CROWD SOURCING

Labour struggles revisited?

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Introduction

"Transformations in advanced capitalism under the impact of globalization, information and communication technologies, and changing modes of political and economic governance have produced an apparently novel situation in which increasing numbers of workers in affluent societies are engaged in insecure, casualized or irregular labour" (Gill & Pratt, 2008, pp. 2).

Cultural Industries and cultural production have been dominant subjects in most research on digital media (Hesmondhalgh, 2010). Only recently the emphasis of a portion of these studies has been on 'creative labour', which is fundamental to cultural production. However, the sociology of culture has shown a more complex division of labour than these studies have taken into account. This has taken on a number of different forms in the analysis of cultural industries, where many have argued that digitalisation has led to new forms of amateur and/or semi-professional production such as; citizen journalism, blogs, wiki's, etc. Cultural theorists like those from the above quote have argued that these new forms of production come with traits such as insecurity, precarity, and irregularity, and therefore have critical implications for labour rights in the digital age. Crowdsourcing, which can be considered as the activation of a cheap labour force, is a phenomena that has particularly gained its popularity for the most part due to advancements in information and communication technologies. The aim of this research is to situate the phenomena of crowdsourcing within the discourse of transformations in advanced capitalism, and see how claims of insecurity, precarity, and irregularity apply to it.

In his book *Blogs, Wikipedia, second life and beyond,* cultural theorist Axel Bruns argues that production and consumption are old 'industrial age' concepts that contrast the internet age, where access to the means of producing and distributing information are so widely available, that consumers can become cultural producers and distributors, bypassing traditional boundaries of 'one to many' communication systems (2008). To highlight this transformation and more specifically, the users productive prowess, he uses the term 'produsage'[1] (pp. 13-14).

Indeed phenomena such as Wikipedia and open source software are great examples of cultural activity that, on the surface, attempt to be more based on pleasures and rewards of co-operation rather than competition. It is most certain the case that firms in the digital era, increasingly seek to draw upon the participation of their users and consumers in the production process. In his book *Crowdsourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd Is Driving the Future of Business,* Jeff Howe argues how crowdsourcing[2], which activates the transformative power of contemporary technology to liberate the creative potentials within us all, is increasingly being applied by businesses to harness these creative potentials for profits (2008).

However, such celebratory accounts have not been without their critics. According to Hesmondhalgh, "too many of these discussions of transformations associated with new digital media rely on caricatured portrayals of supposedly bypassed eras" (2010, pp.268). A dominant theme within critical analyses of digital media is that they

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1 A similar phrase was used by Alvin Toffler in 1980, to argue that production and consumption had been separated in the era of mass production, and that in order to achieve customization, firms increasingly have to integrate consumers into the production process (Toffler, 1980, pp. 266).

2 This term was first coined by Howe in a 2006 article in Wired, and describes the process by which the power of the many can be leveraged to accomplish feats that were once the province of specialized few. In essence, it describes a similar phenomena as Toffler's 'prosumers' and Bruns' 'produsers'.

involve unpaid work on the part of participants. For instance, Tiziana Terranova wrote about the phenomena of 'free labour' (2000). Various recent critical accounts have suggested that work in the cultural industries involves labour that is characterised by high degrees of autonomy and creativity, but also by overwork, casualisation and precariousness (Ross, 2003). This suggests that work in the cultural industries is also characterised by exploitation of the workers. However, there are also critics such as Cova et al. (2011), who question whether the term 'labor' or 'labour' is descriptive of the kinds of activities and contributions that take place on UGC sites.

Moreover, most of the crowdsourcing literature uses the term amateurs or amateurism to refer to the crowd. However, labelling the crowd as mere amateurs or hobbyists undermines the fact that large amounts of work and expert knowledge are exerted by crowds for relatively little reward (Brabham, 2012). This then has critical implications for labour rights in the digital age and possibly presents us with labour struggles distinctive to the digital age. So what does crowdsourcing represent us with? Is it a phenomena characterized by terms such as collectivism, collaboration, and participation, or does it represent us with new labour struggles? Or is it a phenomena characterized by all the above?

The aim of this thesis is to bring together some of the work done on the cultural industry and cultural production with claims by recent critics, that work in the cultural industries is characterised by overwork, casualization, precariousness, and more importantly exploitation. The theoretical insights will then be used to explore what the phenomena of crowdsourcing actually represents. The research question is as follows:

Is Crowdsourcing a form of labour organization that is characterized by more participation, agency and involvement by its consumers, or does it represent new labour struggles, distinctive to the digital age?

