

EDITORIAL

Divided labor, multiplied culture

Perhaps the most basic network in modern life is the division of labor. It certainly rates alongside family, school, and town. And that inexorably leads to a discussion of how resources are allocated within this division, who exercises power, and what happens when the network meets a seemingly natural or unnatural end. For networks that may appear extremely stable can come to abrupt or scheduled conclusions when a company goes bankrupt or a school cohort breaks up.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a mercantile system arose from calculations, appropriations, and exchanges of climate, geography, flora, and fauna. Exchanges of goods turned into exchanges of labor. As food commodities made their way around the globe, so did people, often as slaves. When machinery was developed, work split into an industrial mode. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, cities grew into manufacturing sites, populations urbanized, and wages displaced farming as the basis of subsistence. These new forms of labor were institutionalized in empire. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, manufacturing went on at the centre, with food and raw materials imported from the periphery. In the twentieth century, assembly-line control, with its *quid pro quo* of sufficient wages to buy the products being assembled, became a Fordist paradigm. The labor force was divided between blue-collar workers, who undertook tasks on the line, and white-collar workers, who observed them.

Differences of opinion emerged about the significance of the balance of trade to a country's wellbeing. Mercantilists thought it should be controlled, but free traders wanted market forces to rule in accordance with factor endowments and an international division of labor. Keynesian responses to the Depression made protectionism a more legitimate position in economic theory, until stagflation emerged from the transnational phase that commenced after the war. By the mid-1980s, offshore production by multinationals exceeded trade between states. Since that time, the global capitalist economy has depended on the integration of production processes; even when geographically dispersed, they remain governed by states and parastatal institutions in the service of capital accumulation. Products are first made and consumed in the centre, in a major industrial economy; then exported to the periphery; and finally produced and consumed 'out there', once technology is standardized and savings can be made on the labor front. Goods and services owned and vended by the periphery rarely make their way into the centre as imports.

What has all this meant for culture? We ask that question in two senses. First, has culture itself become an industry that is marked by an internationalizing division of labor? Think of the way that electronic games are played by 'gold-miners' in China who are paid to earn points for Westerners overnight, or Hollywood films are made

by cheap labor in Britain which has weak unions and featherbedded tax breaks? We think the answer is in the affirmative. Then there are cultural matters of everyday life, such as the experience of racialization, of linguistic and religious difference, of the zone where professional knowledge meets customary knowledge. Again – and we see this in the papers assembled for this issue – the impact of a globalizing division of labor is obvious.

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