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Working in Informational Capitalism: The Case of the Argentinean Publishing Industry

Ezequiel Saferstein* and Daniela Szpilbarg**

1. Introduction

As several authors have argued, we are moving through a stage of capitalism which has distinct features compared to previous periods of capitalism. This phase has been named ‘informational capitalism’, or ‘cognitive capitalism’, in allusion to the central position occupied by knowledge and technology in valorization and production processes, with all the corresponding effects on the behaviour of the various players in the process of formation in the field of culture. The analysis of capitalism in the 1990s and early twenty-first century has been concerned with the increase in financial and commercial internationalization and the latter’s link with ICTs as the key issue heralding the onset of the current era.

In order to analyze the history of capitalism, it is necessary to go back to pre-capitalist times: many authors agree on calling the first process of technological transformation that occurred in Britain in the second half of the 18th Century the *Industrial Revolution*. In fact, Freeman and Louçá¹ define a First Industrial Revolution, based on the changes in the

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¹ See Chris Freeman and Francisco Louçá *As Time Goes By. From the Industrial Revolutions to the Information Revolution*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

percentage share of different sectors in the domestic product and the economy as a whole, and also taking into account social, organizational and cultural changes. In this regard, they highlight that in the case of Britain, the rationale for using the term ‘Industrial Revolution’ is based on the fact that industry and construction had already overtaken agriculture in total employment and output by 1810.

According to a study by Rodríguez Vargas², a group of historians, technologists and economists agree on making a distinction between an early industrial revolution and subsequent technological revolutions, vaguely denoting them ‘ages’: the age of steam power and railways (first), the age of electricity and steel (second), the age of mass production of automobiles and synthetic materials (third) and finally the (fourth) age of microelectronics and computer networks or, rather, the age of information and telecommunications.

Now, considering the centrality of information and communication technologies in the construction of economic value and therefore in production, it is interesting to explore exactly how this phenomenon occurs in specific cases. According to Martha Roldán, present-day capitalism makes use of the most genuine human skills — human thinking, imagination, taste — for its own benefit, that is to say, “21st century informational capitalism puts life itself to work, it takes possession of life”.³

Regarding the work of the cultural industry, Virno claims that "the crucial point lies in the fact that, while material production of objects is required to the automated machine system, living labour provisions, however, look increasingly more like linguistically virtuous performances".⁴ We believe that these perceptions might also be related to the fact that time and space dimensions have, in recent decades, undergone transformations which are correspondingly being transferred to the field of labour.

² See Jesús Rodríguez Vargas, Jose (2010) La nueva fase de desarrollo Económico y social del capitalismo mundial (dissertation paper). Available at: <http://www.eumed.net/tesis/jjrv/3c.htm> and Freeman, Chris and L. Soete *Economics of Industrial Innovation*. The MIT Press, 1997.

³ See Roldán, Martha “Capitalismo Informacional, industrias de la comunicación y organización del trabajo en la producción de contenidos en la rama editorial. Reflexiones sobre su contribución al desarrollo en la Argentina 2000s”. In Susana Sel (Ed.). *Imágenes, palabras e industrias de la Comunicación. Estudios sobre el capitalismo informacional contemporáneo*. Buenos Aires: La Tinta ediciones. 2008, 13.

⁴ Virno, Paolo, *Gramática de la multitud*, Buenos Aires Colihue, 2002.

According to Dantas⁵, “information emerges as a decisive productive force” and this ‘flexible accumulation’ gives rise to changes in relationships and working practices. For this reason this paper will attempt to address the changes which are taking place in the publishing industry, at the same time analyzing the distribution of production at local, regional and global levels.

Based on the above, we propose to resume the discussions and claims surrounding cognitive capitalism, and use them in a reflection on the publishing industry, focusing particularly on the developments in ICTs and their impact on this field. We aim to discover the extent to which these changes are affecting the publishing industry in Argentina and, therefore, to what degree this creates the need for new skills on the part of the publisher as a dominating figure in publishing houses.

Firstly, we shall put forward some definitions of cognitive capitalism before addressing the specific subject of this paper: we will examine the behaviour of the publishing industry both locally and globally, and then explore the changes brought about by ICTs in the organization of the industry. We will then look at three publishing enterprises operating at various levels in order to make some initial considerations of modifications which are being introduced to the organization of publishing houses and to the practices of several publishers. This is a transitional phase, where, in addition to the traditional practices and skills associated with traditional modes of carrying out publishing work, a significant transnational reality is gradually restricting autonomy in the field and increasingly creating the need for actions which allow publishers to find a place for themselves in the new reality of their sector.