In pursuit of an answer to this question, this research will first focus on different perspectives of user-agency, in order to flush out the different users and uses a phenomena such as crowdsourcing comprises. The view on user-agency coming from the labour relations perspective will be explored more thoroughly, as it relates more to the research question, and appears as novel territory for thinking and intervening in labour and life (Gill & Pratt, 2008). The different theories coming from this analysis will be used to better situate crowdsourcing within the discourse of transformations in advanced capitalism, under the impact of globalization, information and communication technologies.

Chapter 1: From Production to Prosumption

Discussions about transformations in advanced capitalism under the impact of globalization, information and communication technologies, and changing modes of political and economic governance are frequently carried in terms of the blurring of boundaries between two bipolar terms. Examples of such bipolar discussions are; work and play, professional and amateur, production and consumption, or even organism and machine (Harraway, 1985; Kücklich, 2005; Leadbeater & Miller, 2004; Castells, 2003). Because the phenomena crowdsourcing, which is typical to advanced capitalism, is frequently discussed in terms of the blurring of the boundaries between the terms production and consumption, this research requires first to start with a quick look into the history of both terms. This will add to

an understanding of why crowdsourcing is now frequently discussed in terms of the blurring of boundaries between production and consumption.

It has been said that from the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and about two centuries thereafter, western economy and western society was defined by production. The economy of that period was mostly discussed in terms of production and production was seen as the centre of society (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Such thinking can be traced back German philosopher Karl Marx. Although Marx believed that production always involves consumption, he believed that production was of greater significance in capitalism of his day (Marx, 1981).

The predominance of production lasted for almost two centuries, but a shift began to take place with the close of the Second World War. The production of war material meant a relative absence of consumer goods. It is said that this even encouraged a longing for them (Cohen, 2003). Production gradually began to lose its central position to the economy and society, beginning largely in the 1960's, reflected in the problems in the heavy industry devoted to the manufacture of consumer goods, and the emergence and spreading of heavily industrialized areas containing old factories that were marginally profitable or even vacant. Production was still seen as pre-eminent, but consumption was beginning to gain ground in regards to significance to Western economy and society. As sociologist George Ritzer points out, this can be backed up by the emergence and expansion of the so called 'cathedrals of consumption' in the 1950's and 1960's (i.e. Disneyland, indoor shopping malls, fast food restaurants) (Ritzer, 2005, pp. 9).

What characterizes these cathedrals of consumption is that they leave room for a do-it-yourself attitude, a self-service flair (Ritzer, 1999). In order not to deprive the transformation from its complex and dynamic nature, it is important to note that the increase in significance of consumption in this period encapsulates much more. As Ritzer and Jurgenson point out, it encapsulates "changes and increases in the *objects* of consumption, the *subjects* of consumption (the consumers), consumption *processes*, as well as the kinds of consumption *sites* (i.e. indoor shopping malls, fast food restaurants etc.)" (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010, pp. 15). Not to mention there was also growth in marketing, advertising, branding and such (ibid). The consumers as they were traditionally conceptualized no longer exist, because they demand for greater customisability of products and services, or simply the opportunity to decide or do it themselves. The producers as they were traditionally conceptualized also no longer exist, because in order to answer to consumers' demand for greater customisability of products and services, and more "freedom", the producers have to incorporate the consumer into the production process.

The trend towards putting consumers to work accelerated in the mid-1950's, after the birth of the fast food restaurant (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). According to Ritzer & Jurgenson, early examples of this trend are: pumping one's own gasoline at the filling station; using do-it-yourself medical technologies (e.g. blood pressure monitors, pregnancy tests) to perform tasks formerly performed by paid medical professionals; co-creating a variety of experiences in say, Disney World and its many attractions (ibid). As the 20th century moved towards a close, the cathedrals of consumption, the goods and services, and the consumers who bought them, had more or less replaced the factory at the heart of the Western economy and society. Ritzer and Jurgenson have mostly focused on the American economy and society. However, Europe has not been untouched by these cathedrals of consumption, as the history of the department store has shown (Crossick & Jaumain, 1999). This shift could be a key factor in explaining why terms such as production and consumption are frequently being replaced by terms such as prosumption and crowdsourcing in popular and academic literature.

