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Cultural identities from the bottom up

National cultural identities in the South Eastern region seemed to get over, as we would like to believe, the early stage of “jingo patriotism”¹ after the historic fulfilment of the independence of their state. Ironically, the establishment of new “pocket states”² in the region came at the historical moment when nation-state sovereignties were exposed to overall erosion due to economic globalisation. However, limits imposed on national sovereignty are not balanced by a new “cosmopolitan law” and “such a deficiency”, as the Italian historian of law Danilo Zolo of Yugoslav origin assesses, “favours the propagandistic distortion of the doctrine of ‘human rights’ and its transformation into a kind of aggressive humanitarian universalism – as indeed was the case of the war of Kosovo, led by Western powers against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia”.³

Lack of a new global legal order is substituted by *lex mercatoria* on the international level with an interesting contradiction: although, generally, “the government becomes merely the handmaiden for the global economy” and the state is no more “the omnipotent master of its territory”,⁴ one field is exempted which relates the control over people and where the nationality of people is still operative. State retains the control in determining labour relations using the reduction of labour rights as a tool of raising its global competitiveness in respect to “human resources”. Nationality, in this context, is a distinctive force in determination of labour relations, as, for example, in Slovenia where temporary workers of various nationalities enjoy various labour rights. On the basis of bilateral state agreements, for example, temporary Bosnian and Macedonian workers are deprived of some labour rights, like the remuneration for unemployment, which all other workers have, including the temporary Croatian workers.

¹ I.e. patriotism of war agitators. Cf. Thomas H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, London: Pluto Press, 1992 [1950], p. 25.

² Rastko Močnik, *Extravagantia II: Koliko fašizma?*, Ljubljana: Studia humanitatis, 1995; Croatian translation: *Koliko fašizma?*, Zagreb: Arkzin, 1998/1999.

³ Danilo Zolo, »Rule of Law: A Critical Reappraisal«, in: Pietro Costa; Danilo Zolo (eds.), *The Rule of Law: History Theory and Criticism*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2007, p. 39.

⁴ Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, “Freedom From, In and Through the State: T.H. Marshall's Trinity of Rights Revisited”, *Theoria*, 108 (2005), p. 15.

Labour relations, hence, may significantly contribute to consolidation of a particular social group's "identity". For this reason, we have decided to approach re-questioning of cultural identities from the bottom up, from the perspective of labour relations, taking as a subject of our examination "authors", "artists" or, in short, "creative class". Accordingly, we will rephrase the initial question by inverting the original phase of "cultural identities" into "identity of cultural workers" and ask ourselves what would be the identity of cultural workers due to their present labour relations. We believe that this starting point may have theoretical potential for the analysis of a social group which is traditionally considered as national intelligentsia and is credited for the perseverance of nations as well as for the state independences in the region.

The socio-economic position of artist in the sociology of culture

In the tradition of sociology of culture our contribution intervenes in the research of socio-economic position of artists. Following researches of Pierre Bourdieu or Natalie Heinich, it scrutinises the argument about the economic independence of artists from private and public donors due to the expansion of cultural industries and copyright regulations. The two economic conditions, according to Natalie Heinich, made room for a unique artist and a public figure such as Émile Zola in the 19th century, but rather exceptional among numerous loft-living artists, *les bohèmes*.⁵ The after 2nd world war "aesthetic welfare state" endorsed, as Pierre Bourdieu would put it, the "autonomous principle of hierarchization" in the arts in the competition with the economic principle of hierarchization.⁶ In the latest times the aesthetic welfare state was brought to its end and culture has been driven into the heart of economy for a new cycle of capitalist expansion. Along with this process the integration of artist into art production has been changed. In the examination of this question we will focus on the book publishing since it offers the simplest example among various art practices. It will, hopefully, also help to clarify little a puzzled debate on contemporary "cognitive capitalism".

Means of production in book publishing

If we examine the whole labour-process (book production) from the point of view of its results (books), we see that two kinds of means of production were used: (1) the instruments and (2) the subject of labour as well as the (3) labour as productive labour. We will pass from the easiest to more difficult points, so we will start with the instruments.