2. The Seed of a New Type of Work

In *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Paolo Virno argues that when considering the operating mode of the cultural industry, it is necessary to think of it as a type of space which is “informal, not programmed, one which [is] open to the unforeseen spark, to communicative and creative improvisation: not in order to favour human creativity, naturally, but in order to achieve satisfactory levels of corporate productivity”⁶. The same author, however, states that, in the critical view of the Frankfurt School, these aspects were

⁵ Dantas, Marcos ‘Informação e trabalho no capitalismo contemporâneo’. In *Lua Nova: Revista de Cultura e Política*, 60. São Paulo., 2003, 13.

⁶ See Virno, Paolo, *op. Cit.*

“uninfluential remnants, remains of the past, waste. What counted was the general *Fordization* of the culture industry”. Virno believes that it was precisely these aspects of the work of the culture industry, those linked to the informal and the unforeseen, which were the seeds of what would become a new type of work.

It is first necessary to examine the profound transformations which occurred in this stage of capitalism, following Moulier Boutang, for example, who suggests that these significant mutations are primarily associated with a change in the nature of value and are being linked to knowledge in an innovative way. Knowledge is thus put to the service of production insofar as it controls nature through technology. Enzo Rullani also argues that in modern capitalism knowledge is as important as labour or capital: in order to be valuable, capital must exploit living labour and knowledge. What is distinctive is that the valorization of knowledge responds to special laws and is different from the traditional capitalist formation of values. On the other hand, “virtualization processes separate knowledge from its material medium, and this creates inconsistencies in the valorization process (...) because the process of transforming knowledge into value is not linear or stable over time”.⁷

Knowledge may have no influence on the theory of value if it were little more than an example of ‘merchandise’ doing nothing other than preserving and transmitting the value of the capital and labour used to produce it: knowledge has value in its use but no referenced value of exchange. The cost of the production of knowledge is uncertain and radically different from the cost of its reproduction. The exchange value of knowledge is linked to the practical possibility to limit its free dissemination and to minimize the chances of it being copied by legal means. The knowledge economy is an economy of speed; values are not preserved in inventories but they decrease with the increasing speed of processes, and this has a significant influence on the production of cultural goods. Capital internalizes the laws of the valorization of knowledge, that is to say, the laws of diminishing returns over time.

Based on this, Moulier Boutang argues that it is increasingly difficult to justify property rights as they were created during early industrial capitalism. He also maintains the importance of recognizing the emergence of new forms of property rights such as free software.⁸

⁷ See Rullani, Enzo “El capitalismo cognitivo ¿un Deja-vu?”, en Moulier Boutang, *op. Cit.* 101.

⁸ Moulier Boutang explains that the issue of free software is a useful element to think of this legal boundary. Boutang states that copyleft is not an open source code system, but a

Moulier Boutang uses the term *cognitive capitalism* to refer to the current mutation of capitalism, considering that while there may be many designations (Information Society; net-economy; weightless economy), they are all intended to reflect a change, in his view essential, which is linked to the belief that the nature of value, shape, location and modes of extraction have changed completely, both in terms of changes in the capitalist regime of accumulation, and in production methods, a transition that also means modifications to the wage regime. The author also questions whether the laws in place are relevant to this new economy and notes that the 'non-material' economy is linked to the almost instant digitization and channeling of data and the reduction to almost zero of the cost of knowledge reproduction.

The major obstacle, from this author's perspective, is the difficulty in finding a way to establish new property rights which permit to some degree the regulation of human cognitive activity. These rights are linked to the appropriation and expropriation (a strict delimitation of how usage, valorization and alienation may constitute the essential prerequisite of market mechanisms and pricing). The issue of cognitive capitalism operating with ICTs lies in the current problems of the commercialization of and rights to private property, as well as in the resulting debates regarding the public nature of information goods.