The French social theorist, Jean Baudrillard was the first to recognize this trend towards the centrality of consumption. He argued that at the end of the 20ᵗʰ century, a consumer society had emerged (1998[1970]). Many cultural theorists have spoken of consumer society, consumer culture or consumer capitalism to describe this shift in focus (Featherstone, 1991; Slater, 1997). This goes to show that there was something changing in the dynamics between production and consumption, that compelled theorists to theorize about it and make claims of an emerging consumer society, characterized more by consumption and less by production. It is important to note that consumption does not necessarily mean the enjoyment of material goods, but also and especially the enjoyment of services and intangible goods (Esposti, 2009).

In *The Third Wave* (1980), Futurist Alvin Toffler attempts to describe the quick changes in social structures and technology, and the relationship between production and consumption.[3] In his view, contemporary society is moving away from the separation of production and consumption towards a third wave, where both functions are reintegrated in "the rise of the prosumer" (Toffler, 1980, pp. 265). The prosumer is more informed (for the most part due to the increase and wide spreading of easy-to-use technologies, that were once the privilege of only a few) and demands to be more involved than the traditional consumer. The prosumer demands for greater customisability of products and services. This development is highlighted in the shift from an economic model based on mass industrial production of goods to a model based on on-demand, just-in-time production of custom-made items (Bruns, 2006, pp. 1).

There is a much wider range of prosumption examples online, especially on what is to be known as Web 2.0[4], which is seen as crucial in the development of the means of prosumption (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010, pp. 19). Web 2.0 describes a set of web technologies that facilitate easy publishing and content sharing, as well as the establishment of social networks (Schäfer, 2008, pp. 16). Examples of prosumption sites are: Wikipedia, where users generate articles and continually edit, update, and comment on them; YouTube and Flickr, where mostly "amateurs"[5] upload and download videos and photographs; and Amazon.com, where consumers perform tasks such as writing reviews. The above summary of the history of production and consumption clearly shows that prosumption was not invented on Web 2.0, but it can be argued that it is currently the most prevalent location of prosumption and its most important facilitator.

Traditionally, media scholars have theorized the agency of media recipients in close connection to the type of medium (Van Dijck, 2009). For instance, the study of film yielded a conceptualization of audience both as viewers and consumers. With the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies, the term 'user' gradually enters the common parlance of media theorists (Livingstone, 2004). Users are generally referred to as active internet contributors, who put in a certain amount of creative effort, which is created outside of professional routines and platforms (OECD, 2007).

Since the 1980's, the term prosumer and similar terms have been used in both popular and academic discourse, to accentuate consumer's increased production prowess (Bruns, 2007). For instance, writing on business issues, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) call this trend the value of co-creation. It is a different term to describe the same transformation, but with the emphasis elsewhere. Co-creation describes a phenomena of corporations creating

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3   In his book the first wave represents the agrarian revolution. This was followed by a second wave, the industrial revolution. Toffler believes that this is where the two functions (production and consumption) got seperated.
4   This term, closely associated with Tim O'Reilly does not suggest a newer version of the World Wide Web, but rather an accumulation of the changes in the ways software developers and end-users use the web.
5   I place a footnote here because I will be returning to the problematic term "amateurs" (in Chapter 6) as it relates to crowdsourcing.

goods, services and experiences in close cooperation with experienced and creative consumers. The emphasis here is on the potential for creating profits from consumers demand for more involvement, freedom, and agency. Tapscott and Williams (2006), however see the prosumer as a part of a new wikinomic[6] model where businesses put consumers to work. Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller have described some such user-led production efforts as "pro-am" enterprises (2004), putting it in the rhetoric of professionals versus amateurs. They mainly argue that most contributors are not professionals in the institutionally recognized sense of the word, and yet they sometimes operate on what equates to a professional level. Zwick et al. (2008) relate prosumption to Foucauldian and neo-Marxian theory and argue that "the ideological recruitment of consumers into productive co-creation relationships hinges on accommodating consumers' need for recognition, freedom, and agency" (pp. 185). What distinguishes these terms is the fact that they all put the emphasis in the analysis elsewhere. What these terms all have in common is that they all recognize that transformations in advanced capitalism under the impact of globalization, information and communication technologies, have created a novel situation in the way businesses approach their consumers, and that this has created concerns for labour rights, and questions traditional concepts such as production and consumption. Furthermore, they all have in common that they do not account for the complexity of user agency and the multifarious roles of users. Moreover, these accounts misguidedly focus on human agents, while neglecting the role of technology. Just as most discussions of crowdsourcing is carried in terms of the blurring of boundaries between production and consumption, placing the phenomena within the context of advancements in capitalism, under the impact of globalization, information and communication technologies, also does not agree with clear-cut boundaries between the above viewpoints. Rather, crowdsourcing involves all of the above viewpoints, because none of them alone does full justice to the entire process.

