock—in that, after spending a year in Africa with a video camera, he returned empty handed and said he couldn't find an image. Even idleness and boredom can be a valuable strategic resource for creative production during modern times, as punk has exemplified.

Each creative formula—its procedures, gestures, contingencies, tactics and strategies not only inscribe a different temporality of production, but also envelope it with a different ethos. For example, Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, two filmmakers from the early years of the USSR, belonged to the same ideological camp, were both involved in the constructivist movement and used the same tools. Yet, each had a different idea of what cinema should be, each had a different way of making a film. In their artistic practice, both developed formulations constituting a different ethos that challenged the hegemonic ethos of Thomas Edison's emerging cinema industry at the time. Regardless of the fact that whether or not their products entered the market economy in the end, each creative logic brought along different sets of creative processes and procedures.

If we were to rethink creative labor processes as ways of doing, as technologies in an expanded sense, they would include cognitive, linguistic and affective processes, and extend towards other communicative instances and other forms of social exchange. Sites of production as such, have also been sites of social reproduction, as well as sites of resistance where social codes and subjectivities are shaped and reproduced in ways different from the hegemonic political rationale. The sphere of cultural and artistic production has been marked by other ways of doing throughout the modern era. The art market is concerned with absolute commodities, produced in ways that distinguish them from mass products, and the speculative value derived from the sublimity of the art work. The artist myth, for example—the artist as the creative/mad/genius—directly separates and affirms the artists' ways of doing from that of the rest of the real world.

Whereas, while resembling the sublime economy of the absolute commodity, and incorporating a value that is derived from the immeasurability

20 Scharenberg, Swantje (2003), "Physical education in the Bauhaus, 1919-33," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 20 (3), pp. 115-127.

of difference in the field of cultural production, the economy of cool does not leave space for such other ways of doing and other ethos attached to them. The difference of the brand is produced in corporate offices within nine-to-five work days, through the proletarianization of creative labor—perhaps no longer in Taylorist assembly lines, but by similarly uniform and universally applicable creative asset management strategies. In other words, the work of art is necessarily produced in another economy before it enters the market, otherwise it wouldn't be possible to produce it as a mass commodity. Cool can be designed and produced as a mass commodity within industrial capitalist production cycles, as long as the same production cycles can encode the commodity in its public circulation. This is in fact not difficult at all within today's oligopolistic media markets in which a few major players also have close financial/administrative ties with other industries.

IV. EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF AND GOD AGAINST ALL

The post-fordist subjugation of difference to capitalist economy as a source of value is intertwined with a transformation in liberalism as a logic of government. The public debates and left-wing criticism of neoliberalism often points to the privatization of public resources, deregulation of markets under pro-business incentives, and anti-welfare economic policies. Whereas, as Michel Foucault points out, just as traditional liberalism once appeared as a social design based on the market model, neoliberalism also emerges as an overarching social program rather than as a set of ruthlessly anti-social economic policies.²¹ Aimed at transforming the social fabric,

21 Foucault, Michel (2007), *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France*, New York: Picador, pp. 101-128. Also see Lemke, Thomas Lemke (2001), "The Birth of Bio-Politics"—Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neo-Liberal Governmentality," *Economy & Society* 30 (2), pp. 190-207; Gordon, Colin (1991), "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction," in *The Foucault Effect. Studies in Governmentality: with two lectures by and an interview with Michel Foucault*, ed. Graham. Burchell,

expressed in a new set of priorities in cultural policies over the past three decades, this new logic of government coupled with post-fordist economic formulas to eliminate ways of doing and ethos other than those imposed by the markets.