⁵ Nathalie Heinich, *L'élite artiste: Excellence et singularité en régime démocratique*, Paris: Gallimard, 2005.

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 38.

(1) Instruments

When we speak about instruments in the book production, we mean computers for authors, editors or designers, printing machines, means of transport and so on. Our first observation would be that less and less human labour is needed to produce a book and the modes of its distribution are faster. Instruments are materialisation of past labour which have been needed for its creation and manufacturing. At the same time instruments are also results of multiform innovative contributions of all mankind, the fruits of a general scientific development. The past labour is for this reason also called “dead labour” or “general intellect” and as such, a joint property of mankind, may provoke the “contradiction between the development of productive forces and the relations of production, namely the regime of private property”.⁷ The internet is today the best example of such contradiction: the technological means already make possible that all texts from all over the world would be available to anyone at home, but the private appropriation of technological means impedes this biggest project of cultural democratization. In the situation like this, the “dead labour” is a *voluntary gift* to the one who has means to explore its potentials for the economic use. Therefore, from technological progress itself we cannot deduce hypothesis about its revolutionary impact on society and we must be careful with the notion of “general intellect” as it is sometimes abused for such quick conclusions.

(2) Labour

Our second point will be labour. As we know, the authors do not write books, but manuscripts.⁸ Many various professions participate in the changing of author’s manuscript into a book: editors, designers, proof readers, printers, booksellers and so on. The labour of all these persons is important for the production of a new book; their working skills are rare and highly specialised, but they are nevertheless replaceable. In the context of publishing industry they take a position of wage workers as in any other kind of industries.

What about the author and his labour? The purpose of all kinds of labour we have described so far is to change a manuscript into a commodity, while author’s pursuit cannot be simply described by these terms. His manuscript comes into publishing labour-process as a semi-finished product which has in the process of publishing a function of “raw material”, of

⁷ Daniel Cohen, *Trois leçons sur la société post-industrielle*, Paris: Seuil, 2006, p. 69.

⁸ Cf. Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994, p. 9. Chartier here quotes Roger E. Stoddard: »Whatever they may do, authors do not write books. Books are not written at all. They are manufactured by scribes and other artisans, by mechanics and other engineers, and by printing presses and other machines«. (Roger E. Stoddard, »Morphology and the Book from an American Perspective«, *Printing History*, 17 (1990), pp. 2-14).

“reproductive material”. With this assessment we come to the third point, to the subject of labour.

(3) Subject of labour

The subject of labour in publishing or its raw material is the manuscript which the author has submitted to the publisher. It is, therefore, a subject of past labour from previous labour-process.

This conclusion is more important than we imagine. It marks a point at which the author joins the publishing as commodity production, i.e. after the completion of the manuscript. The manuscript itself was created in circumstances which could be, with no offense to the artist, described as artisanal and certainly different from commodity production. This means that it cannot be compared with commodity production as well as the work of the author can hardly be measured by usual standards of commodity production: How many words has he written in a certain period of time? How much material (paper, ink, electricity etc.) has he consumed while working? Can his work be compared to somebody else’s work?

Here we must be careful with conclusions. All these questions mean that author’s labour cannot be directly subsumed in commodity production, but can be nevertheless comprised into general time-labour form of value. Author’s efforts might be estimated in financial terms according to a current price of labour force in a particular space and time. Socialism, for example, invented a system of fixed authors’ fees which aim was to provide authors with payments that were comparable to wage workers of similar working qualifications. Writing of the manuscript is artisanal and different from the commodity production, but they both, as we have seen, meet at the particular moment of the author’s submission of manuscript to the publisher.