To illustrate the complexity of user-agency, media theorist José van Dijck suggested the case of YouTube, as a useful example. YouTube started as a video-sharing site in 2005, and was run by three students. The immensely popular site was bought up by Google, already in October of 2006 for the large sum of 1.65 billion dollars (Marshall, 2006). At that time, Google was already running their Google Video, which was running on superior software. Apart from the copyright motivations relating to this acquisition, it was also about bringing in the community of users. In less than a year, YouTube became a commercial firm, whose core interest is not in content, but in the vertical integration of search engines with content, social networking and advertising (Van Dijck, 2009, pp. 42).

YouTube's case perfectly illustrates that user agency is more complex than any of the hybrid terms (i.e. co-creator, prosumer, pro-ams) suggest, and Van Dijck rightly points out that there is a need for a more comprehensive approach to user agency in general, and crowdsourcing in particular. Such an approach would include perspectives from cultural theory, economics and labour relations (Van Dijck, 2009, pp. 42). User-agency is praised by cultural theorist as participatory engagement, contrasting the passive recipients of earlier stages of Western economy and society. Economists and business managers frame user-agency in the rhetoric of production versus consumption, using it as a mechanism for creating surplus value. And in terms of labour relations the rhetoric of amateurs versus professionals is used to praise the users new roles as amateurs who participate in the so called professional league. Van Dijck rightly points out that if we want to understand how socio-economic and technological transformations

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6   A term to describe the effects of extensive collaboration and user-participation on the marketplace and in the corporate world. This term was popularized in *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*, by Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams (2006).

affect the current shake-up in power relations between media companies, advertisers and users, it is important to develop a multifarious concept of user agency (2009, pp. 42). Such a multifarious concept of user agency is needed to place crowdsourcing within the context of advancements in capitalism, globalization, information and communication technologies. Following a multifarious concept of user agency, as elaborated by Van Dijck, will help create an understanding of crowdsourcing from different viewpoints, comprising of different users and uses. Following now will be a look at the three perspectives mentioned above (the cultural perspective, the economics perspective, and the perspective relating to labour relations). The thesis will end by taking a better look at the labour relations perspective, as it relates more to the research question.

Chapter 2: Cultural perspective

As mentioned in the previous chapter, cultural theorists have made attempts to make sense of the changes by conceptualizing user agency in the rhetoric of the passive recipient of the 'old media' versus the active participant of the 'new media'. This also applies to cultural theorist Henry Jenkins who mentions that "the new digital environment expands the scope and reach of consumer activities" (2006, pp. 215). In this new digital environment, ordinary consumers are empowered by these new technologies, technologies that were once the privilege of capital intensive industries, and demand the right to participate in cultural production (Van Dijck, 2009, pp. 42-43). Jenkins, like most cultural theorists, applauds the technological opportunities seized by grassroots movements and individuals to express their creativity and provide a diverse palette of voices (Deuze, 2007). The result is a participatory culture which increasingly demands room for ordinary citizens to wield technologies to express themselves and distribute those creations as they seem fit.[7]

In order for the cultural perspective to be useful for our analysis, we must flush out several assumptions inherent in the perspective. First of all, the concept of user comes with an understanding of a deceptive opposition between the passive recipient of the 'old media' of the Industrial age, and the active participant of the new digital environment. This implied opposition is a historical fallacy. Television audiences were never solely defined in terms of passive spectatorship, because scholars from the humanities have long emphasized the intrinsic engagement of the viewer with the medium (cf. McLuhan, 1964), for instance, by stressing the 'multi-accentuality of the sign' or discussions of the role of subject positions in the text's ideological effect (Volosinov, 1973; Brundsdon & Morley, 1978). Furthermore, over the past 15 years, viewers have increasingly acted as participants in game shows, quizzes, talk shows and make-over programmes, and reality television has boosted the participation of 'ordinary citizens' in broadcast productions (Teurlings, 2001). The difference to point out is , that in the digital era users have better access to cheap and easy-to-use networked technology, enabling them to perform tasks that were previously the privilege of companies, or paid professionals. A more important driver is the internet and its successful application, the World Wide Web (WWW), particularly the take up of user generated content (UGC) sites, that allow for do-it-yourself distribution (Schäfer, 2008; Van Dijck, 2009). However, the wide-spread availability of digital networked technologies does not necessarily mean that everyone turns into active participants. A reporter of the *Guardian* pointed this out in