Dantas also analyzes informational capitalism, arguing that the old institutional model of communications which was in place from the 1930s through to the 1980s has changed, causing a shift towards the Third Technological Revolution: text, images and sound are transformed into 'bits' and this digitization of information is the technical basis of social production. Working in informational capitalism is an exercise in gathering, compiling, processing and associating data.⁹

On the other hand, the values inherent to these products involve a value of usage which is not present in the material medium: for the value to be realized, the result has to be *communicated*: there is a mismatch of information between those who produce it and those who consume it which makes it impossible to draw comparisons between values of exchange.

According to Roldán, working time has also been intensified in order to overcome spatial obstacles which will result in the reduction of the total

particular privately-owned right: the prohibition of privatizing products derived from software that can be copied freely for commercial use.

⁹ See Dantas, Marcos, *op. Cit.*

rotation time of capital. Furthermore, according to David Harvey¹⁰, this intense time is becoming the greatest source of valorization, accumulation and appropriation of informational income at national and international levels. In summary, a major change seems to be taking place; this change implies a certain degree of transformation as factory work loses its hegemony, and non-material labour, a type of labour which creates non-material goods such as knowledge, information, etc., emerges.

Roldán broadly defines communication industries as those industries based on the processing and communication of information, be it artistic or scientific. She also takes up Ramonet's¹¹ definition of CIs, stating that Cultural Industries are "those industries producing creations using the three major symbolic systems known: sounds, images and letters". Nowadays cultural industries are believed to strongly influence the country's GDP.¹²

In this regard, the last few decades have seen efforts being made to define the scope and impact of cultural or creative activities within local economies and societies. This has inevitably given rise to the need to develop a new field of analysis which, according to the conceptual framework adopted, will be that of Cultural Economy¹³ or Creative Economy. In both cases are these analyses intended to demonstrate that expressions, activities and products coming from the creative or cultural sphere are of remarkable importance in terms of economic magnitude beyond the symbolic value that can be accorded them. There has also been an attempt to fully recognize the symbolic versus the economic dimension in the analysis, by considering the effects of cultural

¹⁰ See Harvey, David *Spaces of Global Capitalism*. London, Verso, 2006.

¹¹ See Ramonet, I. (2004). El quinto poder. *Le monde diplomatique*, June 23, 2010.

¹² According to data published by the Argentinian Creative Industries Observatory (Observatorio de Industrias Creativas, OIC) in 2004 under "Cultural Industries in Argentina", the sphere of cultural production has poor visibility in our country as a productive sector itself, even when it is of key economic and social importance. By 2000 CIs produced 2.9% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product). This equated them with the food and beverage industry, made them five times higher than the automotive industry product for that year and seven times higher than the textile industry product. In the City of Buenos Aires the economic impact of the sector has doubled, since these industries produce 6 per cent of GGP (Gross Geographic Product) for that city. As regards the contribution they made to employment generation nationally, it was barely over 2% until 2000. Similarly to what happens with the incidence of CIs on GDP, their contribution to employment generation in the city has doubled the nationwide index, reaching 4% of total employment in the city.

¹³ See Du Gay, Paul *Production of culture / Cultures of production*. London, Sage, 1997.

production and consumption on the formation of identities and, ultimately, on the preservation of cultural diversity.

These arguments require empirical data for the analysis of these new realities and their social, political and economic implications, as well as for the definition of appropriate policies aiming to harmonize the various effects these factors can have on different sectors of society. Cultural industries harmonize economic and cultural levels and UNESCO defines cultural industry as those industries that:

combine the creation, production and commercialization of contents which are intangible and cultural in nature; these contents are typically protected by copyright and they can take the form of a good or a service. This twofold nature – both cultural and economic – builds up a distinctive profile for cultural industries¹⁴.

According to this view, Creative Industries cover and imply a broader set of activities where the product or service contains a “substantial artistic or creative element”.

In this regard, while the concept of Creative Economy is useful for the purposes of reflection, it must also serve for development considering the specific characteristics of each country and each culture. Re-appropriating this concept would mean that the creative economy is "related to the government, the private sector, and the civil society in a sustainable development program that makes use of creativity to inspire on the intangible cultural values of people to generate locally and to globally distribute goods and services, which hold both symbolic and economic value simultaneously."¹⁵

As a consequence, it can be said that there is no single definition of Creative Economy. It is a concept under construction which is involved in an ongoing debate that overlaps and extends the concept of Cultural Economy. As has been noted, in order to understand Creative Economy it is important to take into account the evolution of the concepts of 'Cultural Industries' and 'Creative Industries', including the importance of the latter term and its development over the past two decades as it "has broadened the scope of cultural industries beyond the arts and has marked

¹⁴ See UNESCO *Framework for Cultural Statistics*, UNESCO, 2007.

