

# Compulsory Creativity: A Critique of Cognitive Capitalism

By Steen Nepper Larsen

## Abstract

Contemporary capitalism can be labelled cognitive capitalism. In this dynamic, demanding and extremely transformative mode of production, knowledge becomes a strategic force of production and an important commodity, while concepts and ideas become items. This article sheds light on some of the implications of the emergence of a cognitive capitalism. In response to modern oxymorons, such as compulsory creativity and mandatory originality, this article offers various attempts to interpret and criticise how human inventiveness and a whole range of externalities get attuned to economic and market strategies, depriving them their natural, social and individual qualities. The aim of this article is to renew and sharpen a critique of the new type of capitalism and to foster some normative bricks that might be able to inspire alternative ways of thinking and living.

**Keywords:** Cognitive capitalism, creativity, critique, commodification, immateriality.

## Introduction to Cognitive Capitalism

...the capturing of positive externalities and their validation in the creation of private profit.

Yann Moulrier Boutang: *Le Capitalisme cognitif* (2007/2011: 58)

In modern capitalism, it is a *conditio sine qua non* that the dedicated human resource manager (HRM) encourages employees to do their best and release their human potentials for the benefit of the company. The human employee is comprehended as an active good, always capable of achieving more. In other words, the worker is an itinerant catalogue of dormant potentials and competences, an asset possessing extra resources, and the whole human being goes to work in flesh and blood.

The so called positive externalities, which are initially placed outside the productive sphere, such as desire, passion, compassion, language creativity and communication, and the common goods, such as sun, wind, rain and even pollination, are all of major economic interest and become integrated into private production. As levers for accumulation and profit, the non-economical phenomena get economised. Both human nature and the patterns of social interaction invoke immense interest, and attempts to attune both of them to the company's mission get implemented. In fact, according to Moulrier Boutang (2007/2011: 20, 104, 146-147), the current challenge of cognitive capitalism is to capture and fertilise these externalities (also defined as the 'travail gratuit' or 'free work'), which lie in wait outside production and beyond the economic sphere.<sup>1</sup>

The workers become equipped with specially designed CV narratives. They all wish to possess suitably unique qualities, so that they will prove irreplaceable when the next merger or rationalisation process takes place. The work force has become personalised, and the work individualised. Society no longer consists of nameless, unskilled and easily interchangeable 'hands', but of a growing proportion of highly refined and valuable knowledge workers.

Whereas the company is absorbed in branding on large-scale markets for enforced attention economy, the workers have to invest huge amounts of energy in effective and strategic personal branding. The message is the same everywhere: perform and compete, or go away and get lost!

At all levels, there is an increasing demand for the renewal of intellectual skills. Workplace-related courses are being offered and consumed at a rate never seen previously. From the factory floor to middle managers and top management – everybody has to accept the demand for inventiveness and have the courage to change old habits. And it is never acceptable to claim that one knows enough. Authorities that look backwards or worship tradition seem to be traces from an ancient and obsolete past.

Connectivity, change, renewal and innovation have become four important concepts and ideologies for private enterprise and state administration and, if the employee is not engaged in a continual development process, he or she will soon be displaced.

The HRM agent is a kind of a midwife, at the same time an intervener and a gentle redeemer. The employee has to be creative and original within an ever-present triangular framework, whose demands are: self-realization, self-development and self-governance.

Working today involves navigating contract steering, result expectations and documentation claims. Besides this, there is an on-going evaluation process directed towards everything and everyone. The watchword is lifelong learning from cradle to grave. Everyone seems to have an obligation to be creative. All around the imperative sounds: *Be creative!* Like an inevitable fixated truism, it is claimed that not only is it possible to be creative, but that everybody *ought* to be creative. Imperceptibly and wordlessly, this compulsion gets transformed into an inclination.

The workaholic Dane stands on the threshold of cognitive capitalism in which good ideas and productive thoughts can be transformed into gold at the stock exchange. There is currently extensive global competition to attract the best brains. Knowledge becomes a strategic force of production and an important commodity. Concepts become items with different price tags attached, and originality is desired and demanded at all levels and in all sizes. In the current international division of labour, it has become our 'obligation' in the affluent part of the Western hemisphere to produce and sell concepts, programmes and steering systems in order to survive and 'cope' effectively with the big thing called globalization.

Increasingly fewer people work in material production (making clothes and shoes, breeding pigs and cows, collecting mushrooms and cabbages) whilst increasingly more people deliver immaterial goods (experience and attention economy products, designs, knowledge devices). As seen from its own eyes, tomorrow's capitalism is clean, clever and smart. The polluting production and 'dirty' jobs are exported to other regions where the labour force is cheaper.

The aim of this article is to shed light on some of the implications of the emergence of a cognitive capitalism. In the midst of modern oxymorons like compulsory creativity and mandatory originality, this article presents various attempts to interpret and criticise how human inventiveness and a vast range of externalities get attuned to economic and market strategies, depriving them of their natural, social and individual qualities. The focal point of the text is to analyse the relation between creativity and capitalism in order to articulate a critique of cognitive capitalism and to foster some normative bricks that might be able to inspire alternative ways of thinking and living. This article also discusses the etymology of central concepts like creativity and innovation and analyses recent Danish political discourse on creativity claims.

