A Review of ALEXANDR DAVYDOV, PAVEL ABRAMOV, *ETNOGRAFIYA TUFTY: KTO I KAK PISHET ZAKAZNYE RABOTY V ROSSII* [THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF A SCAM: WHO WRITES COMMISSIONED ESSAYS IN RUSSIA, AND HOW THEY DO IT]. Moscow: Social Research Support Fund "Khamovniki"; Common Place, 2021, 176 pp.

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Abstract: The book discusses the market for paid-for essays in Russia and the people involved in it, the ghostwriters. The authors themselves are no strangers to this occupation and describe not only other people's experiences in the form of interviews, but also their own in the genre of auto-ethnography. The interviews and their personal experience demonstrate the motives for taking up this occupation, the peculiarities of working in it, the pragmatics of writing paid-for essays, the formation of small groups and communities of ghostwriters and their social trajectories from within the occupation and after leaving it. The organisation and functioning of different types of commercial associations of ghostwriters, such as workshops and marketplaces, is described. Particular space is devoted to the connection between ghostwriters and institutes of higher education, and also to how Russian higher education provides the conditions in which it is possible to earn money by writing paid-for essays. Unfortunately, although it addresses a gripping topic, includes excellent material and represents a significant first attempt at describing the functioning of the field of paid-for academic essays, the book is written rather haphazardly, and the interpretation and presentation lack structure.

Keywords: paid-for essays, plagiarism, academic ethics, precarity, higher education.

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A Review of **Alexandr Davydov, Pavel Abramov,** *Etnografiya tufty: kto i kak pishet zakaznye raboty v Rossii* [The Ethnography of a Scam: Who Writes Commissioned Essays in Russia, and How They Do It]. Moscow: Social Research Support Fund "Khamovniki"; Common Place, 2021, 176 pp.

The book discusses the market for paid-for essays in Russia and the people involved in it, the ghostwriters. The authors themselves are no strangers to this occupation and describe not only other people's experiences in the form of interviews, but also their own in the genre of auto-ethnography. The interviews and their personal experience demonstrate the motives for taking up this occupation, the peculiarities of working in it, the pragmatics of writing paid-for essays, the formation of small groups and communities of ghostwriters and their social trajectories from within the occupation and after leaving it. The organisation and functioning of different types of commercial associations of ghostwriters, such as workshops and marketplaces, is described. Particular space is devoted to the connection between ghostwriters and institutes of higher education, and also to how Russian higher education provides the conditions in which it is possible to earn money by writing paid-for essays. Unfortunately, although it addresses a gripping topic, includes excellent material and represents a significant first attempt at describing the functioning of the field of paid-for academic essays, the book is written rather haphazardly, and the interpretation and presentation lack structure.

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The Ethnography of a Scam, as the publisher's blurb declares, is about the practice of commissioning and writing academic works, and also the "professional standards and views about their job" of the people who write these works — perpetrating the "fake" of the title. The Social Research Support Fund "Khamovniki", which has promoted the publication of the book, and Common Place publishers are known both for their attention to anthropological research and for their ability to publish books on acutely relevant topics. This is a very curious book, because its title does not give a complete idea of what it is about. It is not the ethnography of the scam as the product of the activity that is described in it (and indeed, the word "scam" is to be found only in the title), but rather the ethnography of its creation and of ghostwriting (as a process), because hardly any attention is paid to the actual contents of the works or their function within the academic community, but the structure of ghostwriters' work is described

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in detail, as are the principles of their organisation into a community and the reasons why they start writing paid-for essays.