¹⁵ See Solanas, Facundo “La economía creativa y las posibilidades de desarrollo en Argentina”. In Ana Fonseca Reis (Coord.) *Economía creativa como estrategia de desarrollo. Una visión de los países en desarrollo*, Observatorio Itau Cultural, Sao Paulo, 2008.

a shift in approach to potential commercial activities that until recently were regarded purely or predominantly in non-economic terms".¹⁶

3. The Creative Economy in the City of Buenos Aires

The publishing industry is one of the key sectors in the creative industry. Thanks to its tangible attributes associated with its social imagery, the City of Buenos Aires claims the right to become a benchmark regional centre of excellence in terms of training and production of the content industries, where human resources and creativity are the distinctive features.¹⁷

In the City of Buenos Aires, the analysis of Cultural Industries is carried out by grouping publishing together with the phonographic industries. Under the heading Publishing, Graphic and Phonographic Industries we find "publishing and printing; the reproduction of recordings" and "the wholesale of books, magazines, newspapers" and their corresponding retail sales. It is notable that if we analyze the 2003-2007 period in the city's structure of the Cultural Industries, we can see that until 2006 they had the major share, 38.2%, which decreased to 32% in 2007, being overtaken by "related creative services", which represented a share of 35.5%. What has thus far been said regarding the evolution of the Related Creative Services and the Publishing, Graphic and Phonographic industries can be corroborated by studying their contributions to the growth of both sectors: Related Creative Services increased from 25% to 85.5%, while Publishing, Graphic and Phonographic industries decreased from 50.4% to -9.7%. This highlights the relatively dynamic nature of Related Creative Services, as they make a significant and growing contribution throughout the period in question, and the relatively unfavourable trend of the Publishing, Graphic and Phonographic industry, which falls into absolute decline towards the end of the period, notwithstanding its contribution to the overall growth of ICs between 2004 and 2007.

¹⁶ See United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). *Creative economy report*. New York: United Nations, 2008.

¹⁷ See La economía creativa de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires [The creative economy of the City of Buenos Aires], OIC, Directorate of Creative Industries, 2008, 25.

4. The Publishing Industry from 1997 to 2010: Globally and Locally

Nestor García Canclini¹⁸ implies that although the word globalization¹⁹ tends to be understood as Americanization, the acquisition of Latin American publishing houses and production was initiated by Spanish companies. He argues that from 1940 to 1970 book publishing played a key role in national development and in the internationalization of culture in Latin America and its expansion into the world (which was also accompanied by the increasing professionalization of writers and an increase in the reading public). South America has had a dominant role in this area in the international movement of cultural goods which changed in recent decades due to the rising price of paper; the decline in consumption by the middle classes caused by a decrease in their purchasing power; low reading rates, poor literacy levels; poor regional and national distribution beyond the capital cities; the scarcity of state programs for the promotion of reading; and the protection of production. When international companies arrived in Latin America, as in the case of Argentina, the markets of each country became subordinate and subjected to a policy of 'bestsellerism'.

5. Digitization in the Publishing Industry

The nature of work which valorizes capital in advanced capitalist economies should always be discussed in light of technical developments, since informational production is not an attribute of the object or the

¹⁸ See García Canclini, Néstor, *La globalización imaginada*, Buenos Aires, Paidós, 2008.

¹⁹ As to the process known as globalization, we can say that its different aspects - economic, political and cultural - have been developing in the world since World War II and, with greater strength, since the fall of the Soviet Union. According to this view, until the mid-twentieth century the political organization of the world was marked by the emergence of many nation-states which were based on specific territorial space. This same position holds that the world might have suffered changes resulting from its passage to a global economic instance, in which various international organizations have started to become important, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, while rapid advances occurred in the field of communication, beginning with the rise and rapid development of the internet. When talking about globalization, it is often referred to as both the spread of capitalist international relations and a supposedly unified world. Especially in the economic sphere, globalization is about the trade and capital market liberalization processes, the internationalization of economic processes and the dominance of transnational corporations. See Ianni, Octavio, *Teorías de la globalización*, Buenos Aires, Fondo de cultura Económica, 1996 and Ortiz, Renato, *Mundialización y cultura*, Buenos Aires, Alianza, 1997.

agent but the relationship between them. That is to say, informational work creates abstract goods, and this is strongly linked with the digitization of contents.

