

INTELLECTUAL PRODUCTS AND
INTELLECTUAL MODE OF PRODUCTION:
The Case of the United Nations University

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January 1987

In marxist analysis the basic tool is the relationship between means of production and mode of production. Very little is actually said about the product. As a consequence, when the mode of production presumably changes under socialism the products (with some exceptions such as war toys and pornography) remain very much the same and so do actually the means of production--the hardware. Even to the point where the argument may be made that the mode of production did not change very much either with the socialization, at the collective or national levels, of the means of production.

Here I am concerned not with production in general but with intellectual production, and with intellectual products. They are verbal; appearing in oral and in written forms, in short versions and in long versions. This gives rise to the very simple Typology I:

TABLE 1. Intellectual Products: Typology I

	short	long
oral	(1) lecture presentation	(2) course
written	(3) article paper	(4) book

I think most intellectuals are fairly well acquainted with all four forms. The oral form has the great advantage of permitting unmediated dialogue, or at least some type of feedback; the written form the great advantage of being preserved, if not for eternity at least beyond the time-span of presentation. Of course, today this also applies to the oral form because of recording possibilities. But tapes or disks, like micro-film have the great disadvantage that

one cannot interact with them, underline, making notes rather than just taking notes. Besides, who can be fond of a cassette, a disk?

Correspondingly, the short form has the great advantage of accommodating more limited thoughts, perhaps more precise, specific to a limited theme. The long form has the great advantage of breaking through such limitations, filling bigger areas of intellectual space or at least lighting them up with many light posts; not only the single-light-in-the-desert of the short form.

Then, there are the equally obvious relationships between the types of products. The oral form may be a preparation for the written form, as the short form for the long form. A thesis is tried out, in short, oral form, perhaps not only once but several times, with feedback, debates, dialogues. From that stage on the intellectual may proceed in two directions. He may add more short, oral presentations and chain them together in a course; or he may transform the one he already has into a short written form, an article (for a journal) or a paper (for a conference). At this point let me only add one personal confession/proposal: a written paper in advance of a conference, apart from a brief outline, seems to me a total misunderstanding of intellectual production. What is the value of a conference where the proximity permits oral exchange if it only serves as a marketplace for already processed, written products where most basic choices have already been made and the author has reduced his options to a minimum, closed his gestalt so as no longer to be really open to what transpires in the dialogue? Except for some minor changes and footnotes?

Regardless of the course taken from the first cell in the table, whether via cell (2) or cell (3), most intellectuals would probably agree that the real goal of intellectual production, the crowning achievement so to speak, is a book. This conclusion is not obvious. The conclusion probably holds for academic promotion into non-tenured positions, and from there on into tenured positions of ever higher ranks. Books literally speaking weigh more than articles. And oral presentations have no weight at all in the European tradition; only written products that can be handed in are evaluated by the committee, much like in a bureaucracy where things have to be in paper, not in person. In the American tradition a person applying for a university position is usually invited to give a lecture or two which seems a more fair procedure as it permits the intellectual to prove himself over a broader range of forms of presentation, whether this is to his advantage or disadvantage.

However, what holds for academic promotion does not necessarily hold in the marketplace. An intellectual may toil for years on a book and the material proceeds may be negligible; he may give a lecture at the right time for the right audience and be amply rewarded, also financially. At universities he is actually paid for his oral work in the form of courses even if he is promoted on the basis of his written work. Oral pedagogy is considered more effective than the written form presumably because dialogue is possible. Unless the professor practices the German word for lecture, Vorlesung, literally by reading aloud, in front of/ahead of the audience.

Third, if he wants to be somehow effective socially in one way or the other, personal presentation, short and oral, at the right time for the right audience may be the best form although the article may be a strong runner-up. The book may come as an afterthought, cementing the shake-up already produced by the shorter forms. All of which tends to show that any intellectual is well served by developing skills in all four forms of presentation.