## The Performative National Competitive State

The state has become a nationally competitive state, and, if we briefly analyse the texts that advocate the policy of the *zeitgeist*, we learn that the 400 members of The Danish Innovation Council (who, incidentally, were hand-picked by the government), proudly proclaim in the report *Innovative Danmark* (Innovative Denmark) that approximately 90 per cent of Danes use their own ideas and take initiative at work without being led top-down. 'It is getting close to a total mobilization of the creativity of the workforce' (2005: 9 my translation). The report employs a simple and commercial definition: 'Profoundly, The Innovation Council defines innovation as something new, which has a value at the market place' (2005: 40 my translation). The logic is simple and compelling: 1) Creativity is a spark plug for 2) innovation, making it possible to renew and increase output on 3) the market, thereby increasing the company's success at the micro-level and enabling Denmark to become a 'winner nation' at the macro-level. One, two, three – jump: the same formula for the individual and for the nation, both welded into the same compulsive contemporary teleology.

The International Thomson Business Press produces a collection of books called *Smart Strategies Series*. In this series, one finds Neil Coade's congenial definition of creativity in *Be Creative. The Toolkit for Business Success*: 'My definition of creativity is the bringing into existence of a product or service which is the outcome of imaginative thinking' (1997: 1).

Once again, creativity gets situated in the invisible mental depths of the magnificent and attractive *black-box* of the human's capacity to think. On the following page, a simple model with two important and typical inferential arrows can be studied: 'Creativity (idea generation) → Innovation (new product/process development) → Market (product launch)' (1997: 2). Coade condenses the very same logic that the politicians and the wishful Danish councils currently tend to canonise.<sup>2</sup>

In the report *Danmarks kreative potentiale: kultur- og erhvervspolitisk redegørelse* (A review of Denmark's creative potentiality), produced by the Erhvervs- og Kulturministeriet (the Ministry of Business Affairs and the Ministry of Culture) in 2000, it was already stated that enhanced global competition in experience and attention economic products demanded an intensified collaboration between the business and the culture sectors.<sup>3</sup> Culture and art are understood as an inevitable 'source of creativity and innovation in economic life' (2000: 18 my translation). The need to establish creative and inventive alliances between culture and business springs from the fact that the talent to tell good stories, the will to develop new design products, and the skills to honour man's immaterial needs have become important competitive parameters for the domestic business. 'The global waves of changes' and the new markets require injections of creativity: 'For many, creativity is the key to invent new ways to be able to communicate to the

market. New ways to insert value into the products. New ways to make enterprise' (2000: 22 my translation). The companies 'possess a need to mobilise their cultural and creative competences to survive in the competition' (2000: 23 my translation).

The Danish nation state and the government – in spite of the political strategy and ideology to let the market sphere decide without political interference – seem paradoxically to have once more found an ambition (See Larsen 2002a). The tendency is no longer a clear de-governmentalisation, but rather a national competitive *re-governmentalisation*, thinking and acting according to a large concern model. The state is deeply engaged in a giant human resource management experiment. The neo-liberal revival wishes to mobilise the dormant potentials of all inhabitants, and the technocratic fantasy strives to render the nation's resources transparent. At the same time, the focus shifts from the citizen to the consumer, while quasi-market relations show their faces. Society risks getting distorted and falling into decay. The preference of the consumer is viewed as the Archimedean point, and the market is seen as the meta-truth of societal interaction; however, it is impossible for the market to solve all problems. Demanding and fastidious consumers able to buy cannot function as the privileged central perspective of society.

Contemporary capitalism is an invisible and complex society without a centre; a society lacking self-confidence in long-term substantial and rational planning. The phantasmagoric market ideology attempts to compensate for this unspoken truth. The market functions as a paradoxical *tranquilliser*.

Beside many other aspects, the market is colour blind to the fact that there is no identity between knowledge and money, neither between innovation for sale and innovation *as such*, nor between creativity and effectuate production destined to strive and long for a profit telos.

## Oxymorons

How is it possible to form critical thought in the midst of this consensus-loaded and confused landscape? The will to philosophise has its origin in human wondering, and philosophy is love of wisdom and the will to question the apparent obviousness. Facing the highly effective, conflict-laden modern work life and its many short-lived buzzwords, it is impossible not to wonder. It is a challenge to launch a critical diagnosis of contemporary values and idioms. In the words of the philosopher Hannah Arendt: 'A life without thinking is quite possible; it then fails to develop its own essence – it is not merely meaningless; it is not fully alive. Unthinking men are like sleepwalkers' (1971: 191). The meaningful and vigilant life is intimately interwoven with the possibility to think, and it is the determination of philosophy that it 'can transform occurrences outside yourself into your own thought' (1971: 166). Critical and awaking thinking has its point of departure in a

curious questioning and interrogating of ‘the manifestations of thinking in everyday speech’ (1971: 176).