Diagram 1: Labour-process in the book publishing

Means of production	instruments	“dead labour”
	subject of labour	“subject of past labour”
Productive labour	labour	“wage labour”

The expansion of market mechanisms into the arts

Conclusions so far have drawn us near the question of art's subordination to market mechanisms. The question of the expansion of market mechanisms into social spheres which were till then not subsumed in the market economy, is not a recent one. Mario Tronti, member of Italian *operaisti*, wrote already in the 60-ies: "The real process of proletarianization is presented as a formal process of the growth of third sector".⁹ Tronti argues that in order to augment the surplus value and, consequently, the profits, the capitalist has to diminish the value of labour force, constantly improve labour process as well as generalise and expand the capitalist mode of social production. At the end, all forms of labour have to become industrial labour and all social relations must swiftly change into production relations – also in the third sector until, according to Tronti, whole society becomes a factory drawing equality sings between factory, society and state (fabbrica=società=stato).

But society as a whole is not becoming automatically a factory, since the capitalist mode of production can not subsume automatically all spheres of social production by, for instance, separation of labour force from the means of production or division of labour and so on. The way how particular social production (as art production) gets incorporated into capitalist mode of production, may have no impact on its particular mode of production. It may remain almost the same as before, like the process of writing a manuscript at least until machines will be able to produce novels and poems. Incorporation of various productions into market economy does not imply that they will be automatically industrialised: some may be industrialised and others may remain artisanal as writing a manuscript.

From this perspective, the arguments developed in "cognitive capitalism" theory seemed simplified and the praise of "immaterial work" exaggerated.¹⁰ According to our findings so far, analyses of the "knowledge-driven production" must be carried out with certain precaution. It was incorporated into market economy without reversing the usual production relations in commodity production. Moreover, mass commodity production has been expanded to some "knowledge industries", as publishing or university, for instance, by creating out of these two sectors two big production lines, similar to those in Ford factories, which produce books or knowledge as market commodities for mass consumers.¹¹ Only the

⁹ "Il reale processo di proletarianizzazione si presenta come processo formale di terziarizzazione". Mario Tronti, *Operai e capitale*, Rome: DeriveApprodi, 1962, p. 49.

¹⁰ Cf. Carlo Vercellone, »From Formal Subsumption to General Intellect: Elements for a Marxist Reading of the Thesis of Cognitive Capitalism«, *Historical Materialism*, 15 (2007), pp. 13-36; Paolo Virno, *A grammar of the multitude: for an analysis of contemporary forms of life*, Cambridge, Mass; London: Semiotext(e), 2003.

¹¹ André Schiffrin, *The business of books: how international conglomerates took over publishing and changed the way we read*, London; New York: Verso, 2000; Primož Krašovec, "Realna subsumcija v hramu

work which could not be directly subsumed in commodity production, as artistic or scientific work proper, was intact and left behind as artisanal. It was incorporated, instead, by monetary dependence inside of process of circulation which we will examine in the next sections.

Conclusive remarks on production

As we said, author offers to the publisher a manuscript which enters into production chain as a semi-finished product or a raw material which editors, proof readers, and designers change into market commodity. At this moment the author might get remuneration for the time he has spent writing a manuscript, for materials (computer, ink, paper) and goods he has consumed during his writing. He or she can therefore receive a kind of “wage” from the publisher, but this is not the only reward to which the author has access. He or she may receive more when the finished book enters into the sphere of circulation.

Circulation

The circulation of cultural goods, like a book, is to a great extent regulated by restrictions of intellectual property rights. Legal protection of intellectual property rights has extended usual property rights to physical objects (land, real estate ...) upon “intellectual creations” (books, painting ...). The right holder so gain a privileged position on the market or monopoly and, particularly, a right to control and monetarize the use of protected works. It means that they can, in determined situations, charge for certain uses of protected commodity even after it has been sold to the buyer.