However, what has just been said is relatively extrinsic pertaining to the reward-punishment structure in which the intellectual, like any other person is embedded. Nothing has been said about the intrinsic aspect or quality of intellectual production. Since I am operating here at the very general level I shall only deal with one dimension: the atomistic versus wholistic intellectual product. Using the metaphor above the atomistic product would be single-lamp, often with a very bright light elucidating a very limited field. The wholistic approach would certainly be multiple-lamp illuminating several, even many neighborhoods in a vast intellectual territory. But more than that, there would be an overarching light, the light of lights, some kind of perspective that permits us to conceive of the intellectual territory as a whole, in an integrated fashion. This is not quite the same as a strictly logical, pyramid-shaped intellectual theory. The word "perspective" is used above, a much more modest word than what presumably stands at the apex of a very steep pyramid: a single axiom, or at most a small number of them.

There is even a much more modest expression, "it all hangs together", probably meaning that the same concepts are used throughout in the same meaning, that there is a relatively systematic exploration of the possibilities open to the researcher given his concepts (which in practice means the construction of typologies, exploring all combinations even if this is not done explicitly), mapping the whole intellectual territory under exploration, seeing to it that some light is thrown into the crevices, the nooks and the crannies. Or, if the light does not penetrate at least reporting that this is the case, indicating unexplored areas for further research.

Every intellectual knows it: the step from the atomistic to the wholistic is a difficult one. What is involved is usually the expansion of intellectual territory; in theme, in space, in time. An intellectual may for one reason or another be particularly acquainted with the production of aspirin in Oslo, Norway in a particular factory summer 1947. An essay might be written about that (time, space, theme) limited aspect of the total human enterprise. The expansion to the total production of that factory, or to the production of pharmaceuticals in general in Norway at that time, or to the history of the production of that product, in that factory, over time would probably mean an expansion from an article to a book in which there is more than one story to be told. The stories have to "hang together". Hence, this is more than the transition from short forms to long forms in Typology I, "short" and "long" being very quantitative terms. We are dealing here with a qualitative

jump and with the basic reasons why the book is still considered a crowning achievement. That jump generally demands some space (unless we are dealing with mathematics, sudden discoveries in the external world and some other cases) to be adequately elaborated. But what is demanded above all is imagination, creativity.

One way of achieving this jump would be to rely on the ingenuity and knowledge of more than one intellectual, bringing together several intellectuals, possibly even from different disciplines or at least from different backgrounds so as to facilitate the expansion in theme, space and time of the "problématique." The result of the single intellectual intra-action and the multiple intellectual inter-action may be books in any case. But as indicated with Typology II in Table 2 below there are books and books:

TABLE 2. The Book as Intellectual Product: Typology II

	multiple intellectuals	single intellectual
atomistic (collection)	(5) proceedings anthology	(6) essay collection anthology
wholistic (integrated)	(7) multiple authors books	(8) single author book

Combinations (5)-(6)-(7)-(8) are all different ways of spelling out (4), "book", in Typology I. And there is an implicit evaluation in the ordering of the cells in Table 2--in general terms, certainly granting that the exceptions may be very numerous.

The lowest level of book production, I take it, is the collection of articles produced by a collection of intellectuals. This

will be the typical conference proceedings, held together mainly by the circumstance that these individuals met at a certain point in time and space, devoted themselves for a limited span of time to a certain theme and produced separately rather than jointly a collection of articles. The level of integration is low. The task of the editor is mainly to order the articles which may also be done without having had a conference, just through the mail. He may also write an introduction which is often more a statement of his own way of looking at the matter than any serious effort to integrate. As a matter of fact the level of integration may be so low that the argument can be made that the articles should rather be published separately since they are produced separately, in the journal, or journals in the field. There is nothing that makes them "hang together" except the circumstance that the authors have been to the same conference or have been on the same mailing lists, a circumstance of little interest to anybody else than themselves. Togetherness in a conference can actually be celebrated in other and better ways, for instance in the memories of stimulating intellectual exchanges and pleasant social experiences, as photos, etc.

Second in line would be the single intellectual essay collection, like the product just discussed also in the form of an anthology. Here the level of integration by definition is higher. After all, the same person is responsible so there is probably an overarching perspective, his perspective. The intellectual coherence may be enhanced through good editing, precisely by having the author point out how the articles "hang together" by exploring different aspects of what

appears to be a common theme at a higher level. And yet one may ask whether much more is gained than what is always gained by producing an anthology: having together between two covers something that thematically belongs together, of practical utility because one might like to use that particular collection for a course on a theme, or to explore the thinking of a particular author. Practicality should not be confused with intellectual quality, however.

