

## Dynamics of Virtual Work: The Transformation of Labour in a Global Digital Economy

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**Title of proposed paper**

New Perspectives for Use-Values? For a more Complex Understanding of Digital Labour

**Into which stream do you think it will fit best?**

Value creation in the Internet Age

**Abstract (500-700 words)**

The proposed article develops arguments for revising our understanding of the "relations of production" as well as the "means of production". Emanating from younger works and the critique of a market- and systems-capitalism (Gibson--Graham, 1996), the article provides an understanding of media as an originary means of production to augment the concept of digital labour. This will allow for consideration of 'new' modes of production and value creation (1) as well as new forms of value (2).

Starting with a short historical reconstruction of the conceptualization of media as a means of production (Williams, 1983 [1958]) we will illustrate the transformation from a push- to a pull media economy. Highlighting two aspects of this process, we will show how and why the music economy has changed due to its experiencing the pressures of digitalization

and convergence earlier than other economies (Wikström, 2009; Handke, 2010). Here, through practices like commenting, sharing, producing, conveying, co-creating et cetera, basically everybody has access to means that allow for various forms of participation in value creation. Since not only traditional public and commercial actors have access to digital media as a means of digital production, the relations, conditions and possibilities within media culture and economy change.

This concept has recently been criticised for not recognizing the exploitative relationship between capitalist media companies and their users that engage in (mostly unpaid) forms of digital labour (Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013). This, so the story goes, has been made possible by the commodification of a “semiotic universe” (Goldman, 1994: 186; cit. after Büsher & Igoe, 2013: 3) that is being created by prosumers within digitally networked media. Here, the use-values that are prosumed are the source of value and profits that a media company capitalizes on. As a result these presumptive processes are correctly being seen as another attempt of ‘capitalism’ to capitalize on formerly ‘authentic’ forms of value, putting users of ‘social media’ into a process of class exploitation (Fuchs & Sevignani, 2013, Banet-Weiser, 2012).

But even though this is true, this understanding of digital labour and exploitation hinders our understanding of value-creation processes in today's mediated networked relations of production because of two new conditions within the relations of production:

1: What we call access to media as a means of production. This point will be explained with critical regard to the simple assumption about the ‘Age of Access’ (Rifkin, 2001). We will show, that a conceptualization of media as a means of production allows for a more complex and more diverse production of values.

2: Our understanding of “relations of production” and “means of production” is too narrow both in classical economic theory as well as in materialist-marxist terms. Here, it is impossible to conceive a role of means of production apart from the basic distinction of ownership (have/not have). We will stress that this confines our cognition of value creation in a way that is inexplicable in today's transformation of the media economy. This will be made possible by conceptualizing media as an originary means of production.

Based on this we can develop an understanding of a digitally mediated network value creation on the basis of access to means of production –augmenting terms of ownership and non-ownership. It is this very access that opens up new economic, quasi-economic and non-commercial possibilities of innovation and value creation for contemporary actors who were formerly ‘just’ artists or fans (Negus & Pickering, 2004). Based on empirical work in the Berlin music economy, we will show that instead of just consuming use-values, actors with access to new means of production and new possibilities of exchange accumulate, produce, share and transform cultural and social forms of value, making them what could be called ‘neo-capitalists’ (Lin, 1999) while at the same time new media relations of production are being constituted. We will explain in detail the role of production of ‘surplus value’ as a production of more use values as well as the transformation of such values (like cultural, social, aesthetic ones) amongst each other. Doing this, we hope to shed some light on the transformative possibilities of digital labour to develop the possibilities for modern marxist critique.

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