Michel Foucault associates the rise of liberal governmentality with an economist logic starting to dominate the political sphere. This new type of political power appears as almost pedagogical. It relies on the model of managing a household, a multilayered care-taking activity that orients towards acceptable ways of managing the individuals, goods and wealth in the family. In this regard, this pedagogy, what he calls the art of government, takes on an economic logic. The essential issue for the establishment of the art of government, Foucault notes, is the introduction of economy into political practice. Eighteenth century liberalism is founded on this premise. What was suggested as the logic of the art of government becomes a social rationale in eighteenth century liberalism. As already prescribed in sixteenth century political thought, the same logic of the right disposition of things applies to each and every social subject to govern himself, his family, his business and his relations with others, in the absence of an absolute, external, singular and transcendent governor. What becomes a social rationale seeks to provide a continuity at all layers of social life, from administrative and public affairs to taking care of one's own body and managing one's self.²²

Eighteenth century liberalism formulates a notion of the market according to this rationale, replacing the common good that was once the locus of social life in sovereign power regimes. The market is found as the absolute expression of this rationale in classical liberalism. It is formulated as the social space of free exchange between rational individuals who automatically, naturally and conveniently make decisions. The invisible hands of the market, and the supply and demand mechanism, determine what is convenient for all in the absence of an outside intervention. The market is an open system that can contain all the social interactions, all the social exchanges. It is based on differentials among the participants, makes the exchange

Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 41-42.

22 Foucault, Michel (1991), "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect*, pp. 87-104.

possible, and such exchange also brings the successful negotiation of differences. It takes care of everyone, as long as each participant takes care of her/his own. In this regard, if the political problem is conveniently defined as the right disposition of things, then, the market provides a highly operational model for politics—in fact, a model that is functional to the degree that it can effectively substitute for politics. If the decision-making processes concerning social and public affairs (as well as the manners and forms that individuals participate in, in these social and public affairs) are determined by the market for the convenience of all. This means that previously formulated functions of administrative apparatuses have to be reconfigured accordingly. To this end, according to classical liberalism, the public is formulated as nothing but a negotiation of private interests, and the state becomes the limit, the outside of the market, whose only function is to protect the market without intervening in its “natural” dynamics and “natural” development.

Although it was surrounded by market and other social institutions, arts and culture as a site of social production (along, perhaps with the sphere of academia, knowledge production, and the sphere of intimate relations, social reproduction) was kept out of this new political logic, and at least to a certain degree, was left to be governed by its own productive devices in modern times. According to Foucault, in Adam Smith’s formulation, the market was not merely an economic but a social model.²³ Smith concluded that there were moments of social life that served the public good in ways that could not be evaluated through the market’s invisible hands. The labor processes that belonged to philosophy, arts, culture, and perhaps to a degree, even scientific works, were defined by their own (often plural) productive logics which referred to little or no immediate utilitarian value, and the value of the products of these labor processes remained immeasurable by the market. In European countries, artistic and cultural production was defined as a privileged field in social life and supported by public funds, which guaranteed its semi-autonomy from the market. This was partly an effect of the enlightenment project, partly an effect of more pragmatic welfare policies. In the example of Austria, this includes the involvement of monarchies and aristocracies. In the US, such public funding is indirectly

23 Foucault, Michel (2010), *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France*, New York: Picador.

established through the legal/economic concept of non-profit organization. Particularly after World War II, arts and culture funds in the US have been effectively sustained by the funding mechanisms of tax-exempt private foundations, in order to balance the cultural effects of a profit-oriented mass media.

However, the semi/relative autonomy that arts and culture enjoy within liberal governmental rationale has been suspended in a new formulation that has become the hegemonic logic of government over the past few decades. Foucault's analysis points to a break in liberal governmentality after World War II, as a misguided reaction to modern forms of authoritarianisms.²⁴ According to the Frankfurt School's Marxian analysis, the rise of fascism was a product of capitalism under specific circumstances, i.e. the lack of access to an outside to expand to, both as a market and in terms of colonial resources. Therefore, for the Frankfurt School, the resulting authoritarian turn was a failure of the free market economy and liberalism.²⁵ Ordoliberals, and in particular the Freiburg School, on the other hand, believed that fascism was not a product of the free market and liberal economy, but inversely, it was the result of their absence. For them, the dissolution of democracy under the Nazis was the inevitable outcome of certain policies and social formations that prevented the establishment of liberalism and a true market economy.