At first glance, the exchange of books does not differ much from the exchange of other commodities. A book is offered on the market in much the same way as a car or any other commodity. When two contracted parties exchange a car, the buyer obtains absolute ownership over the object. Let’s imagine, however, that the buyer of a book wishes to make a photocopy of the book for a friend who is also interested in the topic. The clerk at the photocopying centre will tell him that, although he is allowed to make a copy of a small part of the book, making a copy of the whole book is prohibited. He might even show him the article in the copyright law about reproduction for private purposes or the copyright notice on the back cover of the book, which sometimes includes the statement: “The photocopy kills the book.” The buyer then might come up with the idea of establishing a public or private lending library, where all the books he has bought will be available to everybody for borrowing. He

duha” [Real Subsumption in the Temple of Intellect], in: Katja Kolšek, *Univerza in neoliberalizem*, Novo mesto: Založba Goga, 2011 (v tisku).

will soon find out, however, that in Europe remunerations have to be paid to the authorised organisation for the public lending of books. He might then get angry and decide to hold a public reading from his copy of the book, whose owner he definitely is, because in this way at least he will inform people about its content. But in this case, too, he will be approached by the collective organisation of authors, which will ask him for another kind of remuneration that allows him to read from the book in public. The buyer finally realises that, according to the copyright law, he is excluded from a whole series of uses of the book – a book he has already paid for – and if he wants to gain access to them, he must pay additional remunerations to the author or rights holder. Given the prohibitions stated in the copyright law, he must pay remunerations each time for each of these uses of a book he has already paid for once.

Only author is in many occasions justified to receive all these kinds of remunerations. The author may pass many rights on publisher, but in some cases some rights are not transferable in accordance with copyright law. Legal regulation therefore gives the author rights to “secondary revenues” (like remunerations for copying, lending in public libraries, adaptation into film or theatre performance and so on). The author’s revenues are composed, as we can conclude, of two kinds of revenues: (1) a direct payment for a work which we have already described as a “wage” after the submission of manuscript to the publisher; (2) secondary revenues which are a kind of rent after publishing of the book on the basis of already accomplished and paid work and already sold commodities.

Diagram 2: Author’s revenues

1.	Direct payment for a work	“wage”
2.	Secondary revenues	“rent”

Business partnership between author and publisher

Publisher of course knows about both types of revenues and he thinks: if the author is justified to receive, besides a wage, also rent revenues, then the relation between the publisher and the author is not any more a contract between the author as a seller of labour force or his ability to write a manuscript and the publisher as a buyer of labour force. The publisher, accordingly,

does not feel any more obliged to provide, in the form of wage or direct payment for the manuscript, basic payment for the author's survival. And even less he is obliged to pay for his social security, pension funds and so on. Their relation was thus changed into relation of mutual business partnership for the investment into a new commodity. This leads to a fantastic metamorphosis: the author has been transformed into "entrepreneur" and his labour into "capital".

We call your attention to the fact that diagram above is a theoretical formalisation which draws a clear line between the two sources of revenues, although in reality situation is more complex. With royalties, for example, we could be already uncertain in the front of our diagram. Royalties are a sort of postponed "wage" realized in the circulation when, as we said, the author is justified for "rent revenues". In the case of royalties as a postponed wage the author is allowed to participate in the valorisation of their common product on the market together with publisher. Royalties are therefore a proof of new entrepreneurial nature of the author.

Since the author has a chance to receive rent revenues, the publisher consider having a right to diminish his direct payment for a manuscript out of free will (and a "postponed wage" or royalties are one of the method how to decrease direct payment to the author). And the author, a new entrepreneur, has to collect basic funds necessary for his subsistence combining wage and rent revenues. What takes a form of rent revenues for the author is actually to a great extend a money value he needs for his basic living costs and only a rest may eventually be the author's surplus. In the frame of research project "The Management of Author's and Related Rights in the Digital Environment"¹² we have conducted several interviews with authors and translators. At that occasion we found out that only five percents of their revenues derive from "rent revenues" and that this type of revenues cannot replace rapid decrease of direct payments from the part of the publisher. It is not difficult to conclude that this system leads to considerable pauperisation of authors.

Monetary dependence of authors

Once upon a time writers searched social recognition and sufficient reward for their work from private maecenas, royal courts and, lately, from aesthetic welfare state. Now they are forced to look for them in the system of copyright regulation.

