

Eventhough it seems that the theoretical investigations into the so called cognitive capitalism have already reached their peak, at least in some parts of the world, it became clear in Belgrade that we are still far from articulating the main problems in the field of the cognitive labor - cultural work - let alone the theory of cognitive labor becoming socially effective. There are, of course, many similarities to the demands and interventions of recent struggles, especially within the universities, but there are many specificities in the post socialist countries of former Yugoslavia that can not be directly translated to those articulations and demands.

Despite the fact, that more and more people in the sphere of art, university and other so called “cultural sectors” all over the world are forced into unpaid labor, shady working conditions and unreliable contracts with no social rights, these positions within the sphere of ‘cognitive labor’ are still seen as a privileged ones. It is not just the lack of understanding of oneself as a precarious worker, whose rights are being taken during the alienating production process; the problem also lies in the fact that problems connected to such working conditions are seen as individual, not collective issues. Because of that, there is no desire to address the systematic nature of this problem, no desire to set them in the context of modern capitalism. Instead, people search their own individual ways out of these conditions, only to find themselves in another circle of the same production process. Even if it comes to the attempt of collective action, it is done with individual intents for the solution of individual problems. People at best see themselves as victims of the system, which only leads to the self-group sharing of their experience, instead of contextualizing their struggle politically. Not as victims but as political subject who are taking control of their everyday life into their own hands.

There is an evident lack of solidarity among precarious cultural workers. People too often point fingers to the workers who in their opinion found a way to slide the rules of the system, but they are only the object of their critic to the point where people reach the same privileges. People see the problem in their ‘lazy nature’, nit in the system that allows and encourages such fragmentation of labor force. Another lack of solidarity becomes visible when one worker finds himself in conflict with the institution. The rest remain silent in either lack of political awareness or the fear of losing their positions. As seen with the case of Madrid students in Renia Sofia, it is easy to be radical in safe haven of theoretical argument. It is much harder to invest your name and your body into the real political struggle, for it offers no safety.

In last couple of years neoliberal ideology found its haven in the sphere of art, where we are often faced with voluntary self-precarization, both in theory and practice. Atomization of the workers, that prevents collective action is seen as autonomy, unpaid work as a practice into the world of art production, false promises of getting full time employment one day if we stick with unbearable conditions as a ‘building the network and a name for oneself’, destruction of the line between free and working time is seen as growing on the theoretical basis.

Even more, in post-yugoslav context ‘snadi se’ (find a solution for your problem) doctrine forces us to think that it is not only a privilege to be part of the art scene, but also to find million ways of getting the funds, making projects, etc. without realizing such system only worsens the working conditions for the army of precarious workers.

All these issues were in various ways presented at the two debates in Rex. What, in our opinion was surprising, were the reactions of the majority of the participants to the perhaps naive and amateurish but nevertheless honest attempts of political emancipation - “bottom-up” construction of political subject - through the workers survey done by the Workers Inquiry Group at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid. It is in a way understandable that in difficult situations as the colleagues from Serbia are experiencing it is easier to seek the solution from the outside than to articulate one's own position in the wider social context. That is probably the reason why at these two debates the “form” of the inquiry was scrutinized while it should have been primarily understood as a specific tool in the particular struggle. We think the struggles are particular but the exploitation is universal. Therefore, we need to go beyond those differences to be able to see our positions clearly.

The unresolved question from the two debates in Rex seem to be the following:

- How do theory and practice became efficient? How to go beyond the institutional critique towards social critique?
- Who is the “cultural worker”?
- How to achieve any kind of transversal solidarity between workers in the field of culture and other fields?

- How to bypass the notion of “cognitive work” and the idea that cultural work is still a privileged field of work in today’s society? How to articulate the idea that cultural workers have become a new proletariat?

Bojana Piškur and Tjaša Pureber, REC