The Ordoliberal interpretation of the rise of authoritarianism as a consequence of the prevention of the development of free market and liberal economic conditions led them to reconsider the key formulation of classical liberalism. According to eighteenth century liberalism, the market had a quasi-natural quality. It was seen as a natural outcome of the social interactions which it tended to envelope. Thus the market was expected to develop and sustain itself naturally on its own dynamics, unless there was external intervention, such as that from the state. In this formulation, the role of the state, as I have already mentioned, was to protect the market's freedom without intervening.

Unlike the Frankfurt School, whose fundamental alternative was between capitalism and socialism, the Freiburg School's crucial distinction was between liberalism and various sorts of state interventionism. Accord-

24 Lemke (2001), "The Birth of Bio-Politics'."

25 Ibid.

ing to the Ordoliberals, not only fascism but also socialism and Keynesianism represented varying degrees of authoritarianism and threatened liberty.²⁶ In the view of the Ordoliberals, these authoritarian political forms stemmed from social forces rooted in collective social experience, they hijacked state power to annihilate market conditions and social liberties. The Ordoliberals thought that if social forces had the capacity to prevent the market from developing freely and engendering these authoritarian interventions, then the founding thesis of classical liberalism, i.e. that the market is a natural extension/ground for the social, would need to be revised.

Thus, the Freiburg School refashioned liberalism by replacing the Dionysian soul of eighteenth century narrative with an Apollonian character. According to the Ordoliberal revision, the market was not a quasi-natural social phenomenon but an ideal form. As such, it couldn't be left to grow on its own, but had to be actively cultivated, constituted and maintained by political interventions. Moreover, according to their interpretation, as shown by the fascism and socialism examples, social relations were anti-competitive by their very nature, and the inherent social tendency for collectivism would eventually bring various forms of authoritarianism. Ordoliberalism suggested that fascism and socialism were eventual consequences of intrinsic collectivist tendencies in the social field. This interpretation led the Ordoliberals to reformulate the function of state in regard to the market and public life. The political interventions that the actual market needed in order to better approximate its ideal form, could only be organized by the state. In other words, according to the Ordoliberals, the state had to intervene in the social in order to prevent it from intervening in the market.

Foucault also draws attention to an important shift in the key term around which the conception of the market becomes organized. For classical liberalisms of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, market meant exchange. *Laissez faire* was the condition of free exchange among individuals, and the state had to protect this free exchange from the outside. The neoliberal conception, while breaking away with the naturalism of eight-

26 Foucault, Michel (2010), *The Birth of Biopolitics*, pp. 116-121.

eenth and nineteenth century liberalisms, also reorganized the meaning of the market around the notion of competition.²⁷

This conceptual shift brought important consequences. Once the market's engine was defined as competition, various forms of equilibrium became problematic in neoliberal discourse because they simply minimized the incentives for competition. Examples were market equilibrium in the purely economic sense, where exchange took place harmoniously via supply and demand mechanisms; or social equality, which imposed a fair and egalitarian distribution of resources among social subjects. Economic and social differentials were keys to competition. Market was thought of as a gross plane of inequality on which the differentials among individual actors made them compete against each other, in order to achieve relatively better positions against each other in their inequality. Perhaps the best phrase that summarizes the neoliberal vision is Werner Herzog's film title *Every Man For Himself and God Against All* (1974), based on the story of Kaspar Hauser, a savage young boy who suddenly appears on the market square of a town and has to learn how to speak and how to survive in civil life. Everybody is equal before a great inequality, everybody competes with each other to survive it.

While post-fordist economic incentives have been reorganizing global capitalism at the structural level, neoliberal policies have been reshaping the government institutions around the globe. Cultural production in the west has been transformed over the past three decades under the post-fordist market conditions on the one hand, and under neoliberal cultural policies on the other. Neoliberal cultural policies have not only decreased public funding of the arts and culture, they have also allocated the available funds to initialize and develop market structures in the cultural arena, rather than guaranteeing its freedom from the market. Under the buzzword creative industries, the privileged status of cultural and artistic production has been redefined in a joint discourse by neoliberal and post-fordist initiatives. It shifted from being indexed to public good towards economic productivity. As such, spaces of cultural production and creative labor processes become sterilized from their differences and incorporated into the economic cycles of the global culture industry. This model allows for differences only if they speak a common language. Every creative person has to have a

27 Ibid.

portfolio, one or two concepts, a well-defined research agenda (or works-in-progress), a neat haircut and a briefcase, and lots of contacts in the industry. Whether you are an artist, a writer, a scholar, or an actual soccer player, you have to “bend it like Beckham;” every smile should be a tooth-paste advertisement.