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7   The term participatory culture was initially introduced by Henry Jenkins to distinguish active user participation in online cultural production from an understanding of consumer culture, where audiences consume corporate media texts without actively shaping, altering and distributing them (Schäfer, 2008, pp. 14).

a rule of thumb, and suggested that "if you get a group of 100 people online, then one will create content, 10 will interact with it (commenting or offering improvements) and the other 89 will just view it" (Arthur, 2006). This then means that the term participation becomes relative, when over 80 percent of all users are in fact passive recipients of content (OECD, 2007). This 2007 survey specifies user's behaviour according to six forms of participation. Of all users of a particular UGC site, 13 percent are "active creators", 19 percent are "critics", 15 percent are "collectors", 19 percent are "joiners", 33 percent are "passive spectators", and 52 percent are "inactives".[8]

Furthermore, by emphasizing a greater level of participation or involvement by consumers or users, cultural theorists neglect the substantial role a site's interface plays in steering individual users and communities. This is a common mistake made by proponents of the social-constructivist philosophy, that sees technological advancements primary through the perspective of social actors, neglecting the technological actors (De Mul, 2005, pp. 32-34). For instance, YouTube users are steered towards certain videos by coded mechanisms, which generate categories such as 'most viewed', 'most discussed', 'top favourites', and 'top rated'. Indeed the users serve as providers and arbiters of content, by for instance, download counts, and rating and commenting on videos, but the rankings and ratings are processed by algorithms, the technical details of which remain undisclosed (Van Dijck, 2009). The steering of users is done by means of what media and cultural theorist Mirko Schäfer calls 'Implicit participation', which "is channelled by design, by means of easy-to-use interfaces, and the automation of user activity processes" (2008, pp. 85). The design influences user activities, and in turn, user activities influence the design. This goes to show that the cultural perspective on its own does not, and cannot fully account for the multitude of uses and agents in what Schäfer refers to as a "socio-technical ecosystem" (ibid, pp. 25, 29). Socio-technical ecosystems describe the interaction of large groups of users and information systems. It immediately becomes clear that conceptualizing user-agency in terms of the passive recipient of the old media versus the active participant of the new media is insufficient to account for the complexity of user-agency and the distinct role of technology. Instead, it encompasses a range of different uses and agents, and comprises different levels of participation by users, varying from creators to spectators and inactives (Van Dijck, 2009).

Seen through the eyes of a cultural theorist, crowdsourcing can be considered a phenomena answering to the demands of consumers for more involvement, agency, and a heightened level of participation. In this manner, crowdsourcing is the product of social actors, and thus the product of an intentional and rational process. However, this social-constructivist view, neglects the role technology plays in a socio-technical ecosystem. Withstanding the type of reductionism posed by cultural theorists, this research poses a broader understanding of crowdsourcing as part of a socio-technical ecosystem, characterized by multiple uses and agents, where both technology and users are intertwined in a dynamic system. Furthermore, as seen in the previous chapter, corporations have shown early interest in letting consumers do the work or giving them greater say in the production process. This not only answered to consumers demands, but conveniently also created more profits for corporations, as a result of reducing certain costs. To what extent can we conceptualize this in conditions more favourable to consumers, and to what extent more favourable to corporations? More on this in the next chapter.

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8   For further insight into these numbers see: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2007) *Participative Web: User-generated content,* OECD Committee for Information, Computer and Communications Policy report, April at: http://www.oecd.org/home/

Chapter 3: Economics perspective

Proponents of the economics perspective conceptualize user-agency more in terms of production and less in terms of consumption (Leadbeater, 2007; Tapscott & Williams, 2006). Terms deriving from this perspective, such as 'prosumption', 'wikinomics', and 'co-creation', conceptualize the changes brought by globalization, information and communication technologies, by emphasizing an equality between consumers and producers. It is no wonder that, in marketing and business discourse, hybrid terms such as 'prosumption', and 'co-creation' are frequently replacing terms such as production, consumption, and customization (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Furthermore, proponents of this perspective see a profound paradigm shift in the way businesses approach their customers and go about business relations. For instance, Tapscott & Williams argue that:

> "You can participate in the economy as an equal, co-creating value with your peers and favourite companies to meet your very personal needs, to engage in fulfilling communities, to change the world, or just to have fun! Prosumption becomes full circle" (2006, pp.150).