First of all, it appears to be the case that many words are on the move, and their meanings are going through radical transformations. For the philosopher, it is important to become acquainted with the parents of the new. Therefore, he or she is always preoccupied with studies in the field of the diverse history of words and ideas.

The word ‘creative’ baptises the ability to make something new and unexpected. It has a Latin origin: *creare, creatum* – create, creating. Innovation and innovative mean renewal and renewing (respectively), and, once again, the sources are Latin: *innovare, innovatio*. Classic metaphysical theology claimed and believed that God created everything out of nothing – *creatio ex nihilo* – and without his unfathomable omnipotence nothing of what exists would ever have become as it is. Today’s innovative strategy planners declare that man, as the crown of creation, possesses precious inner creative potentials, which the company and the nation have a right to demand are released. God’s almighty creativity has been spread out and has become a democratic right and compulsory potential. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, every human being has to function and navigate on the unholy marketplace as a profane god (written with a small g) and realise the potential gifts in a productive and convenient way. The traditional concept of God takes God to be infinite, eternal, unalterable, independent and omniscient. Today, the downscaled and profaned self-deification is interpreted as historical, alterable, provisional, dependant and divided into partial knowledge-keepers; but, first as foremost, it is interpreted as insecure and contingent.

Only those who obey the obligation to be creative can hope to out-perform the ambitious, competitive and threatening Chinese and Indian workers. The modern man has to master his self-governing competences and take the responsibility to act; being destined and doomed to freedom and with the technologies of the self, he/she has to ‘foster’ a strategic optimisation of the self. People become private ‘users’ (consumers) of eugenics (via scanning, genetic mapping, or pre-natal embryonic research) and, in the long run, they create humans that are desired and affordable, forcing them to become their own semi-religious and self-centred creators in the workplace and in the societal sphere.

Denmark has to adjust itself to become the world’s most innovative society. The Danes have to be mobilised and optimised. One has to notice the martial and calculative metaphors of the present vocabulary. The premises seem to be that the global competitive fight is an open war in which only the strategically best will survive.

According to Karl Marx’s intriguing and paradoxical view, work in the productive sphere is both a necessary evil and a primary human need. In today’s laborious society, the former has almost vanished as a weak memorial trace, at least in post-industrial capitalism. Instead, the biggest evil now appears to be the societal

fate of not being usable or exploitable. Unemployment is directly related to a loss of recognition, to social and economic catastrophe and, not least, to individual fear and anxiety.

Secondly, it is astonishing that contradictory terms come about in the first place. According to rhetorics, contradictory phrases such as ‘hate-love’ and ‘sour-sweet cream’ are labelled oxymorons. Creativity is charged with a mixture of inclination and compulsion. The unconditional claim: *Be creative!* is such an oxymoron.<sup>4</sup> The desire and the propensity to be creative gets intimately adjusted to the company’s strategic interests in creativity. It thereby becomes difficult to know precisely where the individual use value of creativity stops and the exchange value of the original and creative talents begins. In principle, people today are nearly always at work; not simply because they can always be reached by email and mobile phones, but also because they try to invent creative solutions to workplace problems and tasks even when they are officially off work. In ‘Answering the question: What is Enlightenment?’, Immanuel Kant famously wrote that a person is incapable of managing his own affairs and lacks autonomy if he does not know how to use his own intellect without being led by another (Kant 1784/1991). Today’s normative rule of conduct must be: A person is incapable of managing his own affairs and lacks autonomy if he does not know how to use his creative potentials and innovative skills without being led by another.

Thirdly, it is necessary to reflect upon the question of how contradictions and conflicts can be grasped and studied in a consensus-ridden society. It could be argued that, when knowledge, thinking and creativity are treated like commodities and handled as limited resources, there is something wrong in the state of Denmark, for knowledge is in principle never a private property nor a limited resource. Just like language, love and happiness, knowledge grows whilst being spent and spread. Perhaps it is even against the nature of knowledge to treat it as a commodity with a price.

## The Creativity Concept

The *Dictionary of The History of Ideas* states: ‘The proliferation of meanings of the word ‘create’ [...] have been extraordinary: ‘causing to grow’, ‘ability to produce’, ‘ability to call into existence’, to construct, to give rise to, to constitute, to represent, to invest, to occasion, to form out of nothing’ (1973: 577). But it is doubtful if the anchor place of this active verb (to create) and the noun (creativity) can be conceived as an inner, mental property and character of the individual. Both George Herbert Mead (1934: ‘Section 28. The Social Creativity of the Emergent Self’) and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1996: 1, 8, 23) support this critique and emphasise that creativity has less to do with personal potentials and more to do with social dynamics, contextual options and claims, and that creativity stems from practical situations and unforeseen events. However, in spite of this,

people continue to talk about themselves and their fellow men as if they all possess potential resources, waiting day and night on stand-by. To comprehend the value of innovation simply as its market value is also a dangerous reduction. Imagine if innovation – and creativity – were free to deal with something beyond the market place – like wisdom, beauty, experience, curiosity and happiness – and help harsh work routines to disappear and qualitative use values to materialise.

