23 - THE IMMATERIALITY OF THE SOCCER PLAYER'S LABOR: a theoretical interpretation

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Introduction

This article theoretically discusses the professional soccer player's activity based on the notion of immaterial labor. It starts by analyzing the fact that in a soccer player's activity there are not only quantifiable and measurable characteristics, which are part of material labor; but also non-measurable and non-quantifiable elements, which make up immaterial labor.

Also, based on this premise, it is believed that any analysis or interpretation of either form, whether it be the material or the immaterial one, depends on their mutual comparison. Then, it is believed that the soccer player's activity involves, not only his body's physical labor, such as practices, working hours, salaries and a contract, which in general make up the basis of material labor, but also some aspects related to the human subjectiveness, such as the soccer player's talent, his image, and the production of a show, which are part of immaterial labor.

The interest in the debate over this issue stems from the study on the soccer business relationship in Brazil, which is in our Doctorate Term Paper, in 1999, in teaching Sports Sociology and from our participation in the Study and Research Group on Labor (GEPT), of the Sociology Department of the University of Brasilia (UnB).

Concerning theoretical referential, at first, there is some reference to the Marxist studies on the capital versus labor relationship, published in his classical texts The Capital, The German Ideology and the *Grundisse*. Furthermore, there is some reference to the present interpretations on the immateriality of labor, seen as a new tendency in the analysis of the relationship, here expressed in the contributions of Negri & Lazzarato (2001), Gorz (2005) and Imbrizi (2005), among others.

On the Concept of Immaterial Labor

Marx himself, in his writings, had already foreseen the changes in capitalism and, especially, in the area of labor, thus idealizing the rise of an advanced form in relation to the simple abstract labor, of Adam Smith, who was considered as a valuable source. The measuring and quantifying of production in relation to time used for it are gradually replaced by an increasing complexity in standards. Actually, in *Grundisse*, Marx pointed out that knowledge would become the main source of wealth and that immediate labor, quantifiable and measurable, would cease to be the measure of such created wealth, and this would depend less on time and quantity of required labor, demanding more from the general level of science and technological progress.

As of 1980, according to some authors who study recent transformations in the world of labor, these twenty years of restructuring in production has led to the defeat of the Fordist worker and brought about the centeredness of an increasingly intellectualized lively labor force, which is the basis of the post-Fordist labor. It is then justified, at first, the hegemony of the social worker's immaterial labor, a new category of worker or proletarian that rises in post-Fordism. In this scene, the notion of immaterial labor takes up relevance and converging elements are herein pointed out by some authors.

Cattani & Holzmann (2006:327), in general, understand immaterial labor as *"a set of corporal, intellectual, creative, affective and communicative activities inherent to the worker...",* and thus resulting in, besides material products, some intangible products such as feelings of trustworthiness, safety, and comfort to the consumers in a new production consumption relationship. In addition to that, the product of immaterial labor, when consumed, does not remain with its consumer as the product of material labor would.

Based on the aforementioned concept, it is possible to say that the media, such as television, the internet and other means of communications that surround and support highly competitive sports, such as soccer, for instance, are exterior basis of the soccer player's immaterial labor, reinforcing positively or negatively his career and success in the market.

From the concept of immaterial labor and its relationship with the soccer player's activity, two analytical dimensions are elucidative, i.e. a) that of the subject who works; and, b) that of the product of his labor. Therefore, two major questions arise: How is it possible to analyze immaterial labor from the soccer player's perspective? What does he produce as a result of his labor?

The Perspective of the Subject Who Works

As far as the subject who works is concerned, before focusing on immaterial work, it is impossible to overlook elements of immateriality; since it directly involves physical work or the body's work. Consequently, the soccer player's is a physical activity, where he uses his body in practices and in games. In this sense, one may say there is predominantly material labor. The player's body is the object of labor, which is similar to so-called heavy duty work; or to the work of garbage collectors as they gather trash from homes; or the one of urban bus drivers, or civil construction builders', etc.

However, there is an immaterial aspect, which refers to the "affective" element (groups of players in collaboration and mutual help) and an "intellectual" one too (sports intelligence that is a trace of quality, technique, technical skills and style of a player to act in the soccer field, which can be defined as "sports talent"). On top of that, though, there are players in the market and successful ones that do not necessarily bear those skills. There are cases in which the player's leadership, performance and attitude are enough to place him in the job market, even though they do not have "sports talent".