V. FROM THINGS TO EVENTS AND BACK

Yet, how could the cool, the difference in other words, with all its immeasurability, fit into such an economy without dragging it into a crisis, become part of such banality without contesting it? In order to make sense of this subsumption, we have to first examine the political economy of the global culture industry, and look into how it has been structurally transformed over the past few decades in terms of operational scales, industrial practices and business strategies.

Today a very large share of the US media market is occupied by four-five global corporations, whose holdings span across a variety of media markets vertically and horizontally through subsidiaries that have considerable market share in other cultural/linguistic territories, and whose economic interests are directly or indirectly related with other sectors.²⁸ The incorporation of cool into the economic flows of the global culture industry is made possible by an operational scale of media industries that can mobilize

28 As Robert McChesney recognizes, it proves somehow useless to seek for and provide precise statistical data when it comes to assessing corporate holdings and structures in media industries. The mergers, buyouts, horizontal associations and shifts in sub-sectors etc. happen so rapidly that, even the data collected a few months ago loses its precision. The fact remains the same, though. Since the mid 2000's, over 80% of the US media market has been dominated by a handful of corporations in various compositions. See Waterman McChesney, Robert (1999), “Rich Media Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times,” in *The History of Communication*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press; Lutz, Ashley (2012), “These 6 corporations control 90% of the media in America,” *Business Insider*, 14 June 2012; Freepress, “Who owns the media?”: <http://www.freepress.net/ownership/chart> (accessed 15 April 2014).

integrated marketing campaigns and cross-promotion strategies at an unprecedented level of intensity and sophistication. The story of the movie *Titanic* is an example of how a sunken movie project can not only be retrieved, but made cool and hugely profitable with an aggressive cross-promotion campaign.²⁹ Today, the promotion of a blockbuster film starts before its production, and by the time the movie hits the theaters, it has already become a social event. The new economic logic of global culture industry that Lash and Lury dissect actually runs on two conditions that were not available in the culture industry Adorno and Horkheimer criticized earlier. The first is the level of penetration new media technologies assert over everyday, primary social relations. The second is the concentration of capital and oligopolistic economic structures that assert a practical control over a media market overlapping with everyday life.

Under these circumstances, the global media industry can create events that can substitute the effect of the sublime and the cool through an artificially constructed novelty around ordinary and banal things. On the one hand, the global culture industry infuses the circulation of material commodities with aesthetic experiences. What Kant called beauty has become an essential form of value in ordinary commodities, and thus has turned objects of utility into design or life-style objects. Lash and Lury point to this transformation as things replacing representations.³⁰ On the other hand, the sublime, the aesthetic affect of the work of art, has been detached from its object and constructed outside of it. If need be, it has even been constructed in its absence, and often as an event. Carrying the effect of the sublime, without the intervention of the work of art, an event can now be incorporated into lifestyles, brands, and social experiences. In other words, an exhibition, a biennial, a performance, a show can essentially and seamlessly become integral to capitalist accumulation regimes. What we have, then, is a passage from the enchanting novelty of the absolute commodity to the absolute novelty of an enchanted event.

The enchanting novelty of the event substitutes the experience of the sublime by being akin to it. It constructs the newness of the present: "it is

29 See Welkos, Robert W., "The \$200 Million Lesson of Titanic," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 February 1998; Garrett, Diane, "Big-budget bang-ups," *Variety*, 20 April 2007.