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* § 49, Immanuel Kant writes: ‘The imagination (as a productive cognitive faculty) is, namely, very powerful in creating, as it were another nature, out of the material which the real one gives it’ (1790/2000: 192). In the paragraphs that follow, Kant defines the concepts ‘talent’ and ‘genius’ and proclaims that man is not predestined to imitate and copy. Man is namely both autonomous and ‘schöpferisch’ (the old German word for being creative).

Many years earlier, Kant wrote: ‘Creation (Die Schöpfung in German, Larsen) is not the work of a moment. After creation made a beginning by producing an infinity of substances and materials, it is efficacious with constantly increasing degrees of fecundity throughout the total succession of eternity. Millions and numberless millions of centuries will pass, during which new worlds and new world systems will constantly develop and reach completion, one after the other, in the expanses far from the central point of nature [...]. Creation (Die Schöpfung, Larsen) is never complete. True, it once began, but it will never cease. It is always busy bringing forth new natural phenomena, new things, and new worlds’ (Kant: ‘Part Two. Section Seven: Concerning Creation in the Total Extent of its Infinity Both in Space and Time’ in *Universal Natural History and Theory of Heaven* (1755/2000: no pagination). It is worth noticing that Kant anticipates man’s ‘destiny’ in contemporary capitalism while portraying him as the second creator doing a never-ending job (‘always busy bringing forth new natural phenomena, new things, and new worlds’) on Planet Earth. In the pre-modern world, God was the only creative force and, though man was created in his image, he was created (*natura naturata*) and not creating like God (*natura naturans*).<sup>5</sup> In the modern world of cognitive capitalism, man has to be creative to avoid being dismissed from the workplace.

Taking a quick glance in three different international dictionaries that give voice to general historical consensual definitions of creativity, one can envisage that the concept is connected to the co-term ‘originality’ and is loaded with the power to break routines: ‘When original thinking is desired, assumptions should be questioned and routines broken’, and ‘Originality is, after all, the most widely accepted dimension of creativity. Creative things are always original’ (*International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 2001: 2893 and 2894). ‘**Creativity** (Latin), ‘creative power’, ability to original creative analysis and structuring of the material and social environment (Hillmann: *Wörterbuch der Soziologie*, 1994: 451-452).<sup>6</sup> ‘**Creativity**, the ability to make or otherwise bring

into existence something new, whether a new solution to a problem a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form' (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1992: 721)

But upon examining its etymological roots, denotations and connotations of the concept of creativity also lead to two entries stating that creativity always has to solve concrete problems in pragmatic settings. Creativity is first and foremost divergent thinking and contextual awareness: '**Creativity** (*psychology*) that aspect of *intelligence* characterized by originality in thinking and problem solving. Creative ability involves the use of divergent thinking, with thoughts diverging towards solutions in a number of directions' (*Collins Dictionary Sociology*, 2000: 119). 'Cognitive theories of creativity focus on the intellectual structures and processes that leads to insights, solutions, and ideas that are original and useful' (*International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 2001: 2892). In line with these definitions, it can be said that contemporary cognitive capitalism does not celebrate creativity in itself (*an sich*), but its ability to produce 'original and useful' material goods and immaterial commodities (such as ideas, knowledge and brands).

## Cognitive Capitalism and Creativity

Capitalism seems stronger than ever, and its ability to transform and commodify social relations does not encounter many obstacles. However, it appears as though its base – the private commando over surplus production – is crumbling, because it is utterly dependant on concepts such as knowledge, creative body-thoughts, invention, linguistic fantasy, culture, confidence, sanity, engagement, democracy and communicative action.

Although industrial capitalism transformed living labour to dead labour on a grand scale (via an externalisation of the experience and knowledge of the workers to be encapsulated in the machines and the technological steering-systems), immaterial and cognitive capitalism seems to be immediately dependant on living labour, and not least to the unpredictable and attractive creativity bound to human existence and intelligence, as its primary source of value.<sup>7</sup>

The economic autistic indication of value tends to become the measure of everything, even though it is destructive and impossible. Only time will tell whether there are built-in absolute borders in and for cognitive capitalism and whether it will be its own *Totengräber* (gravedigger). For the time being, capitalism does not appear to be fragile. In the meantime, I will dare to draw twenty alternative views of societal development and contrast them to the scenarios stemming from the one-eyed utilitarian-neoliberal model.

Today's capitalism takes advantage of 'the exploitation of living immaterial labor' (Hardt & Negri 2000: 29). The challenge is to establish how this exploitation and suppression can be opposed.<sup>8</sup> Such a critique has to challenge and pro-

voke contemporary cognitive capitalism and its new regime of accumulation, whose motto – taken from Marx’s first volume of *Capital* (1867/1976: 412) – remains: ‘Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!’