The quantum jump in quality characteristic of a real book is obtained, in principle, only in combinations (7) and (8). And here I have ranked the single author book above the multiple authors book, although with some doubt. Let me try to explore the matter.

In a book written conjointly, not separately, by multiple authors, in other words by a team, several brains are linked together, presumably producing a whole of higher quality than the sum of the brains. This may be true if the linkage among the brains is sufficiently efficient to produce the level of integration needed. In general I would assume that the linkage inside one brain is so much more efficient in producing integrated results that this compensates for the limitations of any single author, hence more productive of a positive result than the bringing together of separate experiences and reflections in a team. However, any thesis of that type is contingent on how good the linkage could be between the members of the team, and how much they bring into the joint enterprise in terms of different experiences and reflections. In other words, the quality of the

intellectual product would depend on the level of diversity and symbiosis among them.¹ Given optimal conditions where these two factors are concerned I might be very willing to reverse the evaluation. But in general terms, given the experiences we have so far, I would stand by the ordering.

In doing so there would of course be ample empirical support. After all, what we know in intellectual history is that all the books, or practically speaking all the books (with the notable exception of the Bible), that have had lasting impact seem to be authored by one person rather than by co-authored by several. There may be two factors at work here that would tend to obfuscate the picture: individualism and verticality. Particularly in occidental culture individualism would make us focus on one author only even if, in fact, a team has been at work. And verticality would make us focus on the senior author to the exclusion of junior co-authors. As a matter of fact, all those who explicitly or implicitly have been participating helping the individual senior author produce the book might wane into oblivion, disappearing not only from the jacket of the book but also from general human consciousness. Thus, we often read in the prefaces written by single authors that such and such a person has contributed so much that the name really should have appeared as a co-author on the jacket and we may be led to ask the question: "why didn't you do it then?" The answer has just been given.

Nevertheless, I think it can be assumed that the general mode of book production is the single author book. But does it have to remain like that forever?

To explore this further let us combine some of the thinking in Typology I and Typology II, producing Typology III of Table 3 below.

TABLE 3: Modes of Intellectual Production: Typology III

	single-shot production	intermittent production	continuous production
single intellectual	O: lecture presentation	O: set of lectures/papers	O: integrated course
	W: article paper	W: collection anthology	W: integrated book
several intellectuals	O: conference presentations	O: network meetings	O: continuous dialogue
	W: proceedings	W: edited proceedings	W: integrated book

O: oral W: written

We retain the distinction between a single intellectual and several intellectuals as producers, and the dichotomy short/long, but spell it out a little as "single-shot production" (meaning short span of time), "intermittent production" (meaning several short time-spans, one after the other) and "continuous production" (meaning "long" periods of production). We still need the distinction between oral and written products but put it as a third variable inside the six combinations, and get Table 3.

The problem is very simple: given the combination in each of the six major cells of the table, what can we expect? For the single intellectual at work I think the six results mentioned are relatively clear. They are actually taken from Table 1 for a single-shot production, from Table 2 for the written forms for intermittent and continuous production, and then I have added the distinction between a set of lectures/papers and an integrated course. Any student will appreciate the difference between the professor who at the beginning of the term presents him with a "course" which is nothing but a collection of topics with a reading list for each topic, and the professor who has a theme which is systematically pursued according to an inner logic throughout the course--not by that saying that the second course is necessarily pedagogically more valuable even if intellectually it might have much higher quality.

In the bottom half of Table 3 exactly the same exercise is carried out for the case of several intellectuals working together. If they meet only once it is hard to see that the result can be more than a conference with presentations, possibly resulting in proceedings. If they meet more than once, in other words if they constitute a network with meetings with a very high over-lap in membership then the opportunity exists for real editing as opposed to the "editing" described above. The papers may really be attuned to each other; there is more dialogue, more give and take, more inter-action. But the assumption remains that for a really integrated

book with several intellectuals behind it a continuous dialogue is necessary, not a set of meetings however valuable they may be. What is meant by this will then be spelled out more below.

Let us now bring in the United Nations University. What mode of intellectual production does the UNU offer? The answer is simple in terms of Table 3: the cornerstone in the construction is the conference. Although there are ad hoc conferences the general mode of production is more institutionalized: more than single-shot production but also less than continuous production; in other words intermittent production. And, of course, the general mode brings together several intellectuals, not only encouraging one to work alone at the place where he already is--if that were all there would be no justification for the United Nations University at all except as a funding agency.