There is a close relationship between the concept of subjectiveness and the sphere of labor. As a consequence, it is seen in Imbrizi (2005) that the worker's subjectiveness includes in his study the categories of expropriation and appropriation, which come from Marx's theory of revolution. Also based on this study, there is the notion of "affection", not in Freudian approach, but meaning mediation, identification and affectation, which show a symbolic language and a dialectic fusion in the production process.

Labor is transformed in labor force and its product into merchandise, abstracting the human subjectiveness from this product. In soccer, the show (labor's immaterial product) is then presented as a consumption object, which is appropriated or expropriated from the subjects who, in fact, produce it: the soccer players.

The Perspective of the Product of Immaterial Labor

Labor's industrial result is translated into two distinct forms: material product and immaterial product. As a matter of fact, in sports, and, especially, soccer, the aforementioned can be assumed. The physical practice, the participation in a game

that was won, lost or tied, would be material products of a soccer player's labor. Essentially, from the perspective of what is produced, it is material labor. Here, there is a relationship of correspondence between the subject who works and the product of his labor, where the body is the object or the means of access to the production. This production is the body movement and the technique.

Concerning the cycle of immaterial production, (Lazzarato & Negri (2001:44), point out the big industry, the enterprise and the post-industrial economy are based on information handling. The characteristics of a new integration between consumption and production develops the so-called “service relationships” as information, consumers' needs, values, interaction among people, subjectiveness, etc.

Hardt & Negri (2005:149), on the other hand, present some characteristics of immaterial labor production, which are divided into two main categories, i.e.: intellectual or linguistic labor (ideas, symbols, codes, cultural products, etc); and affective labor (excitement, passion, emotions, subjectiveness, etc), where one can find elements that are part of the soccer player's activity and of the show production itself.

Gorz (2005:17) also identifies that in this new stage of the capital, in the *“knowledge society”*, knowledge is made up of experiences and practices that have become intuitive evidence, habits; and intelligence covers the whole range of skills, from judgment and discernment to open-mindedness, to the ability to acquire new knowledge and combine it with previously received information.

Based on such interpretations, it is noticed that the best soccer player is that who combines skills and is knowledgeable, but also has a kind of creative knowledge that places him within the sports knowledge society. Cognitive knowledge, technique, style, and capacity to create and improvise in the field and in the show production are essential for a soccer player to be considered a really talented one.

As for the product of the player's labor the show , it is seen as a combination of such individual talents; however, above all, the final outcome is the one of a collective production for the market. Therefore, by analogy, the show production is collective and does not equal the total of all individual talents, if individually considered; rather, it is the result of the players' combination and coordination This is an immaterial outcome, an intangible one, but made for consumption.

Then, if, for a journalist, for instance, the immaterial product of his labor would be the “idea” or the “meaning” that is perceived in his material and journalistic text, instead of the collection of letters; if, for a artisan, it would be the satisfaction caused by what he has materially produced (a wallet, for example), and that has some immaterial “value” for him; or even the player, his material activity or participation in a soccer game as a worker turns out to be the immaterial production of a “show”. This is how sport is converted into merchandise to be sold and consumed.

In this combination, one must take into consideration the replacement of the physical for the immaterial and the imposition of a new division of labor. This bears a relationship of correspondence with the fact of mega businesses, such as Nike, by placing their logo on soccer players' jerseys, are also promoting their brands by replacing the physical for the immaterial, since this brand will be freely spread by means of the player's visibility in the media. Likewise, there is a division of labor, transferring to the player and to the television the job of promoting the brand.

In accordance to (Lazzarato & Negri (2001:27), two elements are relevant to theoretically establish the new labor order: a) the transformation of labor into immaterial labor and of labor force into mass intellectuality (both aspects are called General Intellect by Marx); b) mass intellectuality may be transformed into a socially and politically hegemonic subject.

The idea embedded in the notion of General Intellect, in Marx's *Grundrisse* is here elucidative, since it allows for an interpretation of the sports talent as something related to the player's intelligence; i.e., a factor that subjectively differentiates one player from another, and turns him into an individual merchandise, which contributes to the creation of an immaterial product of labor: the show.

Based on these observations, the transformation of the player's activity into immaterial labor and of the labor force into mass intellectuality takes place as the product show for the masses is made up of an arrangement of individualities, who are the talented players, which outshines them collectively.

Final Considerations

The theoretical analysis of the relationships between the soccer player's labor and immaterial labor has initially allowed us to point out some relevant questions: a) in the soccer player's activity, the materiality or immateriality of labor are present; b) immaterial labor includes talent, even if this is an individualized and timeless characteristic, which has always marked the great soccer icons and has distinguished them from among the other players. However, it is understood that this talent is also part of a collective production or a product of “mass intellectuality”, which is the show. “Individual talent”, therefore, depends on the group's “collective intelligence”.