## **Man’s Ideas and Productivity Generously Foster and Feed Capitalism**

Productive relations delimit and restrict the free development of productive forces. When knowledge is treated as a strategic resource, a commodity and a private property, when creativity becomes a compulsion and a competitive parameter of the nation state, and when innovation is stripped of any qualitative content and only estimated for its market value, it is not out of the question to examine whether or not Marx’s point is still valid and possesses imaginative power.

Man’s ability to produce knowledge and the capability to foster creative and innovative social processes are absolutely necessary for the development of productive forces. But these capacities are governed by private ownership, by the merciless market and by the strategic-political performance paradigm. And besides, everything happens in the holy name of self-realisation and becomes subdued to the dominating logic of strategic behaviour of the subject.

The majority of productive forces (though admittedly not all of them) might be developed more freely without these ownership relations and economic and political rationales. Inherent in knowledge, creativity and innovation, there seems to be something transgressing. It is immanent in the ‘nature’ of knowledge that it must be divided and shared and not just restricted to an exclusive and private object. Everybody ought to have access to knowledge and, the more it circulates, the more it grows. The same holds for happiness and love. None of the three disappear while they are given away.<sup>9</sup> In principle, though not in real life, we already live in a post-scarcity society.

## **Creativity is more than Fuel for Capitalism**

Both as a theoretical concept and as a concrete social and individual praxis, creativity has to be rescued and donated its own right without focusing primarily on its potential economic possibilities and implications. Its non-economic existence has to be defended. It cannot simply be accepted that all diverse non-economic phenomena always-already and servile have to become parts of an economic machine. Knowledge, creativity and innovation are like critical and normative voices in a hyper-rationalised and hyper-economised world. The perpetual ambition of this article is to allow a cool analytical way of thinking cope with and line up beside a warm critique of society in order to renew the concept of critique and to shed light on the differentiations inhabiting a diagnosis of the contemporary society’s values and norms.

No position of discourse or interpretation is ever neutral. The task is to intervene in the public sphere and to fertilise possibilities for an open, international debate on society's development.

Critical research is a passionate and advocating affair with which critical judgements intertwine.

Rather refreshingly, Paolo Virno writes, 'Der Mensch ist ein Lebewesen, das Imstande ist, seine Lebensform zu verändern, indem es von gefestigten Regeln und Gewöhnheiten abweicht' (2007: 244) ('Man is a living creature capable of changing his life-form when he deviates from the strict rules and conventions'), and he continues by providing a precise definition of creativity, which contrasts other broader and vaguer definitions. He states, '...die Formen des sprachlich artikulierten Denkens, die es erlauben, das eigene Verhalten in einer kritischen Situation zu verändern' (2007: 246) ('...articulated thinking in a lingual form, which makes it possible to change one's behaviour in a critical situation') (see also Hentig 1998/1999). Notice that Virno understands creativity as something situated and context-bound and, at the same time, as a qualitative and existential force to change the situation and oneself. This understanding establishes a distance to the airy and abstract figures of pure potentialities that neoliberal spokespeople and cognitive capitalists often idealise and refer to.

### **To Rescue the Concept Creativity**

Imagine if it were the lions who branded delicious boxes of human flesh from distant countries, if the sharks displayed diving-trips down under, or the eagles offered guided tours to the Alps. Picture the scene in which you were unable to create possible worlds in language and were denied the opportunity to expand your taste experiences and regions. Imagine if you were destined to cud-chewing, day and night, for centuries, for ever.

In order to rescue the concept of creativity, one must recollect the knowledge and wisdom from a vast field of thought, including philosophical anthropology, evolutionary biology and cognitive semantics. The human species is plastic, curious and creative: 'nature plus', develop a 'second nature', which is not reducible to one type of nature.

To be a human being is to be changeable by nature, but it was never written into human genes nor inscribed in human linguistic patterns that there had to be a compulsory creativity within cognitive capitalism. The wise words of Kant have to be remembered: man is the animal equipped with reason, motive and argumentation, and capable of saying no.

## **Biopolitics and Bio-counter-power**

A rescuing critique of the phenomenon of creativity interlocks the anthropological specificities of man with the unpredictable social dynamics we inhabit, maintain and come to change. Creativity is far more than an inner mental resource, an outer strategic trump, an element within national educational planning or a convenient lever to enhance the effective economic competition.

Capital establishes widespread connections to the talkative and listening person embedded in everyday life, active in the work sphere and an eminent language user, having to live in the overbearing interlaces of the experience economy, biopolitics and life-economics.

The 'old' capitalism laid violent hands on the common grounds and fields and expelled the original inhabitants in order to breed flocks of sheep to acquire wool for production (Karl Marx wrote about these so-called enclosures in Chapter 24 of the first volume of *Capital* (1867/1976)). The valorisation of capital spread through diverse materials such as grain, cotton, venison, coal, iron, gold, diamonds, ivory, fish, whales, water (transformed to steam and energy); not to forget productive child labour and the efforts of the working masses.