In the 'digital canon', Juan Mendoza²⁰ supports a scheme consisting of three stages, which would involve an initial period of hegemony of the literate culture, then the industrial culture and finally the cyber culture. The industrial culture would be marked by a quantitative leap in culture thanks to new media technology, radio, TV: expanding audiences make the difference between mass society and literate culture. Thus, as the cyber age arises from the twentieth century and integrates with previous ages, so this cyber culture, which is characterized by "eliminating hierarchical relationships between the high and the low", marks the beginning of a new type of publication.

In the same vein, several authors such as Castells²¹ describe the current form of society as a "network society", referring to a profound change in communication systems, since a culture is not only contents, but also comprises transmission and the various means individuals can use to communicate. Indeed, the division of cultures into oral, typographic and electronic specifically concerns the various systems for the transmission of contents. 'Information Society' or 'Digital Society' is formed through the combination of two factors: information technology: data processing technology using computers as a central element; and communication networks: technology which enables the sharing of digitized information.²² The most significant feature of the digitization process is the possibility to convert elements previously subject to limited time-space conditions into information. This process had already been started through the use of mechanical, magnetic or chemical reproduction systems which allowed ephemeral things to be converted to analogue media, but it became more radical with the arrival of the internet.

The publishing and writing industry is made up of several figures including writers, readers, critics, publishers and booksellers who operate at different points in time, or stages: the 'creation or production' stage, consisting of the intellectual production of texts; the 'production-distribution' stage, comprising those in charge of the material production

²⁰ See Mendoza, Juan. *El canon digital. La escuela y los libros en la cibercultura*, Buenos Aires, La Crujía, 2011.

²¹ See Castells, Manuel. *Internet y la sociedad red*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid. 2001.

²² See Aguirre, Joaquín. "La incidencia de las redes de comunicación en el sistema literario". In *Revista Espéculo*, 7. 1997 Available at: <http://pendientedemigracion.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero7/sistemat.htm>.

of the texts, that is, their conversion into a specific medium; and the ‘consumption’ stage.

The first thing to discuss is the role of the book itself and the changes that that have occurred in the phase of a book’s creation. The first major change which has taken place since the advent of electronic media is the emerging gap between text and media, that is to say, the gap between the information and its format, since all the information included in the printed book can be digitized. This is a troublesome issue, because, if we consider that ‘texts’ can be shared in formats other than ‘book’, it follows that the publishing institution will no longer be necessary for all texts. A further major change concerns productive capacity: authors can be their own publishers, meaning that they can control the whole process of publishing their works. Information technology provides them with all kinds of production tools (e.g. word processors, graphic design software). In addition, there are other devices which enable them to reach the public directly through social networks.²³

As regards the distribution/marketing phase, it should be noted that new printing systems will make a new publishing system possible: the on-demand printing of the amount of books required with minimal risks. All these changes linked to the digitization of literary works inevitably lead to issues of copyright due to the impossibility of controlling copies. If the reader were able to make multiple copies from a single original digital copy, the publishing business would be adversely affected.

From all of the above it follows that this new communication paradigm will have a significant impact on the publishing industry, either by diverting texts to digital publishing (which may be done by the authors themselves, by new businesses or by publishing houses); by using dual publishing systems (digital and print); or by the production of new types of multimedia ‘texts’.²⁴ The modality of intervention in the distribution sector will also undergo changes, as the possibility of digital intervention would diminish the supply of books to bookshops — places that will no longer be absolutely necessary when it comes to buying a book.

²³ See Szpilbarg, Daniela and Saferstein, Ezequiel “La incidencia de las TICs en la esfera de la cultura. Aproximaciones al caso del campo editorial y literario”. In *Avatares. Comunicación y Cultura*. 2, 1-14. 2011.