30 Lash and Lury (2007), *Global Culture Industry*, pp. 4-10.

what is happening now, what has not been, and what will not be.”³¹ Newness as such shatters the logic of value as does the sublime. The pure novelty of the event, its temporality, makes it beyond measure and therefore beyond value. Being there, a part of that event, living it is a priceless experience. The post-modern spectacle distributes such value that is beyond measure into a chain of associated commodities and services that altogether construct the event: the merchandise, the tickets, the guided tour, the memorabilia, etc. The products that enable you to experience the event, and turn that experience into memories, in contrast with the pricelessness of the event, come with a price tag.

The importance of the sublime lies in its generative power, as Lyotard recognizes. The unrepresentable presented by the sublime, the uncanny difference it introduces, expands the limits of language, our sphere of representations and cognitive capacities, while its temporality quickly fades away. The event that presents itself as an experience akin to the sublime has a similar effect in post-fordist cycles of economy: it not only directly refers to a chain of associated commodities and services, but also expands in time in both directions. It becomes an effect that turns locations and spaces into places and sites, seeds future experiences, and begins to mobilize future commodities and services. In turn, it formulates and facilitates life-styles, brands and eternal consumption patterns.

VI. THE NEW BYZANTIUM

Events as such also serve to incorporate into the global flows of capital locations that were once culturally and financially peripheral, i.e. Istanbul, Dubai, Rio de Janeiro, etc. As has happened in Istanbul, large-scale spectacles such as the Formula 1 races, the biennials, various international art and culture festivals, and gallery districts that continuously present novelties, reintegrate the once peripheral city into the contemporary world market. These events and scenes refashion the privileged districts of these urban sites into something found in any other contemporary city, often by offering

31 Harutyunyan, Angela, Ozgun, Aras and Eric Goodfield (2011), “Event and Counter-Event: The Political Economy of the Istanbul Biennial and Its Excesses,” *Rethinking Marxism*, 23 (4), pp. 478-495.

a patchwork of scenographies: business districts that resemble Downtown Manhattan without a shabby smelly Chinatown; gallery districts that look Parisian; music venues with the air of London. Or as in Williamsburg in New York City, in the absence of a displaced midscale industry, prewar warehouses were built from scratch to offer a luxurious loft living experience to local affluent young professionals. These event-scenes plaster over the inherent inequalities of the social fabric with coolness and make these sites cool on a global scale.

Yet, contemporariness becomes more than a refashioning theme for urban space, it also functions as a political discourse to compensate for, or counteract the failed modernization processes of the past. Modernization has been a hegemonic vision for third world politics, regardless of whether the site embodied a socialist or capitalist industrialization. Industrialization, as a key component of modernization, does not refer strictly to a form of economic production, i.e. factories, but also to the series of social, urban, legal and ideological dispositions that come with it. In the case of Turkey, Turgut Özal, Prime Minister of Turkey from 1983 to 1989, was to bypass this issue, and reformulate the idea of modernity around a set of social consumption patterns rather than socio-economic production processes. This was, of course, only possible under the circumstances of the specific political discontinuity imposed by the 1981 military coup. Beginning with Özal's post-military government, almost all parties and governments in Turkish politics have indexed their success to the achievement of contemporariness defined in vague terms: from bidding on the Olympic Games, World Fairs, and various international sports events to hosting cultural events, such as the Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul's international cinema festival and jazz festival, and most recently, its selection as the European Capital of Culture in 2010.

During the last decade in Turkey, even the conservative AKP government who rigidly controlled or heavy-handedly censored even the smallest criticism of everyday culture, appeared to have tolerance and even compassion when it came to international contemporary art events. In contrast, the misery of the shanty towns still surrounding the city, the poverty of the precariat that fueled the new post-fordist economy, the gross violations of the very basic human rights of the underprivileged masses, the flames of an acute civil war burning in the distance in south-east Turkey could be ignored as *passé*, so long as the events that located Istanbul in the map of the

contemporary world happened to be there, so long as the event-scenes infused the temporality of urban life with an undeniable sense of contemporariness for the urbanites. In Erdoğan's hands, Özal's rhetorical invention has become a whip that keeps drawing blood. Any criticism, whether from the left or right, is considered by the government a conspiracy against the imagination of contemporary Turkey, and as such merits death by gassing. The way that the Gezi resistance was handled by the Erdoğan government, is a case in point.