The 'new' capitalism does not differ radically from the old one when it comes to principles, nor the diverse movements through matter, bodies and souls, but it also benefits from the fact that schools and families socialise youngsters to function as productive and flexible cogs in the industrial and virtual machines (see Gorz 2003/2010 and Larsen 2011). The individual is tremendously effective in disciplining his or herself to wage-labour and being creative on his/her own initiative or on command. Therefore, capital finds always-already available and keen workers who are willing to help capital blossom, and capital knows how to address and meet man's cognitive and productive skills and consumptive desires. It seems to be attractive to join the show with the biggest yield. But we should not forget that capitalism has other faces: child prostitution, trafficking, drug dependency, powerful monopolies and oligarchies, wars on oil and other precious and strategic resources, excessive fishing and harvesting, weapon production, and unhealthy food (to give a few examples).

## **Mental Capital and Neuro-capitalism**

The animal with the large brain is convenient for capital. Capital is dependant on many 'things' that are initially difficult to capitalise without striking a blow (even though it happens all the time and often under cover). Just to mention a few: life, air, water, ideas, dreams, hopes, love, happiness, sunshine, respect, confidence, passion, ethics, will, fear, collaboration, interaction, language, communication, compassion, curiosity, empathy, knowledge, beauty, help, events and unpredictable and thinking bodies. Despite this, capital attempts to commodify these exter-

nalities or to transform them into something that can be recognised within an economically coded horizon. Capital seeks to reterritorialise what has been deterritorialised or risks slipping away from its field of action. The modern *enclosure* vocabulary deals with copyright, patents and various agreements on whether or not it is legal or illegal to try to headhunt important and knowledgeable ‘workers’ from various companies. Cognitive capitalism is profoundly dependant on human knowledge and creativity and it views mankind primarily as a potential resource. This human potentiality seems to summon paradise on earth, but it has its costs and dark sides.

When creativity gets attuned to the needs of production, the human ability to shape something new gets moved from the playground, the art schools and the educational settings. Besides this, it is not only the entrepreneur, the manager, the leader or the devoted, strange and lonely inventor who has to be creative in today’s society. The expectation is that we all have to come up with creative solutions and ideas at the speed of light in order to direct the invisible cognitive, creative and innovative processes to be realised with a visible market effect.

### **Transformation of the Concept Creativity**

Creativity used to be conceived as an anthropological capacity, as a renewing force in society, as an integrated part of a successful human self-realisation project and as a potential for opposition and resistance. Critical thinkers even saw creativity as something to be rescued from capital(ism), market and state. Today it seems to have become ‘something’ we are destined to fertilise in a life-long perspective. Compulsory creativity gets directly interwoven with neo-liberal steering techniques like evaluation procedures, control and contract measurements (Larsen 2004). Creativity – talents for serendipity and unforeseen decision-making – become appreciated assets and commodities.<sup>10</sup> The task is to design and produce material and immaterial goods to honour the insatiable demand for new products, experiences and entertainment. The creative outcome can be coined ‘customised thought-items’.

Previously, creativity was conceived as an external factor, occasionally being capable of servicing production and functioning as an economic lever. Now creativity has moved up front, where it plays the role of the first priming composition of the food chain in the accumulation process. In the rich and spoiled part of the Western hemisphere, nobody ever seems to question that one must live on creativity, or else die.

The powerful creativity discourse can be depicted in a scheme in which ‘quotations’ of the anonymous contemporary creativity lingo are inserted:

- Creativity is inexpressible, rare, irrational, groundless – beyond measuring, intention and planning (‘Creativity cannot be predicted, either it is there or not there’).

- Creativity gets fertilised; it could be described as a fragile and brittle plant ('The creative young talents have to be raised and cultivated'; 'The creative talent was blossoming').
- Creativity is a gift; rare and precious ('This creative employee is outstanding').
- Creativity is a resource; a field for vivid economic and political interest ('Creative economics'; 'The creative resources of the nation has to be mobilized' – like the striking assertions and mantras mentioned at the beginning of this article).
- Creativity is reserved for certain groups (parts, segments) of the population ('The creative kid'; 'The creative class'; 'The creative leader'; 'Artists and architects are creative').
- Creativity as a property of teams and interwoven with social relations ('The creative Brazilian soccer team'; 'Denmark as a creative nation').

In general, creativity is valorised in a positive way and is actively related to praiseworthy events and acts that manage to surprise and please us. Creativity is situated *in someone* and expressed *in something*, and, in cognitive capitalism, people apparently do not mind committing themselves to the naturalist fallacy: creativity *is* able to do something; creativity therefore *ought* to do something.

Creativity is a trigger, ignition and dormant potential. Creativity is an utmost viable process phenomenon. It brings something new into existence; it changes the world and its inhabitants. Creativity is a richly connoted dynamic noun. It deals with and implies changes of forms and states, transformation and energy transfer.