²⁴ See Aguirre, Joaquín, *op. Cit.*

6. Three Publishing Houses: from Artisanal Work to large-scale Publishing Groups

Although it is an ambiguous term²⁵, when we speak of *Independent Publishers* we mean publishers who are mainly supported by domestic capital, and have a print run and a catalogue significantly smaller than those of leading multinational publishing companies. However, within this group there is a certain amount of variation: from publishers who are trying to compete in the publishing market, to artisanal publishers whose books are made at home, and who have a significantly more limited circulation. In this group we find independent publishers such as *Eloísa Cartonera*, *Tamarisco*, *Carne Argentina*, *Funesiana*, *Clase Turista*, *Nulú Bonsai*, *Milena Caserola*, *El Surí porfiado* and many others. This group of small-scale publishers publish writers and topics often ignored by the large- and medium-scale publishers of traditional associations (Argentina's Book Chamber and the Argentine Chamber of Publications), which is to say that they either do not fit in with the logic of the marketing departments of large publishing houses or that their topics or writers are unknown to publishers who are of the view that it is not worth investing in them. As with the field of drama or music, many of these 'marginal' writers often move on to work for large publishing houses if they are seen to have aroused the interest of consumers. Malena Botto describes these transformations as a *polarization of the publishing market* which has been taking place since the late 1990s. In an interesting article she argues that, despite it being a paradox of the 1990s, a period of liberal economic policy, in this decade the book industry experienced a growth that had no correlation with an actual recovery of the publishing and circulation of Argentinian writers²⁶. She explains this as being a result of the acquisition of publishing companies by foreign capitals. Against these transnational conglomerates small publishing ventures – called 'independent publishers' – emerged, with

²⁵ See Szpilbarg, Daniela and Saferstein, Ezequiel, "La independencia en el espacio editorial porteño". In Ana Wortman (Ed.) *Mi Buenos Aires Querido. Entre la democratización cultural y la desigualdad educativa*. Buenos Aires, Prometeo. 2012.

²⁶ In this way, there was a reversion of the process begun in 1930 and which extended until well into the 70s, which was led by a large group of Argentinian publishing houses and managed to develop □ focusing on the local market a process that in the 50s pushed these publishers to hold the hegemony of Spanish-speaking markets. Claridad, Emecé, Losada, Peuser and Sudamericana – which disappeared or were sold to foreign capital – were the major publishing houses of that group. See Botto, Malena (2006) in *Editores y políticas editoriales en Argentina 1880-2000*, Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica. 2006.

publishing policies that differed from those of large-scale groups in cultural terms. In fact, in the 2005 report by the Centre of Production Studies (*Centro de Estudios para la Producción, CEP*), these ventures are classified as ‘cultural players’, rather than profit-seeking private firms. On the other hand, the author adds that the denationalization of the industry also caused a drop in wages and a reduced headcount. She also mentions the disappearance of a major player in the book distribution chain: the bookseller. Instead of the bookseller of the past who was familiar with the printed material received and worked as a liaison between the writers and buyers of books, the current scene is dominated by ‘book dispatchers’.²⁷

The publisher of Editorial Funesiana (EF), ‘Funes’ Oliveira states that “we want to flatter the readers with good typography, great presentation, hardcover, something entirely for them, a way to thank them for their choice, and the search for writers has to do with this: that the mere fact of reading be stimulating, to embark on writing”. On the company’s website it can be seen that they prefer to publish books with extremely short print runs, 40 or 50 copies, and a highly personal binding and design. They define their books through a series of qualifiers: “handcrafted”, “bound by hand”, “numbered” and “unique”. In the same interview, the publisher recognizes that “not being able to publish made me bind my first short-story book myself”. The fact that it had been bound by the author endowed it with a very particular power while marking a break with the model of the writer as a sacred artist, distant from the material production of the book. One of the points of contact among these ‘self-managed’ publishing houses also arises from their involvement in the entire production of the book, from the conception of the idea to the moment of its materialization as an object with its own characteristics. At the same time, this publisher is also an organizer of a reading groups and book presentations where reading and friendship networks converge.

Another publisher analyzed is Eterna Cadencia (EC), a medium-size publishing house of local capital which employs ten people, including the owner-publisher, one editorial director, one executive editor, a secretary, a website manager, a press officer, another trade and export officer, editors and designers. It is a publishing house focused on literature and essays and seeks to position itself at local, regional and global levels, through actions such as participating in national and international book fairs along with other publishers.

²⁷ A statement by Editor Raul Ordenavía, in an interview with Malena Botto, *op. cit.*

Finally, we considered Random House Mondadori (RHM), the owner of the Sudamericana imprint, among others. Its subsidiary in Argentina has a staff of more than one hundred people, and its organization evidences a high degree of specialization comprising several managing editors, publishing marketing departments, media employees, secretaries, designers, editors, readers, staff specialized in business matters, and so on. It is a company with a large structure similar to that of the large-scale transnational capital entertainment companies which control the global sector.