In other words, a self-referential notion of contemporariness not only mobilizes new economic resources and directly generates considerable financial flows, but it also incorporates an ideological intervention that works to bypass political criticism that points to new economic inequalities brought about by the post-fordist transformation. For a city and its people who have been desperately struggling to become modern for a few centuries now, being contemporary once again offers a value that is beyond the measure of political and economic reason.

The inequalities and political complications created by post-fordist economies in places like formerly peripheral sites like Turkey, particularly affect the precariat. This is the new precarious working class that provides the labor force for the local branches of the global culture industry in these cities. In Istanbul, after the new economy became consolidated, we witnessed a few outbursts of anger from this new working class as soon as they came to the bitter realization of their new socio-economic reality. It was the result of the failure of the socio-economic benefits promised to creative workers, artists, as well as to a new generation of well-educated technocrats, in return for the "gross national cool" they had been producing.³² The intense protests against the eleventh edition of the Istanbul Biennial in 2011 constituted a significant moment in this context. The protesters saw the eleventh biennial as a socialist spectacle for the enjoyment of the rich and the tourists financed by the wealthy industrialist Koç Holding. They called for sabotage and vandalism. They criticized the working conditions of the precarious workers, such as those volunteering or working low-pay cultural service jobs in the biennial, showing the scale of the discontent felt by the

32 Nothing expresses cool as a privileged form of economic value in post-fordism as the witty title of Douglas McGray's uncritical article published in the May 2002 issue of *Foreign Policy* ("Japan's Gross National Cool.").

precariat towards the otherwise rosy development of the arts scene in the city.

During and after the protests, the public debates involving artists and intellectuals reflected a division within the creative community. To some, being against a high calibre art event was unjustifiable from a left-wing political perspective. As such, the critics must have been nationalist/conservatives who couldn't stomach the contemporary arts. This division itself reveals a condition we have already observed in western centers of cultural production: functioning as a part of the global culture industry, the creative sector develops its own internal conflicts and class dynamics. The tension and conflict of interests intrinsic to capitalism arise between managerial cadres of art institutions, and those who sell their creative labor under precarious work conditions. This division structures the field of artistic and cultural production.

VII. ETHOS

More recently, after no longer being able to pay the rent in the city's cool neighborhoods, to the gentrification of which they had been actively contributing over the past few decades, the precariat mobilized against an urban development project in Gezi Parkı. What started as a small scale, ordinary protest against the privatization of the urban commons quickly escalated into a massive rebellion that spread throughout most major cities and towns in Turkey. The escalation of the protests in the face of massive police brutality, the significance of this escalation and its brutal repression, and its eventual signaling of the end of AKP's ideological hegemony merits a lengthy discussion, which is unfortunately beyond the scope of the current chapter. However, I would like to emphasize one very important point: the Gezi Parkı protests brought an important novelty to Turkish radical politics. This may be very much related to the rapid popularization of the protests as well as to the unprecedented levels of brutality they received. Rather than making their voices heard and going home, the protesters reclaimed the urban commons that had been taken from them. They occupied the park and used it as a space to develop non-capitalist social relations and economic exchange, and to invent new and different ways of doing. The protest quickly turned into resistance. The tent camp not only successfully began to

experiment with alternative technologies for creating, doing, and living that neoliberal politics had intended to eradicate forever, but the participants also enveloped these in an ethos that defied the political logic of representative democracy.

It was a powerful expression of a collective desire for another possible world, the spawns of alternative social practices such desire gave birth to, and the ethos of resistance that draw the wrath of AKP's neoliberalism upon itself in Gezi Parkı. This showed clearly that what constitutes an existential threat to brand economy is not the cheap knock-off's, imitations, or the surplus production that undercuts the value of the logo. Instead, it is social practices such as the Do-it-Yourself culture, non-capitalist mutual exchange, workers cooperatives, other forms production, circulation and other acts of communing that elude the regime of continuous consumption.