## **How to Act as *Homo Intellectus* and to Form a Culture of Generosity?**

This is a transformation phase celebrating profane determination. *Homo intellectus* is selected to bridge the gaps between creativity, innovation and the market in a number of intelligent ways. It has become the optimum meaning of capitalist cognition and its presupposed destination to take care of a direct transformation from idea to earning, *from thought to invoice*.<sup>11</sup>

Two counter-moves seem possible: 1) Exogenous counter-power, demonstrating that a sizable amount of creative skills and innovative solutions do not primarily have to facilitate the market. This praxis of resistance tries to liberate the human streams of energy and place societal needs higher than private economic ones. 2) Endogenous counter-power. Many waking hours are spent at the workplace or in educational institutions, following dreams and exposing creative skills. It is also worthwhile fighting in this sphere, 'even though' one might get a higher wage and better marks by remaining passive. The critique of cognitive capitalism cannot afford to pretend to be 'holy' and pure in advance; it is not enough to stand on the side-lines.

Reflective governance has become systemic reason and internalised ‘nature’. Bio-power and bio-politics get fused as empirical reality and existential tonality for those who fulfil their duty (and more) towards it. In order to not to get swallowed or lose one’s freedom to think and move, it seems important to learn to read the signs, to notice the differences and to acknowledge the resemblances between the dominating governance and management rationales. Some of them have to be laid bare, some to be ‘hacked’ (de- and refunctionalised), some even have to be fought against. Attempts at counter-thinking have to be strengthened. Contra-productive capitalism – using violence, power and smart strategies to economise with non-economical features – has to be publically undermined. Knowledge belongs – like language – to everyone and no one (see Larsen 1995). Today, a ‘Kultur der Generosität’ (culture of generosity) is missing, along with the power to lift itself far beyond the strategic exchanges of equivalences and the linguistically masked and dressed up exploitation of man’s creativity.<sup>12</sup>

The passion for non-utilitarian thinking must be guaranteed the best conditions and the right to have non-regulated experiences must be protected. It becomes a lifelong task to fight abuse of externalities: thinking, knowledge, being together, carnal pleasures...and creativity. Like Marx, it is necessary to continue to criticise the societal machine when it digests the knowledge worker without anyone protesting. Back in 1850-1860, what used to be the activity of living labour suddenly seemed to become a result of the activity of the machine. Today, most of us never have to be attached to noisy and unprotected machines. The production and extraction of surplus value happens much more smoothly and gently when we work, network and learn. Previously, the factory and dangerous Spinning Jenny expressed a clear language of exploitation; today, forms of suppression and exploitation are much more subtle and delicate. They even become something as strange and incomprehensible as internalised ‘nature’.

### **A Civilizing Influence of Capital?**

The knowledge-intensive (e.g. intellectual) workforce possesses a use-value as well as an exchange-value dimension. The use-value for the carrier and owner of the potential intellectual workforce consists of an opportunity to position oneself as a powerful player on the labour market with a high exchange value – in an actual and virtual joyful capability to be able to form the world’s matters and signs.<sup>13</sup> The use-value for the buyer of the highly skilled, educated and trained workforce is ‘densified’ in its ability to contribute to value production, by way of the valorisation of capital.

To protect the use value of one’s own knowledge and skills and to try to give it another *telos* than the one governing production and market affairs might be one sort of resistance opportunity.

But quite many of these types of workers appear already to be so privileged that they feel it gets close to an autonomous and meaningful hobby to master and pursue their daily work. When going to work donates life meaning and fosters pride in what is accomplished and created, implying that one receives recognition, it might be the case that modern work has been so unrecognisably humanised throughout the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that what Marx once labelled ‘the civilizing influence of capital’ has been an active player behind the backs of the wage labours.

However, it should never be forgotten that cognitive capitalism feeds on the productive passions and creative impulses of the workers, like Yann Moulier Boutang documents and many current critical voices testify.<sup>14</sup>

Creativity does not have to be inscribed in influential business models (like Coade’s cyclical model described above). Instead of igniting technological innovation and being directed towards the market, creativity can try to break away from this beaten track and be engaged in strengthening social ties and inventing new ways of doing things. Instead of doing the job to maximise the production of exchange value creativity, inventiveness and serendipity can donate new use-values, civilise the feeling of togetherness, and find new ways to qualify the productive forces to serve mankind. The challenge is to treat and honour creativity as a friend of excellence and a power to liberate social processes, instead of seeing it simply as a money-making device.

A critique of cognitive capitalism calls on both knowledge and perceptions to be able to differentiate, judge and navigate a concrete situation. To critique is not simply to equate expressions of distaste or to point derisively at something one dislikes. Creative critique is *Möglichkeitssinn* (a German word for the skilled sense to find and shape meaningful opportunities) and a conceptual form-determination of what has to be criticised. Critique gets activated by the phenomenon that needs critique.