6. Differences in the Modes of Production and Work with ICTs

It should first be noted that in all cases the organization of the company is formally regulated. It can be said that there are varying combinations of different ‘productive scenarios’. In the case of RHM, of course, we are talking about headquarters that belong to a transnational group, where different activities are carried out using a broad division of labour, as a large staff of employees work there to cover the different tasks. The final manuscript completed at the publishing house is turned into proofs which go to press before returning to the company to undergo a series of Press and Public Relations processes.

Content, however, is acquired by the companies in different ways. In most cases, there is an editorial planner who searches for books and authors which could become bestsellers. In this case, books are treated as bestsellers before they are put on the market, meaning that the marketing, media and editorial departments have an operational structure aimed at hiring certain authors and creating certain books according to potential demand. In other cases, collections are created under alternative imprints belonging to the same publisher but oriented towards literature. Here, the contents of books can reach the publisher with or without recommendation, but this always depends on the intellectual work exhibited by the author in other productive scenarios.

The economic relationship between authors and the company begins when the first contract is signed for a book, and it consists of the advance payment of a sum by way of ‘copyright’ which is linked to the print run (the number of copies printed), and the author is paid 10% of the value of book sales at varying periods which may be every three or six months.

These publishing companies – large-scale groups of transnational capital – have adopted parameters taken from their parent companies, and large publishing groups are managed according to the commercial parameters

which guide their decisions: Fernando Estévez, Editorial Director of Alfaguara, from the Prisa Spanish Group, also owners of Santillana, Taurus, Aguilar and the Fausto bookstores, stated that "the publisher does not decide what is to be read, but he or she is a more or less effective interpreter of demand". He also stated that the hiring of an author comes with a given name and a secured sale floor which, in order to be on the winning side, should be of two or three thousand copies over a short period of time. Rather than a book, what is proposed to the authors is a 'project'. That is to say, the book is signed up before it is written. The figure and role of the publisher has gradually been transformed: he or she is no longer an intellectual who discovers new authors and is at the forefront of the field, but somebody who studies market trends so as to become familiar with the preferences of the reading public. It is no longer the publisher who decides what to publish, but market experts, often denoted the 'Editorial Board'. Editorial departments have consequently undergone a process of reduction as sales and marketing departments have grown.²⁸

In fact, when asked about publishing activities, Paul Avelluto (General Editor at Random House Mondadori) put forward a vision of the book as a symbolic product to be placed on the market, a task requiring creative activity.

The job of the press staff has moved onto providing interviewers with a cut-and-dried interview by telling them: I have an author who can speak of such and such topic, you can put it together with something else... and increasingly, from what I saw in the United States, they work on the author's prior informal talk around the news: so for you to have a good sale you have to convert the author into something newsworthy. (Paul Avelluto, 2011 interview)

Capitalism across the company organizes the creative work for valorization, although it is true that *the author's work* valorizes capital and creates a product, as suggested by Roldán²⁹, which is inseparable from the author's body and mind. It is transformed into a product with a brand that places its value in the market. These workers are usually self-employed in this activity and often have other revenues enabling them to obtain a full salary.

²⁸ See Schavelzon, Guillermo "Del autor al editor: los caminos del manuscrito". In De Sagastizabal, L. and Esteves, F. (Eds.) *El mundo de la edición de libros*, Buenos Aires, Paidós. 2002.

²⁹ See Roldán, Martha, 2008, *op. Cit.*

On the other hand, it should be noted that each of these publishing houses manage varying levels of randomness and redundancy which are part of the global value chain in the Cultural Industry. In another study, this author refers to some of Dantas' notions such as random and redundant labour. The notion of redundant labour refers to a type of work in which the agent is required to replicate something. Conversely, random labour makes reference to the search for information that is not provided immediately by the redundancy of the code.³⁰

In the range of publishing houses we have analyzed, we can observe higher levels of randomness in the case of EF, in the sense that the goods are prepared by hand, they do not operate considering profit as a variable (not included in labour conventions), which allows for an organization of work which is practically unregulated, although this very situation poses the problem of long-term economic sustainability and requires workers to have other activities to ensure their income.