As far as I know, this is the first attempt at describing the Russian market for paid-for essays from the point of view of those who provide its services. The phenomenon has previously been described as part of corruption in higher education as a whole [Klein 2011; Golunov 2014; Denisova-Schmidt 2016], including as an economic-institutional problem [Heyneman et al. 2008; Osipian 2012b; 2012c; Golunov 2013]. There have been separate works on the market of bogus dissertations [Osipian 2008; 2012a], but for the most part the phenomenon has been described from outside, without any attempt at fieldwork. One cannot, of course, omit to mention the 'Dissernet' community. Although it is oriented more towards practical activity, its analytical reports[1] are an important source of data about academic dishonesty (but only in the sphere of academic degrees).[2] There is also the series of articles by Elvira Leontyeva in which paid-for academic works are examined alongside other means of deceit among students [Leontyeva 2004; 2006; 2008; 2010; 2011; Denisova-Schmidt, Leontyeva 2012]. However, a notable part of these works was written before AI plagiarism checkers such as 'Antiplagiat' had become universal in Russian higher education, which was also reflected in the preferred methods of deception adopted by students. The dissertation that the authors mention [Rytkönen 2016] is to all appearances the only major piece of research done on paid-for essays as such, but the phenomenon is examined in it from the position of the students (i.e. the customers) and from the point of view of the anthropology of values both for the student community and for the higher education system as a whole.

Among the more theoretical works, it is worth mentioning Kirill Titaev's essay [Titaev 2012] about academic conspiracy, which analyses why such a system of omerta has come to exist in Russian higher education, and likewise Alena Ledeneva's works on the informal and shadow economies in Russia [Ledeneva 1998; 2006]. The issue of academic plagiarism has also been reflected upon more than once abroad [Buranen, Roy 1999; Blum 2009], although it is usually considered separately from the problem of essay mills confronting academic publishers. This latter problem is also quite well described in English-language journalism and research. The problem of ghostwriting is particularly acute in medicine and allied subjects [Bosch, Ross 2012; Stretton 2014; DeTora et al. 2019]. All the same, what we have here represents the first fully-fledged attempt

1 <https://www.dissernet.org/analytics>.

2 'Dissernet' is an anti-fake site that is primarily aimed at identifying plagiarism and falsification in higher degrees, often written (or "written") by highly-placed officials and politicians. Its irritant effect on the victims has led to much talk of shutting the site down. [Eds.]

at describing from within the Russian field how paid-for academic work functions.

Paid-for essays in Russia are not exactly hidden: many authors write about such offices' blatant advertising. But in reality, we know little about this market. This reviewer knows at least two people engaged in producing work for it, and has more than once encountered reactions to the idea of taking up this activity that were expressed without any condemnation or any thought that it might represent doing something illegitimate. At the same time, a student who buys an essay is hardly likely to be encouraged to do so. In other words, buying is disapproved of, but selling is not, which reminds us of the Swedish model for controlling prostitution. In combination with Roosa Rytkönen's dissertation, mentioned above, we get a three-dimensional view of a field that largely resists description.

To denote the participants in this activity, Davydov and Abramov use the word *scriptor*, following Roland Barthes (p. 6), who abolished the very notion of a text's biographical author [Barthes 1968], but they use it differently. Barthes' *scriptor* is "a person who writes a text, but is not its author". Still, the analogy with monastic *scriptores*, copying the same texts over and over again, would also be appropriate. Correspondingly, the authors call the activity itself *scriptura*. In my view, it is a very successful term: accurate and at the same time non-judgmental. I shall also use it in this review.[1]

Ghostwriting as a form of activity is quite widespread in Russia. (The authors write only about the Russian experience, not indicating where else such an industry (their word) exists.) They give the number of people engaged in it as between thirty-five and eighty thousand people (p. 7), though they do not say how they arrived at these figures. They chose their informants from among their acquaintances and colleagues, and also "among people whom we managed to contact over the internet", mostly in professional communities on social networks and fora. In all, they conducted thirty-one interviews and ten informal conversations (they do not specify what the difference between them was), and also analysed discussions among ghostwriters on the internet (and this is where a notable quantity of the empirical data was gathered). The authors describe the principles on which the selection was made, and the socio-demographic characteristics of the people questioned, only in an appendix, after the conclusion. It is unfortunately unclear whether it is the planned selection or the one which was actually made that is described.

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[1] The authors are adapting — not adopting — Barthes' term to express in Russian the concepts which are in English designated by *ghostwriter* and *ghostwriting*. This translation will, accordingly, use the English terminology. [Transl.]