In other words, the UNU has explicitly or implicitly taken a stand where intellectual production is concerned: several intellectuals, intermittent production. By establishing networks of sufficiently like-minded, yet diverse people, bringing them together in meetings the UNU is hoping for sufficient symbiosis to arrive at a final product within the potentials, but also limitations, of well edited proceedings. In the rest of the book some of this will be explored in more detail, let us here merely make some introductory comments.

The strength of the UNU approach is, of course, that several intellectuals are brought together capable of exploring a problema-

tique (a good term in this connection!)² from various angles, given the diversity of their experiences and reflections. The second positive aspect is the presence of sufficient funds to have them meet more than once. Of course, in this there is nothing new: intellectuals have been doing so for generations, and in the social sciences very actively since the Second World War.³ Actually, there is a particular reason why social scientists almost have to do so: all good empirical social science has to be comparative since there is no illusion in the social sciences that conditions are the same around the world. Even if nature should turn out to be "uniform", behaving the same way regardless of space and time coordinates; person, social and regional systems are certainly not uniform. Any study of freshmen in a US college is exactly that, a study of freshmen in a US college, not of the human being as such. Any study of US imperialism in South America or Soviet domination in Eastern Europe are exactly that, not a study of imperialism or domination in general. To come together and compare findings is, hence, bread and butter of social science. This is certainly a necessary, if not sufficient condition of extending the exploration of a theme in space and a strong argument for international teams.

When this exploration, in addition, is extended in time by the same people meeting more often than once, intermittently, a necessary if not sufficient condition for more thorough work is given. This extension should not be confused, however, with exploring a particular theme in time, meaning historically. On the

other hand it may also be argued that the network that lasts through some time, perhaps even meets again after a latency period, will have the opportunity not only to change their reflections on the problématique, presumably with more wisdom, but also to reflect on the changes in the problématique. In other words, there are all kinds of good arguments for networks spanning world space meeting repeatedly over time except one: to be that expansive is rather expensive, and it is not obvious that tele-conferencing is an adequate substitute.

However, the conclusion nevertheless remains: this mode of production will not produce top quality intellectual products. What can come out of it will be well edited proceedings, little more. That such books may be useful in the way discussed above is not to be doubted. More particularly, they could be the textbooks corresponding to seminars/courses organized with the same structure, with participants from several countries, meeting at least once. As a matter of fact, one good way of doing this would be to have each network meeting essentially designed for research also develop a teaching exercise, for instance at the end of the meeting, testing out findings on third parties.

But what is practical and useful is one thing, high intellectual quality breaking new ground, seeing things in a new and more fruitful light, quite another. There is a very simple reason for this.

Each participant in a network would bring into the network what he has produced so far, a state-of-the-art paper meaning a paper stating his art. To arrive at that stage will have cost him 10, 20 years of study and research. A couple of days in a single-shot or intermittent pattern will not be sufficient to change this. There will be some new perspectives, a give and take, maybe some expansions of the perspective in the footnotes. But the basic text, the basic paradigm will tend to remain unaltered. A deeper shock is needed to be jolted out of deeply rooted intellectual habits.

Even left alone by himself, in his own artisanal workshop so to speak, it takes time before any such change takes place. As a matter of fact many, perhaps most, intellectuals never undergo changes during their intellectual life. They remain pretty much the same, filling in details, using the same paradigm from their student days, perhaps in some new contexts; or move on to new areas of inquiry.

On the other hand, intellectuals also report that sometimes they are jolted out of their mind-set, seeing light where there was dark and darkness where there use to be light. There is hardly any question that meetings with other intellectuals may be among the factors causing such changes. The basic point may not so much be concrete criticism and challenge as the mental processes engendered by the meeting itself, by living for a couple of days in an intellectually high temperature environment that makes the general intellectual metabolism speed up considerably. Hence, the argument would certainly not be that such meetings are not important in producing intellectual

qualitative jumps. The argument would be that those changes do not necessarily express themselves in the outputs from the meetings, but in the outputs from the participants later on. They become immensely enriched by the experience, and in that sense are riding piggy-back on the UNU as an organizer of such network meetings just as much as the UNU has been riding piggy-back on them and the local intellectual milieus that have produced them, as mentioned above.

