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**REVIEW OF THE BOOK BY BAS VAN HEUR  
“CREATIVE NETWORKS AND THE CITY. TOWARDS A CULTURAL  
POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AESTHETIC PRODUCTION”.  
BIELEFELD: TRANSCRIPT VERLAG, 2010**

The reviewed book is noteworthy first of all in the light of the context, in which it was generated; as well as in the light of expected and actual impact on the current urban studies and on public discussions of urban governance in Europe. In “Creative Networks and the City” there was a very good showcase of the mainstream studies of relations between the terms of ‘governance of cultural symbolic production’ and ‘urban development’. This book did not really generate new concepts and did not reveal radically new regularities regarding those relations. Yet it has well structured and presented the discourses on how ‘governance of cultural symbolic production’ is relevant for ‘urban development’ and vice versa. At least back in 2010 those discourses were dominant both in the academic urban studies and in urban development. Characteristically, Van Heur’s research project was localized in Goldsmith College London and Center for Metropolitan Studies Berlin — the ones among the most recognizable nodes of popularization of this research agenda in European academia. In this light one could expect from this book examination and critical analysis of the rhetoric about culture-led urban development; as well as analysis of how this rhetoric is grounded in governance strategies. One could also expect from this study more sophisticated theorizations of culture led urban development than publicly reproduced.

On the most general level the book poses the question of relations between three terms — ‘accumulation’, ‘regulation’, and ‘networks in aesthetic (cultural) production’. The first two terms (and relations between them) are summarized with little discussion and presented in the classical version of regulationist approach to neoliberalism (with Bob Jessop as the central reference). In this version, mode of regulation is understood as process, which “normalizes” capital accumulation. Here one could notice the author’s tendency to question and reflect on the limits of economy, politics and social strategies. The book’s hypothesis remains rather cautious in relation to the empirical and conceptual context, and says that in case of aesthetic production, networks should be understood as emerging from the mechanisms of accumulation and regulation (p. 18). Therefore, Van Heur suggests considering mechanisms of accumulation and regulation as primary ones, while networks of aesthetic (in this particular case — music) production as determined by already formed dominant modes of regulation and accumulation.

In the empirical sense this book describes networks of production of electronic music in Berlin and London. The choice of electronic music as a researched case is justified on the one hand by predominantly “grassroots” aesthetic production (with minimal engagement of big commercial events and major labels), and on the other hand by the growth of popularity of this type of music simultaneously with the strengthening of accumulation regimes typical of the ‘knowledge society’. The author focuses on three key aspects of the tendencies, summed up by the terms ‘knowledge society’ (sometimes ‘knowledge economy’) and ‘creative industries’. The first aspect is urban spaces as key localizations of transforming capitalism. The second aspect is the role of strategies of urban creative industries as the state’s tools to exploit creativity and knowledge. The third aspect is the role of networks of aesthetic (cultural) production in strategies of urban, and, wider, capitalist development. Van Heur tries to work with all those three aspects simultaneously, and to coordinate approaches of cultural studies and of political economy in the field of urban research on creative industries. In this case the main argument of the former approach is about ‘culturization’ of the economy; while the main argument of the latter approach is about commodification, local clusterization, and about exploitation of labor in cultural and aesthetic practices. Generally, Van Heur pays a lot of attention to the existing conceptual context, which makes incorporation of his own arguments into this context often overextended. Moreover, here he creates an impression that the regulationist paradigm is

the only possible one for the analysis of relations between aesthetic production and urban environment.

One should acknowledge that this does not hinder the author to precisely and interestingly summarize the strong sides of the regulationist approach. His efforts to explore and to develop the regulationist paradigm of research on ‘creative city’ often turn out to be a fundamental deconstruction of the cliché of state rhetoric about creativity as an instrument of urban development. For instance, Van Heur argues and constantly assumes that the networks of aesthetic production are mainly temporal categories, not spatial ones. It means that it is possible to identify much more interesting regularities in their temporal (not spatial) aspects of functioning. And in the process of localized learning of skills necessary for the process of aesthetic production, the social (not spatial) context is more important. This is against fetishization of place in neoliberal state rhetoric. For instance, as Van Heur shows, in terms of localized learning, clusters are helpful to acquire entrepreneurial skills, but are not useful in terms of acquiring technical skills. Generally the argument is that clusters of aesthetic (cultural) production are not that much a spatial model for aesthetic production, but a mode of regulation of aesthetic (cultural) entrepreneurs on the urban scale.

In such perspective spatial units of clusters of aesthetic production are regarded by Van Heur as designed by the state with an aim for turning diverse and often uncoordinated activities related to those spatial units, into relatively formalized and regulated process of capitalist production. The author shows that practical activities of many participants of electronic music production and distribution clusters have not changed radically after the emergence of the state rhetorical apparatus of creativity. Van Heur considers this apparatus as legitimizing the set of terms aimed at description and reglamentation of ‘knowledge society’, ‘cultural entrepreneurialism’, ‘flexible employment’, etc. In this light, a cluster to Van Heur is essentially a unit of economic imagination, which has performative effect. This performative effect implies that a cluster is not only a discursive, but also a regulative phenomenon. And “creative” clusters are only one of the niches of regulation (in the broader regulation regime). Thus, Van Heur shows that under the current regime of accumulation and regulation the cliché “cluster” serves rather for objectification of industry and for legitimation of state intervention into this industry.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The author examines it in better detail here: Bas van Heur. “The Clustering of Creative Networks: Between Myth and Reality” in *Urban Studies* 46(8), 2009, pp. 231—252. In

Van Heur's entire book is primarily an effort to sum up regulationist approach to urban development seen through the lenses of 'knowledge society'. The book's structure articulates this author's aspiration well. Appropriate concepts are operationalized very distinctly and clearly, however it does not always imply structured argumentation. Sometimes it feels as if the author repeats himself. Besides, the book creates an impression that due to fixation on the strict operationalizations, the author sacrifices big amounts of empirical material: presentation of data — especially the qualitative one — lacks narrative and more detailed discussion. The most innovative conceptual endeavor of the author is juxtaposition of the concept of 'network' with the concepts of 'accumulation' and 'regulation'. In this case he fruitfully uses the concept of 'emergent culture' by Raymond Williams. Actualization of this concept looks like the main addition to the regulationist theory. In particular, in the research environment the focus on the process of emergence instead of on the process of structuration and disciplining significantly valorizes practices of description vis-a-vis practices of explanation.

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this article he is more articulate in confronting networks on the one hand and clusters on the other, saying that the rhetoric and popularity of the cluster imagery is rather the result of the state intervention with a goal to stabilize and routinize prevalent accumulation regime.