To anonymise their respondents, Davydov and Abramov make creative use of pseudonyms from the Bible and from *The Lord of the Rings*. Unfortunately, this method does not always work properly. For example, in chapter 1.1 two different respondents are called Orpha (pp. 22, 29), and yet another woman (judging by the age given for her) with the same name appears later on. Sometimes the same fragments of an interview appear word for word twice in the same subsection (pp. 19, 28, Naomi). Some quotations are not attributed at all (p. 100).

Structurally, the book is organised as follows: five chapters subdivided into sections, each section divided into two parts, the first presenting the experience of auto-ethnography (the authors are themselves participants in the paid-for essay market), the second containing commentated fragments of interviews.

The authors have deliberately renounced any theoretical or methodological foundation, and this has not been to the advantage of the book. We unexpectedly encounter some theoretical underpinnings in the conclusion, where the authors connect their material with Simon Kordonsky's concept of estates. Kordonsky's thesis is that at all stages of its history Russian society has been divided into estates, not classes, and that its social and economic relationships have formed in a way that is fundamentally idiosyncratic [Kordonsky 2008]. However, it is not very clear what relevance the estates have here, given the book for the most part addresses the interaction between the ghostwriter and the customer (where market relations operate, which would therefore imply class rather than estate structures), and Kordonsky does not regard students as an estate at all, or even as a group in transition into the estate of academic workers (the more so as such a trajectory is by no means guaranteed). In any case, very little space is devoted to what might have been considered the process of status "gatekeeping" between students and professor.

The main result of this lack of theory is that the reader does not understand what phenomenon the authors are describing. The fact is that a qualitative ethnographical description (a "thick description") nevertheless presupposes an analysis that allows one to discern the structure and meaning of what the researcher sees. This operates both at the level of the specific topics involved and at that of the overall posing of the question. The book under review does not, in this sense, give the reader any clear co-ordinates: are we presented with an attempt to describe the industry or the market for paid-for essays? Or are we given a social portrait of the ghostwriter? It is equally unclear how the authors see and interpret the network of links between ghostwriter and client. As work with clients, which implies a 'service provider — customer / buyer' relationship?[1]

[1] On this topic see: [Tett 2021].

As involvement in a not entirely legal activity, in which case the participants are in the relationship 'thief — fence'?[1] Or is this 'disguised' creative work — so that we are faced with some sort of literary slave labour?[2]

Each of these types of relationship has a sufficient historiographical tradition of its own.[3] It would have been possible to derive from these a minimal theoretical framework which would have allowed the text to be better structured and a more comprehensible narrative to be constructed (as it is, some of the "second parts" have an extremely tenuous relationship with the subject of the section). In the work on the interviews, both at the stage of preparing a field guide, and at the stage of processing the notes, a consistent methodology would have allowed the placing of certain *points de repure* and maintain a greater thematic unity of the sections, simultaneously allowing both authors and readers to recognise what was primary in the phenomenon being described and what was secondary. Above all, though, a theoretical framework would have made it possible to answer the question why the authors chose to describe these particular facts when discussing their own experience, for example, and not some others. In what follows I shall try to show how much an approach devoid of theory really does influence the material.

The book's first chapter is devoted to the ghostwriters themselves: their social portrait and life trajectories. The authors suppose that ghostwriters are divided according to their "field of knowledge" (p. 14). Regrettably, however, they largely avoid the question of in which academic disciplines paid-for essays are written and whether there is any difference in the principles of preparing works on different subjects or demand for them. A term paper on the theory of the state and law is different, after all, from one on thermodynamics, and even more different from a routine calculation in analytical geometry. Probably works in the humanities for subsidiary courses[4] also have their own specifics, and ghostwriters will have their own ways of writing them. But how the difference between subjects affects the industry and craft of the ghostwriter and the network created by that craft is unclear. There is no more than a mention of the fact

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1 Some respondents clearly see their activity more or less in this light: "And I never told you, mind, that I got any income or paid work out of all this" (p. 23).

2 See: [Erdal 2004; Coughlan 2016].

3 The peculiarities of criminal communities have been described, for example, in a contradictory study [Goffman 2014], and there are also many works based on Italian material, for example: [Calderoni et al. 2017]. *À propos*, the "Khamovniki" fund for the support of social research, which has promoted the publication of the book under review, is soon to publish Nikita Gordeyev's book on the social and economic practices of members of youth gangs.