Let us now turn to the question of how the situation could be improved. Under what conditions could we get into the coveted category of producing books of high intellectual quality with several authors appearing together on the jacket? When saying so I am meaning really working together, not only vouching for the result by appearing together in alphabetical order, or not producing that famous result which is more than the sum of the parts--the anthology or proceedings being exactly that, the sum-bound between two covers--of the parts.

One key is given in Table 3: continuous production. What is meant is simply stated that the authors stay together for an extended period of time, in a continuous dialogue, work together, exchange manuscripts, revise them, criticize them, until in the end an integrated book appears as a genuinely collective work. Again, there is nothing particularly new in this. Many intellectuals have probably participated at one time or another in a mode of intellectual production of this kind and also experienced its frustrations and

great rewards. Since the mode is extraordinary the setting should also be extraordinary: a resort place with not too many diversions; pleasant but not so much as to detract attention; logistically well equipped in the sense that people can work individually yet meet collectively whereas much hardware and a good library probably would be counterproductive, taking too much attention away from the essential task. Library work can be done before and after. The only point to note would be that time should be sufficient. To mold existing papers into a book with a handful of authors co-operating in the process should take less than a month, but will definitely take more than one week.

The question then becomes why this does not happen more often if it is that easy. Thus, any university in this world is a setting with many intellectuals concentrated for a long time in a short area of space, with ample opportunities to coalesce in triplets, quadruplets, pentuplets and so on. So, why are there not more collectively produced books?

Some answers in terms of individualism and verticality as key dimensions in our social structure have been indicated above. Linked to this is the obvious factor of academic promotion: what is promoted and hence rewarded in almost all academic settings is an individual, not a team. The individual gets a job, not the team even if they have proven to the satisfaction of everybody that the team is much more than the sum of the individuals. In some future

academic structures much more respect may be paid to this obvious phenomenon, but we are not there yet. Hence, to play it safely aspiring intellectuals will tend to choose the single author mode of production, with other intellectuals as sources of inspiration, hopefully on a basis of reciprocity--and then withdraw to isolation for production with an eye to promotion. As a consequence collectively authored books would not be expected from junior intellectuals. But they might be expected from a group of senior intellectuals who have already made their career. Not to mention from the usual combination of one senior and one junior, one master and one disciple, the latter doing the footwork for the former in return for the juxtaposition on the title page, the former lending some of his prestige to the latter with the hope that the latter will carry his intellectual tradition further into the future than he is able to do himself.

Ordinary intellectual life under ordinary university circumstances would be like this: ordinary. But a network presents the participants with extraordinary circumstances, in an extraordinary setting and this might, in principle, produce extraordinary results. Personally I would think that absolutely indispensable for any really good product to emerge would be an opportunity for continuous production over a period up to one month. But an equally necessary condition before that would be network meetings throughout the period of, maybe, some months, even years. The intellectuals themselves would then have to decide through a process of shared reflection: yes, we are ready--now is the time to come together and

really work it out!" In other words, the combination of intermittent and continuous production might be the key to the problem. Networking alone with intermittent sessions will not do it--that is the UNU experience so far, I would say. Continuous production alone will not do it, that is the ordinary university experience so far, I would add. A combination of the two might do it.

The consequences for this type of thinking for the future of an organization like the UNU, or for some alternative organization, will be spelled out later. As a conclusion let us only reflect on one point: the difference between the UNU and other UN agencies. Networking is by no means unknown to UN agencies: most of them make use of that as a mode of research, even many of them. The single-shot conference is important, but also known to be insufficient to produce results more in depth. There will be steering committees and committees of researchers all over the place in that vast intellectual conglomerate known as the United Nations.⁴ And the result would be a high number of edited proceedings in addition to the proceedings coming out of single-shot conferences. The practicality and usefulness should, in principle, be considerable given that they are geared to the political agendas of these organizations. The intellectual caliber may be less than exciting.

But then it is hardly the task of the United Nations system in general to produce intellectual novelties. The task is to produce a basis for new action, not a basis for new thinking. Precisely that should be the specificity of the United Nations University, so far not fulfilled.