

Peter FLEISSNER

„The Second Great Transformation“ – Expropriation or Promotion of Culture?

The commodification process of labour in the first half of the 19th century in England (preceded by the commodification of land) transformed the capitalist economy into a capitalist society by deregulating labour and extending market principles to it. This process was analyzed in depth by Austro-Hungarian Karl Polanyi in his famous book *The Great Transformation* (1944).

At present, we are witnesses of a process not less important for our lives: The commodification of culture. By a well organized interplay of technology and law contemporary Digital Information and Communication Technologies allow for a world wide extension of the market and give room to capital investment in a new field: human culture. Mobile communication technologies enable the commodification of talking to others nearly without restrictions on space and time; digital audio, photo- and video devices allow reifying an even broader range of human activities: singing, writing, performing music, doing science, producing software, and creating photos, paintings or movies by freezing and unfreezing those activities according to our needs; Intellectual Property Rights, laws and technologies of copy protection transform information goods into genuine commodities. Finally, the Internet has become the global market place to sell, buy and distribute them, a market which represents in many countries already a volume around 5 to 10 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product.

The paper gives a critical appraisal of this development within a framework of political philosophy.

Peter FLEISSNER, born 1944, retired from his chair (Design and Assessment of New Technologies) at the University of Technology, Vienna, in October 2006, after seven years of work for the European Union (1997–2000: Head of the Department "Technology, Employment, Competitiveness and Society" of the Seville based Institute for Prospective Technological Studies of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission in Spain; 2000–2004: Head of the Department "Research and Networking" of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia). Before, he had worked for the Austrian Academy of Sciences; for the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, Laxenburg, Austria; as research scholar at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, Austria. Some publications: *Digitale Medien – Neue Möglichkeiten für Demokratie und Partizipation?* (with V. Romano, 2007); *Philosophy of Culture and the Politics of Electronic Networking*, 2 volumes (with Kristóf [J. C.] Nyíri, 1999); *Data Security and Privacy* (with M. Choc, 1997); *Men Shall Not Live by Bit Alone* (with W. Hofkirchner, H. Müller, M. Pohl and Ch. Stary, 1996); *The Transformation of Slovakia*, 1994; *Input-Output Analysis*, 1993; *East German Economy in Transition* (with U. Ludwig, 1992). Further information: <http://members.chello.at/gre/fleissner/default.htm>. E-mail: fleissner@arrakis.es.