4 That is, courses taught to students whose main topic of study is different (e.g. courses in history for physicists or computer scientists, etc.). However, unlike the UK 'subsidiary' or the American 'minor', some such courses are compulsory at Russian universities. [Eds.]

that people working in engineering specialities start to engage in this activity for more or less the same reasons as those in the humanities (pp. 25–26). Davydov and Abramov go on to distinguish a type of those ghostwriters who are more or less immersed in the practice. They inform us (and this is confirmed by the interviews) that the ghostwriters themselves most often describe their activity as supplementing their income, and not as their main line of work; in defining what is primary and what is supplementary work both Davydov and Abramov and their respondents basically go by the proportion contributed to their overall income. One way or another, not many people regard themselves as professional ghostwriters.

Davydov and Abramov also fail to specify what level of educational or professional work their respondents generally perform. Evidently, their informants' tasks do not include writing dissertations for the degrees of candidate or doctor of science. Most likely, ghostwriting also has its levels of skill and, probably, "access", but the authors draw no such conclusions and do not address anything of this sort.

In any case, what primarily interests the authors in this part of the book is not the typology of ghostwriters as such, but rather the reasons why they have entered this sphere, and their social trajectories. The interviews are also devoted to this. The basic social trajectories identified by Davydov and Abramov are entry "because of the demand" in their student years, or entering on account of their own needs. In the second case, it is a matter of situations where for some reason other means of earning are impossible or undesirable "as a result of their identity" (by "identity" here the social conditions and convictions of the individual are probably to be understood). However, there is no mention of identity in the interview fragment that illustrates this assertion, but of the socio-economic structure of a particular society: the informant says that in his case the only work he could find was that of a shop assistant. The authors conclude that it is extremely rare for ghostwriting to become "a life's work": ghostwriters often burn out. However, they do write that "nobody mentioned moral discomfort as their main reason for stopping" (p. 45), although in both interview fragments used to illustrate this point, moral discomfort was in fact named as one of the reasons for stopping this activity.

Further on in the text, the absence of structure that we have mentioned appears. The authors introduce the concept of "authorial offices" in the chapter about the social portrait of ghostwriters (and not in the chapter about the ways in which ghostwriting work is organised, which would have been more logical), in order to illustrate how ghostwriters proceed from writing themselves to acting as intermediaries. They will also go on to refer to the workshop, the marketplace and the essay mill, without explaining what these

structures are or how they differ one from another. The description of the internal organisation of ghostwriting itself is also exceedingly amorphous: the authors hardly mention any other participants in the network than the ghostwriter, the customer and the lecturer, though a manager of the orders in one form or another may intervene in this triangle, depending on the form of the collaboration between the client, the customer and the ultimate examining authority. Added to this, the first chapter mentions an even more complicated structure: "Since there may be up to seven intermediaries between the customer and the ghostwriter, academic ghostwriting in the worst case assumes a ninefold deadline" (worse, this example is given twice in the text). It is a great pity that there is not even a brief description of this multiplicity of stages. It would have been very interesting to know who else could be an intermediary, how often such positions are encountered, and how they affect the overall structure of the network. There is also a passing mention of "the Tula confederation of ghostwriters" (p. 64), but what sort of phenomenon that is and how it differs from the other methods of organisation mentioned remains unexplained.

The next section of the monograph recounts the ghostwriter's skills. The authors divide these into technical (formatting the work), falsificatory, and research skills, assuming that in the process of ghostwriting the person doing it is still capable of generating new knowledge. However, on the basis of the interviews, a different typology and a different hierarchy of skills emerges, namely epistemological and business skills, while the second are, furthermore, "divided into organisational and commercial"[1] (p. 55). Then the authors add social skills to these — the ability to develop social connections — and describe the possible trajectories ("personal prospects") in ghostwriting. Again we see a loss of structure: this information would appear more organically in the subsection on the portrait of the ghostwriter, where their social trajectories are described. The idea of reputation as the ghostwriter's basic capital after their skills is not confirmed by what the respondents say. The authors also note an important element: ghostwriting is seasonal work. They identify "three basic seasons: the winter season (December and January), the basic [sic] season (April to June) and the long season (February to June)" (p. 74). Unfortunately, this important observation is lost somewhere at the end of the first chapter, although it is mentioned at the beginning of it that it is the first season (four to five months of work) that provides the ghostwriter with their basic skills.