¹² More about the project, conducted between 2006 and 2008 at the Peace Institute, see the web page http://www.mirovni-institut.si/Projekt/Detail/en/projekt/The-Management-of-Author-s-and-Related-Rights-in-the-Digital-Environment/kategorija/Cultural_policy, where the whole research report is also available.

As we have already said, the authors are free to organize their production over which the market relations have no control. But social recognition and reward are accessible to authors only through publishers, valorisation of their books on the market and the sale of books on which the amount of copyright remuneration strongly depends. Cultural production is thus subsumed in capitalist economy with monetary dependence, since market mechanisms only provide some kind of subsistence to the authors and through which the author has access to his or her readership. For this reason, authors are probably inclined to adapt to publisher's expectations or market records which certainly influence back his or her decisions in writing. But the most far reaching social effect of authors' monetary dependence is that the field of culture can not create an alternative system of production and circulation aside from and/or against the market economy. As a consequence, market mechanisms atomize individual authors, inhibit attempts for cooperation and collective work. They inhibit as well possible self-reflection and the questioning of social impact of artistic practice.

Academic e-journals

We will illustrate the argument about the monetary dependence with an absurd example for all parties involved except publishers. On the list of world's largest publishers in respect to its turnover we find three (Reed Elsevier, Thomson Reuters, and Walters Kluwer) among the first five which publish academic journals.¹³ They manage few hundreds of journals each. Their lucrative business model is based on voluntary and free of charge work of authors who submit articles and of their colleagues who do peer-review. Articles present research work, predominantly funded by public money, but authors must nevertheless pass all rights related to articles on publishers. They, as the only right holders, have a right to fix prices, to determine the accessibility terms for e-journals, selection criteria of journals or articles as well as the use of methodologies for citation index and impact factor. This is the reason for having authors in the hollow of their hand: publications in journals with the highest impact factor and citation index rates are main criteria for the evaluation of a particular scientist. University careers and research funding depend on publishing and citation rates. Given that it is also a terrain of interstate comparison and competition among national scientific communities, research funders additionally urge scientists to publish in journals with the highest impact factor. Funders thus entrust sheep to the wolf, but they too do not come off with a small loss.

¹³ The list of world's largest book publishers, published by Publishers Weekly accessible on the web page: <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/international/international-book-news/article/43564-global-publishing-rankings-2009.html> (4.1.2011)

The same group of authors, peer-reviewers and editors is also a target readership of these journals which exceed the comprehension skills of general public. Subscriptions are often too expensive for individuals: in 2007 the yearly subscription of chemical journal costs 3.490 USD, of physical journal 3.103 USD, of engineering journal 1.919 USD and of geographical journal 1.086 USD.¹⁴ University libraries subscribe to these journals for which national funders mostly pay excessive prices, particularly in comparison to restrictive access to articles which they have already financed once through research funding. The reason that they nevertheless bargain with publishers is in their particular position in academic publishing. They created out of it a kind of stock exchange with a system of quantification and monetarization not yet monetarized items like publications, citations, rejections of articles and so on. Authors use this new money in exchange for university posts, research funding, rewards and prestige, national funder as quantitative research funding criteria and as international score rates of national scientific competitiveness, while publishers sponge well on public funds for education and research. The system seems to work out and each agent has obligations and benefits: although the role of publishers seems superfluous, the “monetary dependence” they have been able to build up out of academic publishing, bind all agents tightly together. The fact that commercial publishing slows down the use of digital technology for further circulation of scientific findings, that it inhibit epistemological advancement in the representation of scientific results, seems to worry only marginal groups of scientists.¹⁵ Despite the technological progress the scientific publishing is still modelled after the print culture using pdf documents as simple replacement for printed text and peer-review remained hidden from the public. It would be possible to create a new system of electronic publishing in which editors, authors, readers, and peer-reviewers would discuss openly about scientific issues and publishing by means of new communication tools. Such task wouldn't be so difficult, since much of the work in scientific publishing is already free of charge, but the bonds of monetary dependence nevertheless seem tight and strong.