Post-fordism is not a monolithic economic prescription. It is an amalgamation of diverse strategies and tactics that emerged to overcome, incorporate or circumvent various sites of resistance that impose obstacles and crises upon modern capitalism.³³ The transformation of arts and culture into a privileged economic sector, as I tried to explain before, not only incorporates it into capitalist production, but further imposes a challenge to developing resistance strategies. Even the expression of subversive political and moral statements, which can no longer take place in any other corner of the public sphere, are welcomed in the very established and mainstream institutions of art and culture today because of their potential for eventfulness. In countries that have severe problems keeping up with the internationally recognized criteria of liberal political and economic rights, such as Turkey, human rights abuses are perceived almost as ordinary everyday affairs. Yet, banning an exhibition or show is perceived as an outrageous and unacceptable violation of freedom of expression. Artists living in "the free world" are now mostly free from direct and visible forms of censorship, and disciplinary and oppressive instruments of social control. In fact, the institutions and the media environment they work in encourage them to be even more transgressive, critical, edgy, and excessive. That is, as long as their creative production remains within the system of gallery displays, and

33 Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri (2000), *Empire*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

becomes incorporated into the production/consumption cycles of the global culture industry.³⁴

And so, at that very moment when we find ourselves privileged social subjects, as artists and cultural producers, as almost “classless and free” subjects on the one hand, and the precariat of the world on the other, what question do we ask ourselves? We have few prospects outside the electronic sweatshops and gallery walls where we create events and contribute to that narrative, and where we also are exploited. How can we be cool without producing/contributing to the branding of the cool?

The Gezi Parkı protests and various similar acts of resistance across the globe give us a reference point in this regard. The beauty of that iconic *kırmızılı kadın* (woman in red) standing alone in front of the police line as her hair blew with the tear gas spray, the virtuosity of Çarşı fans in selling the armored vehicle they stole from the police online, the graffiti and slogans witty enough to give the most creative advertisement gurus a run for their money, were only a few of the many inspiring cool moments in the course of the Gezi Parkı resistance. It was an ethos of resistance that marked the temporality of these events, and produced a cool, or multiple cools that cannot be repeated, decontextualized or appropriated by the post-fordist economy. Erdoğan knows this best: after all the protesters are beaten, gassed and arrested, still haunted by the image of *kırmızılı kadın*, the Turkish riot police continues to wait in the now empty square.

Perhaps, we should start again by giving words their true meanings. In this case, by rethinking what we understand by the term cool. It is not a coincidence that cool was a significant term in the Black American culture of the early twentieth century. Despite the fact that the meaning of *cool* reflected the painful history and struggles of African Americans, it still signified a positive attribute. Yet it didn't refer to what was merely fashionable. It referred to a particular attitude, a calm audaciousness, cold indifference, calm infused with apathy.³⁵ In the history of Black American Culture, when the price of open rebellion was too high, keeping emotions under control, calmly refuting the power by being indifferent to it, being uncon-

34 Harutyunyan, Angela, Ozgun, Aras and Eric Goodfield (2011), “Event and Counter-Event.”

35 Thompson, Robert Farris (1973), “An Aesthetic of the Cool,” *African Arts* 7 (1) , pp. 40-43; 64-67; 89-91.

cerned with it, became valuable. Therefore, in this context, although the cool attitude did not immediately refer to a style, it did come to mean a set of behaviors brought together within the ethos of resistance and survival. This eventually became embodied in the jazz music of the 1920s in the United States, as well as in other stylistic forms of Black Culture. In this sense, cool in its origins did not mean fashionable, as it does today. It was in the temporality of Black Culture, and then in that of the white counter-cultures it inspired (such as the Beatniks or Mods), that being cool acquired its mainstream meanings and became fashionable.

When we return cool to an ethical framework, and redefine the culture of cool around it, what remains before us is no longer a cool city, but instead a burgeoning concentration of global culture industry, no more a cool artist but a precarious worker. Cool, then, will be waiting to be done—not in the shopping malls and art galleries, but behind the barricades, in that occupied park in the middle of the city.