It is also clear that there is no relationship of absolute determination concerning either form of labor; there is prevalence instead.

As new subjectiveness is valued television visibility (that is necessary to convert the player into merchandise) and show production , the labor immateriality takes place. And, under the name of merchandise, it is easy to understand how a soccer player becomes part of a team's assets and its private business partners' as well. This is the prevailing logics at present, due to the amount of businesses that are spread throughout soccer and its games around the world, even though the player's physical labor, dialectically, is also necessary for the immateriality of his image in the market.

Sports talent is an individual quality that allows for distinguishing a player for among his peers and includes criteria such as knowledge, genius, skills, creativity, style, technique, etc., which meet present-day requirements from the world of labor. Consequently, whenever this talent produces a show, the talent is part of a collective product, which would be similar to the collective intelligence or Marx's General Intellect.

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THE IMMATERIALITY OF THE SOCCER PLAYER'S WORK: a theoretical interpretation

Abstract

This paper presents a theoretical interpretation of the soccer player's job based on the notion of immaterial work. Although the soccer player's expertise involves quantifiable and measurable aspects related to material work, such as salary, contract, working hours that consist of practice, games and so on; there are subjective and immeasurable elements that are not quantifiable. The latter may be analyzed from two analytical dimensions, which are: a) that of the subject who works; and, b) that of the product of his work. Therefore, in the soccer player's activity, the subject's sports talent is a major issue to be considered, since it then becomes the main product of his work and of the collective intelligence: the sports event.

Key-words: immaterial work, sports talent, soccer player.

L'IMMATÉRIALITÉ DU TRAVAIL DU JOUEUR DE FOOTBALL: une interprétation théorique

Résumé

Cet article présente une interprétation théorique du travail du joueur de football à partir de la notion de travail immatériel. Bien que la fonction du joueur de football présente dans sa caractérisation des aspects quantifiables et mesurables du travail matériel, comme salaire, contract de travail, journée de travail que se reduit à des entraînements et des jeux etc; il y a des éléments subjectifs, immensurables et non quantifiés, qui peuvent être interprétés sous deux dimensions analytiques, à savoir : a) celle du sujet qui travaille; et b) celle du produit du travail. De cette manière, dans l'activité du joueur de football, le talent sportif du sujet constitue un point central à être considéré, en même temps que ce talent se convertit au principal produit du travail et de l'intelligence collective: le spectacle sportif.

Mots-clés: travail immatériel, talent sportif, joueur de football.

LA INMATERIALIDAD DEL TRABAJO DEL JUGADOR DE FÚTBOL: una interpretación teórica

Resumen

El presente articulo presenta una interpretación teórica del trabajo del jugador de fútbol a partir de la noción de trabajo inmaterial. Aun que el oficio de jugador de fútbol presenta en su caracterización aspectos cuantificables y mensurables de trabajo material, como sueldo, contrato de trabajo, jornada de trabajo que se reduce a entrenamientos y jugos, etc; existen elementos subjetivos, inmensurables y no cuantificables, que pueden ser interpretados sobre dos dimensiones analíticas, a saber: a) la del sujeto que trabaja; y, b) la del producto do trabajo. De este modo, en la actividad del jugador de fútbol el talento deportivo del sujeto constituye un punto central que debe ser considerado, a medida se convierte en el principal producto de trabajo y de la inteligencia colectiva: El espectáculo deportivo.

Palabras-claves: trabajo inmaterial, talento deportivo, jugador de fútbol.

A IMATERIALIDADE DO TRABALHO DO JOGADOR DE FUTEBOL: uma interpretação teórica

Resumo

O presente artigo apresenta uma interpretação teórica do trabalho do jogador de futebol a partir da noção de trabalho imaterial. Embora o ofício do jogador de futebol apresente em sua caracterização aspectos quantificáveis e mensuráveis do trabalho material, como salário, contrato de trabalho, jornada de trabalho que se reduz a treinamentos e jogos, etc; existem elementos subjetivos, imensuráveis e não quantificáveis, que podem ser interpretados sob duas dimensões analíticas, a saber: a) a do sujeito que trabalha; e, b) a do produto do trabalho. Desse modo, na atividade do jogador de futebol o talento esportivo do sujeito constitui um ponto central a ser considerado, a medida em que se converte no principal produto do trabalho e da inteligência coletiva: o espetáculo esportivo.

Palavras-chaves: trabalho imaterial, talento esportivo, jogador de futebol.