The alignment of the state with the interests of commercial publishers

Where did the interventionist state go? The role of the state in academic publishing is a puzzling one, while the state subsidies for book publishing are really instructive. We would

¹⁴ Cf. Bill Cope in Angus Phillips (eds.), *The Future of the Academic Journal*, Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2009, p. 23.

¹⁵ Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis, »Signs of epistemic disruption: transformations in the knowledge system of the academic journal«, in: Bill Cope and Angus Phillips (eds.), *The Future of the Academic Journal*, Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2009, pp. 13-61

assume that state subsidies go where the lack of sufficient resources is. Diagram 3 shows, contrary, that the state subsidies are almost proportional to publishers' profits; due to substantial profits many publishers could easily finance books which they consider less profitable and demand state subsidies for them. The state, giving its consent to their demands, aligns with the interests of publishers and defends their right to profit. Moreover, the state distributes subsidies to the publishers from the list above paying no heed to the fact that the same publisher, holding monopoly in publishing and in distribution of books as well, inhibit production and circulation of pretentious publishing programs which state otherwise supports by public subsidies. The position of state is therefore ideological by evident support of commercialisation and the profit-seeking strategies in publishing despite all social consequences. It shows also clear intend from the part of state authorities to block eventual attempts to constitute independent publishing system on the basis of, as Bourdieu would say, "autonomous principle of hierarhization".

Diagram 3: Ranking of Slovene publishers in 2008

PUBLISHER	NUMBER OF TITLES	REVENUE	PROFIT	SUBSIDY
Mladinska knjiga	552	52.118.547,00	4.787.490,00	506.798,50
Učila	308	4.484.087,00	1.021.101,00	13.000,00
Rokus	283	7.795.679,00	505.308,00	0,00
DZS	267	55.496.838,00	3,487,218,00	8.000,00
Modrijan	232	3.561.565,00	997.635,00	80.000,00
Družina	97	7.354.500,00	2.058.152,00	160.328,70
TZS	91	2.007.143,00	509.196,00	0,00
Mohorjeva	157	9.361.643,00	(-8.645)	95.724,05
Didakta	77	1.185.108,00	9.005,00	23.000,00
Študentska založba	70	x	x	427.225,34
Cankarjeva založba	60	661.703,00	19.225,00	162.744,12

Identity of cultural workers

We said that author has a role of entrepreneur or little capitalist in business agreements with his stronger partner, a publisher. Devil's advocate may oppose that we were simply imposed upon the false presentation of labour as "capital" as it is seen from the point of view of capitalist in general, in traditional and new economies alike. One may also say that the hidden objective of this particular ideological mechanism is to conceal the true nature of labour as the only producer of new value and the consequential extraction of value produced by labourer in "surplus labour", i.e. the labour performed in excess of the labour necessary to produce the means of livelihood of the worker ("necessary labour"). We answer that the position of an author is nevertheless particular in comparison to other labour force. As we have shown in the two parts on production and circulation, the author is torn between wage labour and his (mostly illusionary) privileges of rentier. The effect is that he can identify neither with wage workers nor with capitalist class. For this reason the author is twice déclassé in respect to labour class and in respect to capitalist class. He or she has no allies or identity group to which he or she might belong, so it shouldn't astonish us his or her uncertainties in past turbulent events. Authors, for instance, did not oppose labour relations reforms targeting reduction of social benefits which were firstly experimented in the field of culture (like deregulation of authors' fees, flexible employment, self-employment, reduction of health insurance ...). They even applauded to such reforms and called upon more profound "modernisation of culture sector". Torn between the interests of wage workers and the interests of capitalist class, authors may have significant role in making a new society, a new type of capitalist society which intends to subject all social relations to capitalist production. In order to gain more propulsive social role of intelligentsia, they would need first to carry out a radical reform of the cultural system and find a way out for a new type of integration of authors as labour force into cultural and science production.

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