[1] Judging from the fact that only private enterprise, with all its formal difficulties, is named as a form of legalisation, and the reluctance of ghostwriters to get involved with it, we may assume that all the interviews were conducted before 2019, when self-employed status became available to residents of the Russian Federation.

The second chapter is devoted to the interrelations between ghostwriters and institutes of higher education. In the preamble the authors already note very accurately the reciprocity of this relationship. On the one hand, ghostwriters are impeded by the verification system of higher education (anti-plagiarism software and standard mechanisms such as the pre-defence), but on the other, it is, paradoxically, higher education that provides them with work. But the ghostwriter also gets something from the university. What is evidently meant is that the detection of plagiarism using computer programmes leads to an increased demand for paid-for essays, rather than cut-and-paste jobs, even though the ones written to order cost more. It is explained only in passing that a systemically corrupt university does not increase the demand for paid-for work, but reduces it, because as a rule there are mechanisms within the university itself for "resolving matters", and it is neither usual nor necessary to have recourse to outside services. Naturally, the demand for paid-for work in an incorrupt university will also be low. But the highest demand will be at an educational establishment that has strict formal requirements, but no systemic corruption.

The authors correctly note the place of so-called course requirements (*metodichki*) in the process of verification and evaluation, describing them as the basic document that regulates the relationship between the ghostwriter (as replacing the student) and the university.

Regrettably, neither in the ethnography nor in the analysis do we see the student as the third party in the interaction. Students appear in the book either as customers (in the 'ghostwriter — client' relationship) or as participants in the 'student — university' relationship. Such an approach reduces ghostwriting to an altogether binary, not triangular relationship. Indeed, when reading the book, one has the impression that the ghostwriter has more connections with university lecturers than with students (*qua* students, and not as customers). Unfortunately, the habits of ghostwriting make themselves felt here too, with three almost identical sentences on three consecutive pages: "It is the university that sets the framework for checking work", "The university sets the framework of requirements", "The department provides the standards for checking work" (pp. 80, 81, 82). Besides the obvious stylistic carelessness, it is unclear why the authors need to repeat the same thought.

In the section with the interviews, it is not so much the relationship between ghostwriters and universities that is highlighted, as the ghostwriters' relationship with the higher educational system itself, and how lecturers react to paid-for work (and since many ghostwriters have been lecturers, or are still teaching, this gives a stereoscopic view). Taking into account the nature of their activities, ghostwriters must regard higher education as a profanation. It would be

interesting to know (and it is unclear from the book) whether participants in the industry reflect on their own contribution to that profanation. Moreover, lecturers are sometimes sorry for ghostwriters and regard them as victims rather than profiteers (p. 85). There are cases when the ghostwriter and the lecturer are in close contact or even one and the same person: in these cases, the ghostwriter is obviously taking part in a university-wide scheme of corruption on a greater or lesser scale. It does happen that lecturers direct students to recommended writers, but ghostwriters disapprove of such a practice. According to informants' observations, lecturers rarely try to tackle paid-for work as such, but are more inclined to involve students in the other illicit schemes that exist on the education market, such as paid consultations.

It is interesting that lecturers most often fail to correctly understand the significance of paid-for work, equating it with plagiarism. Accordingly, the verification system is directed towards that variant, and not towards work that has been done by someone else. One ghostwriter says in her interview: "What is the difference between paid-for work and that done by students themselves? Essentially none, except perhaps that it is better formatted and more professional-looking" (p. 89). In such a scheme the ghostwriter is, as it were, removed from the construction; one is even tempted to call him or her the "magic helper" who assists the hero or heroine of the fairy tale to fulfil the demands of the capricious monarch [Propp 1928: 88–91]. It can even happen that ghostwriters defend students against pressure from their lecturers, teaching them how to resist pressure that is unconnected with formal requirements, and even defending them from extortion (pp. 92–93).