### **Marx’s Eternal (?) Actuality**

Marx’s words in *Grundrisse* (1857-1858/1973) are still valid. It is not wealth, understood as accumulated exchange value, command over other people’s work and private ownership to ever more circulating capital that gives society its real measure and quality: real wealth is the elaborated individual productive force and the free and self-determined time in which one can live like a human being.

But Marx has to be supplemented: contemporary cognitive capitalism does not possess a sole and exclusive right to annex creativity, which is exposed individually in indeterminate singular form, or in the social field in various plural forms. Creativity is more than and different from a simple lever for further accumulation and strategic and national politically induced competitive, market and production-related behaviour. Creativity is not an object and not a fixed tool. Neither is crea-

tivity to be grasped as a rational, intentional, voluntary and inner-mental potentiality. Creativity is subjected to certain borders, for man did not create the Big Bang, the cosmos, nature, evolution, life or death – or even for that matter him- or herself – with consciousness or creativity.

**Steen Nepper Larsen** (b.1958) is associate professor at GNOSIS – Mind and Thinking, Campus Emdrup, Aarhus University, Denmark, and Co-author and co-editor of *Sociologisk leksikon*, Cph.: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2011 ([www.gnosis.au.dk](http://www.gnosis.au.dk)). E-mail: [stla@dpu.dk](mailto:stla@dpu.dk)

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See Larsen (2008) for a categorical attempt to conceptualise and criticise cognitive capitalism. A thorough presentation of Moulier Boutang's critical thinking is also to be found in this book and in Kristensen and Larsen (2008).
- <sup>2</sup> As well as the Innovation Council, a so-called Globalization Council has been formed.
- <sup>3</sup> At this time, the Danish Government was not like it is today, nor was it liberal-conservative (as it was in 2005); in 2000, the government was social democratic and social liberal. It should therefore be noted that consensus manifests itself across the political spectrum when it comes to how to comprehend and treat creativity as primarily an ignition with tremendous economic implications. See Larsen (2006 & 2012).
- <sup>4</sup> The neologism cognitive capitalism can also be interpreted as an oxymoron, through the direct connection between something living, organic, thinking and human and a societal exploitation and accumulation form. The oxymoron stems from the fact that capitalism on its own is not able to be creative; only human beings, alone or as parts of social networks, have the capacity to be creative.
- <sup>5</sup> See Henriksen's interview with the author about the historical roots and the actuality of the creativity concept (2011).
- <sup>6</sup> My translation from German: **Kreativität** (lat.), "Schöpferkraft", Fähigkeit zu originärer schöpfer. Analyse u. Gestaltung der materiellen u. soz. Umwelt'.
- <sup>7</sup> Moulier Boutang (2007/2011: 163): 'Without the power of the living (*le vivant*, human activity) which is radically distinct from machinery and from coagulated dead labour, none of this can take place'. He continues to describe how cognitive capitalism benefits from invention power of the cooperation between large numbers of brains. Today exploitation is, 'basically, not that of the consumption of labour power, but its willingness to make itself available', and 'its capacity to provide answers to non-programmed questions'.
- <sup>8</sup> Sloterdijk (2007: 171) sheds light on how modern thought strives for and gets attracted to 'unendliche Möglichkeiten des Auch-anders-sein-Können' ('infinite possibilities of also-being-different').
- <sup>9</sup> In *Empire*, Hardt & Negri (2000: 407) assert that the creative power of the multitude (its multiple *posse*) is currently being suppressed. Its virtual force to free creation beyond the demanding exchange forms of money and capital is being blocked off by Empire. According to the authors, collective resistance does not lie dormant; it is brewing irresistibly. 'By the virtual we understand the set of powers to act (being, loving, transforming, and creating) that reside in the multitude' (Hardt & Negri 2000: 357). I do not think it is necessary to accept this grand profane narrative and utmost peculiar semi-sacred emancipation story of the multitude

(see Larsen: (2002b)) to accept the argument that creative talents could take other prosperous forms if they were not subdued by capital/the state/Empire.

- <sup>10</sup> It has to be emphasised that a lot of people never get the opportunity to be creative, neither in Denmark nor abroad; they still have to do what they are told. Furthermore, quite a few are expelled from the work sphere, suggesting that their potential creativity is unlikely to be seen.
- <sup>11</sup> This happened to be the slogan of the Ministry of Research (full name: Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation) in Denmark until 2011.
- <sup>12</sup> The concept of a ‘culture of generosity’ is inspired by the chapter title ‘Vollendeter Kapitalismus: Eine Ökonomie der Generosität’ (Completed Capitalism: An Economy of Generosity) in Sloterdijk (2006: 60).
- <sup>13</sup> Lazzarato (2004: 190): ‘Contemporary capitalism does not arrive with factories, these follow, if they follow at all. It arrives with words, signs and images’.
- <sup>14</sup> Lotringer (2004: 6): ‘The more creative and adaptable the workers are – the more self-valourising – the more surplus of knowledge they can bring to the community at large [...]. Everything has become “performative” [...]’. See also Larsen (2008), and Kristensen and Larsen (2008).

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