Conversely, EC and RHM work with lower levels of randomness, as they are involved in more regulated forms of labour governed by wages and pre-established working hours.

We must also analyze the role played by technology in the different publishing houses: it should be noted that EF is a small business where part of the work is done on the internet — a place where orders materialize and books are promoted. In addition, their higher level of 'creativity' may be evidenced by the lack of specified working hours, since the Publisher-Entrepreneur interviewed, Lucas Oliveira, handles work-rest schedules and regulates his own managerial activity, the maintenance of the project on the website and the construction of the book. In fact, this publishing house works with on-site book sales through buying and selling websites such as *Mercado Libre*, but it also releases its books in *ePub* format for download and preliminary reading.

EC, however, makes a much broader use of the internet than RHM, which shows that the lower the relative size of the business enterprise, the greater the use of the internet for a variety of purposes associated with management, advertising, sales and the creation of *reading communities*. This is linked to the fact that digitization is still evolving, and the concentrated large-scale publishers have not yet defined a clear business horizon for the eBook, due to the productive and profitable performance of the

³⁰ Roldán, Martha. "Trabajo "Creativo" y Producción de Contenidos Televisivos en el marco del Capitalismo Informacional Contemporáneo. Reflexiones sobre el caso argentino en los 2000s. In Susana Sel (Coord.) *Políticas de Comunicación en el Capitalismo Contemporáneo*. Buenos Aires, CLACSO. 2010, 72.

traditional book. It is the small and medium publishing projects which make a more rapid and appreciatory use of technological tools for the dissemination and circulation of their products.

7. Conclusions

Throughout this work, we have tried to show the trends of various authors which characterize modern capitalism as a new mode of accumulation, linked to information and so-called 'informational capitalism'. We have also seen the peculiarities of the publishing industry in Argentina, considering technological innovation in the three publishing houses analyzed, so as to evaluate to what extent symbolic productions affect both value formation and the skills that workers in these business enterprises require. Our findings, although preliminary, allow us to see that symbolic production and informational capitalism are essential to the production processes of Cultural Industries, as well as to work logic. The arrival of new technology has set new rhythms, activities, skills and practices which overlap with previous skills and can come into conflict with them. On the other hand, certain phenomena such as copyleft, put the very basis of the publishing industry at risk, threatening the copyright system, and thus the basic value of cultural goods, by ensuring the possibility to obtain free books through copyleft and 'Creative Commons' licenses.

We should return here to Virno's reflections and think about the new skills arising from the jobs of those who are involved in cultural productions. Virno assumes that the communication industry or the culture industry is an industry among others, with its specific techniques, and particular procedures; on the other hand, it also plays the role of an *industry of the means of production*. He argues this since, from his point of view, the industry of the means of production is traditionally the industry that produces machinery and other instruments to be used in the most varied sectors of production. However,

in a situation in which the means of production are not reducible to machines but consist of linguistic-cognitive competences inseparable from living labour, it is legitimate to assume that a conspicuous part of the so-called 'means of production' consists of techniques and communicative procedures³¹

³¹ According to Virno, the culture industry produces, regenerates and experiments with communicative procedures which are destined to function as means of production in the more traditional sectors of our contemporary economy. This is the role of the communication industry, once post-Fordism has become fully entrenched: an industry of

In conclusion, this is a transitional phase, where, in addition to traditional practices and competencies usually held by publishers, related to traditional ways of managing the publishing activity, there is also a strong transnational reality which is: reducing the autonomy of the field (as suggested by García Canclini, there is an incipient debate about the existence of ‘fields or markets’); creating the need to do things that make them stand out in the new reality arising from technological innovations which affect the way publishing houses are traditionally regarded as part of the cultural industries. There is a change in the reader who, in Canclini's words, becomes a "netizen"³²— a multimodal player who reads, watches, listens and combines various material which come from reading and entertainment.

the means of communication. When ‘subjective’ cooperation becomes the primary productive force, labour activities display a marked linguistic-communicative quality; they entail the presence of others. The monological feature of labour dies away: the relationship with others is a driving, basic element, not something accessory. Where labour moves to the side of the immediate productive process, instead of being one of its components, productive cooperation is a ‘publicly organized space’. See Virno, Paolo, *op. cit.*

³² García Canclini, Néstor, *Lectores, espectadores e internautas*, Barcelona, Gedisa. 2007.



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