Some ghostwriters note that in the course of their work they are in practice engaged in educational consulting or coaching. The authors for some reason did not ask them (or, if they did, the answer is not recorded in the book) why, in that case, they did not switch to that format of work, although some ex-ghostwriters do describe such a career trajectory. According to the ghostwriters, students lack the skills of academic writing (that is not quite how they put it, but they do describe the skill set quite precisely). In other words, the Russian higher education system does not provide the skills, but it does require them, and that is one of the reasons why students turn to the grey economy.

In the third chapter, 'Forms of Organisation of Ghostwriting', the unstructured nature of the research, as is logical for the subject being described, is especially clearly manifested. Thus, the concept of a workshop of ghostwriters is introduced before it is described (pp. 96, 108–111). It is clear only that it is not a marketplace. It is similarly not entirely defined how a marketplace differs from an

essay mill, or an authorial office from a workshop. If in a workshop there is a leader (the intermediary), ghostwriters and managers (and that is the structure the authors describe on p. 111), then how does it differ from an abstract office? A new participant in the market appears in this chapter: the intermediary. In the 'Personal Experience' section, his or her activity is mostly described, and evidently from within, from an auto-ethnographical approach. However, some nuances of his or her work remain unclear. It is, for example, impossible to understand why the intermediary, who looks after the interactions between the ghostwriters and the client and the final recipient of the work, expends "most of his nervous energy in the period from the submission of the final version of the work to its defence" (p. 105). Because the value of the work is fixed only at this stage, or because the intermediary cares about the fate of the product and is worried that at any moment its paid-for nature might be discovered?

In this chapter, the interview section is mostly devoted to the interaction of ghostwriters with each other, in other words, as Latour would have said, to the construction of the network. The authors identify two differently directed tendencies in these connections: competition, accompanied by reputation wars, and various forms of collaboration. In the informants' opinion, mutually beneficial collaboration is more frequent, because in practice ghostwriters often swap orders, when they get a commission through private channels that does not fit their profile, but they need to "keep up demand", and they also help each other to carry out the practical side of the work (p. 107). True, the authors also call passing on a commission for a percentage (i.e., in practice, being an intermediary) a form of assistance, and the difference between "complete or partial outsourcing" and "client passing on a commission without consultation" is also left without comment.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, the authors' own ghostwriting habits unexpectedly manifest themselves: on pp. 115 and 160 there appear two absolutely identical paragraphs. The fourth chapter is entitled 'The Portfolio of Commissions', but part of it is devoted to the clients and interaction with them. If the authors had used a theoretical or methodological framework such as the works of Bruno Latour (cf. [Latour, Woolgar 1979]), they would have seen that the discussion of the clients logically belonged in the preceding chapter about the organisational structure, and in a certain sense continued the considerations regarding the interaction between ghostwriters and universities. In the end, these all make up the overall structure of the actors in the paid-for essay market.

At this point the authors finally tell us what type of work is the most popular. It is the term paper. The range of prices for it is also given

(from 600 to 5000 roubles, with 1500 the most widespread rate) and the time it takes to do is also specified, this ranging from one half-day to two weeks for a single paper. Then, some sort of logic best known to the authors leads them to a discussion of the problem of finding clients and of advertising, although the corresponding subsection is called 'Conditionality of Work with Clients' (probably meaning the conditionality of approaches to the work?) and begins with a description of clients' motives and how these motives affect their interaction with ghostwriters and intermediaries. Nevertheless, the section including the interviews continues the theme of the search for clients and advertising.

Besides the problems with the structuring of the research that we have already indicated, by the last chapters it becomes evident that there is no basis for the thematic progression from one part to the next. Sections with interviews that are supposed to illustrate the authors' judgments do not always fulfil that function. Moreover, the interviews do not always correspond thematically to the propositions put forward by the authors in the auto-ethnographical sections. This is particularly the case with chapter 4.2: the description of the authors' personal experience relates to the criteria for verifying and approving work, principally by employing the 'Antiplagiat' AI programme. The interviews, on the other hand, are devoted to the particulars of receiving payment, and are supposedly unified by a common theme designated as 'Negotiation and Bargaining'. In the first part of the subsection there are interesting remarks in the interview fragments about how lecturers' requirements do not always correspond to reality, for example, the requirement for "practical implementation". The authors note that the ghostwriters often criticise the system, and that for some of them this is even a motive for starting to write paid-for essays.

The next section is devoted to pricing, and only intensifies the impression that the original integral text has been chopped up into separate pieces: one section often flows into the next, and the interviews immediately continue the personal experience, though the authors do not indicate that other people's words are being used. The personal experience relates to pricing, and to some extent also to how interaction with lecturers affects this (a topic that would have looked more appropriate in the second chapter). The tariffs in operation are placed directly in the section comprising interviews, which only takes up a page and a half. Since the book is about paid activity and market relationships (albeit in the grey market), it does contain quite a lot of calculations related to profit. But these calculations are not integrated into any system and do not show how the existence of one or another system of payment influences the actors in the network.

The last section of the fourth chapter describes the risks run by the customer and the ghostwriter and the means taken by the ghostwriter to avoid those risks. This is the most structured part of the book. It includes strategies for coping with the far from obvious risk of "underestimating the complexity of the commission": in such a case the ghostwriter may go on making corrections to the commission until one of the parties gives up; delegate it; or reject it and pay compensation. It is admittedly unclear why delegating a commission is included among strategies of risk avoidance together with outright rejection and regulating the price (and, evidently, setting the price high enough to deter the customer). There is no section with informants' direct speech in this part.

Finally, the fifth and last chapter is devoted directly to questions of working on the text. The authors describe the particulars of the structural and typographic formatting of the work (without drawing a distinction between these) and consider how the approach of the deadline changes writing practices: when the deadline is still a long way ahead, the ghostwriter works practically like a diligent student and sometimes conducts genuine original research, when it is close, the ghostwriter behaves like a negligent one. Here the authors come to a paradoxical conclusion: in the value system described, "a good job" is not the same as good research, and need not even be in readable prose. In fact, a badly expressed text looks like a typical student composition, which is a help in getting it through the verification of its authenticity. "A good job" is work that does not stand out in any way.

Later in this section, the question of due dates is studied, both for the work and its submission. Neither the authors nor their informants define the concept of a "due date". In the end, it turns out that they mean both the date by which the work (or possibly only the first version of it) should be written, and the date by which it should be submitted after going through the entire correction process. Incidentally, the correction process is not scrutinised in the preceding chapter, concerned with negotiations.

In studying the process of writing in paid-for work, the authors use an interesting metaphor: a ghostwriter's approach to his or her work is placed on a scale (they call it a vector) proportional to the use of the concept of "analogy", from "analogy as example" to "analogy as falsification". At one extreme ("analogy as example"), the ghostwriter does the work in the same way as an ordinary student would, collecting material following the example of his predecessors. At the other extreme, he or she simply copies pieces of other people's work. But the comparison collapses because the authors do not correctly understand the meaning of the concept "vector": it only has one fixed point, its beginning, it does not have a second, final point, as a scale of measurement does.

A field like this, where formally no crimes or infringements of the law are committed, but the action is clearly in contravention of the accepted rules of the community, is very hard to work in. Not only because the respondents may not be altogether frank, but also because an academic researcher studying malfeasance in the academic milieu finds themselves in an ethically vulnerable position. "The view from inside", from actual participants in the industry, appears to offer the best way out of this clinch, although it will probably be accompanied by a loss of position in one's previous field (it is not known whether the authors wanted to move to a new one). But the attempt at a complete description of the field to be found in this book has not been crowned with success — some areas are omitted from the description because the authors had no access to them, and they do not use work done by other people even as a support for comparison. The lack of any theoretical framework or idea of how the communities might be organised is added to the purely operational difficulties of describing "grey areas". Nevertheless, the data collected are the only data of their kind and deserve a more thorough interpretation.

In this way the authors describe an extremely interesting field and notice interesting regularities in it, but, unfortunately, they do not make the transition from ethnographic description as such to second-order interpretation, that is, the processing of their personal experience using the tools of scholarship. Being more structured and more precisely worked through wouldn't have hurt the material, either.

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