So how is this any different from the way businesses previously approached their customers? Van Dijck argues that with the full implementation of Web 2.0 technologies, and particularly with the emergence of many UGC sites, business interest has shifted more towards producing activities, giving users more power over content because they add business value (2009, pp. 46). However, the history of production and consumption outlined above, has shown how already in the 1950's and 1960's companies began to let consumers do the work (i.e. including them in the production process). Hybrid terms suggesting this increased power of consumers in terms of production activities, disregard the fact that users were, and are still also targets of advertising (Van Dijck, 2009). Therefore, it is important to consider the role of advertisers in casting new user-agency. With the emergence of every new medium, advertisers and media companies have adjusted their strategies to reach the consumer, from mass audiences targeted by broadcasting in the 1950's, to niche audiences reached by narrowcasting in the 1990's (Smith-Shomade, 2004). What one could argue is that the full implementation of Web 2.0 technologies, and the take up of UGC platforms has further enhanced the potential for niche marketing, making it easier to reach individual consumers and communities of consumers. The already close relationship between content producers, advertisers and consumers has become even more intimate (Van Dijck, 2009, pp. 47).

Furthermore, what we can learn from the economics perspective is that users take on two roles; both as content providers and data providers. Not only do the users upload content, but also willingly and unknowingly they provide important information about their profile and behaviour to site owners and meta-data aggregators (van Dijck, 2009; Schäfer, 2008; Proulx et al., 2011).[9] Before being able to use a site's services, users usually have to provide personal information, such as name, email address, gender, age etc. User behaviour is tracked and coupled with personal information, and this creates user profiles. For instance, YouTube's Terms of Use state:

> "We may record information about your usage, such as when you useYouTube, the channels, groups, and

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9   Meta data or meta information describe data about data. Meta information specifies content or the semantic relation to any stored file. An example would be an index card in a library referring to a certain book (Schäfer, 2008, pp.17).

favorites you subscribe to, the contacts you communicate with, and the frequency and size of data transfers, as well as information you display or click on in YouTube (including UI elements, settings, and other information). If you are logged in, we may associate that information with your account. We may use clear GIFs (a.k.a. 'Web Beacons') in HTML-based emails sent to our users to track which emails are opened by recipients."[10]

Meta-data can be used for various purposes, from interface optimization to targeted advertising. Permission to use this information is mostly regulated by a site's service agreements (Terms of Use), which users are required to agree to before being able to use the site's services. These terms of use make up important aspects of the quality, definition and legal regulation of content ownership and further use (Schäfer, 2008).

Schäfer rightly points out that, the enthusiasm about user activities is premature and unbalanced, because it neglects the fact that underlying power structures are not necessarily reconfigured (2008, pp. 17). New media practice does challenge traditional business models, but it doesn't make the industries exploiting those models disappear. What is most important to take from this is that even though users have more power over content distribution, they still have none over data distribution (Van Dijck, 2009). This is crucial, because the meta-data Google harvests from its own users and YouTube's users (after the acquisition), is much more valuable to advertisers than the content users provide. What does this tell us about user-agency?

Looking more closely at claims from the economics perspective, one can argue that the user's role as data provider is much more important than his role as content provider. This is basically reflected in the fact that, before being able to create and provide content, users must accept the condition of creating and providing data to the platform's owner(s). There is a double bind to this logic. "On the one hand users assert their creative agency by demanding a greater role in content production; on the other hand they lose grip on their agency as consumers as a result of technological algorithms tracking their behaviour and refining their profile" (Van Dijck, 2009, pp. 49). This is exactly where the cultural perspective in the previous chapter and the economics perspective collide. Though cultural theorists may argue that consumers or users have more agency in content production, the economics perspective teaches us that businesses have also adapted their strategies in order to make these conditions more favourable to them. Through data-mining, businesses make use of the fact that consumers or users, willingly and unknowingly provide personal information. This information is used to further enhance profits. On could argue that crowdsourcing even goes a step further by directly (i.e. not indirectly by ways of collecting data from consumers or users) asking or allowing consumers or users to contribute in the production process. An example that would highlight the difference is the fact that even collecting data, that consumers or users provide, and creating user profiles out of that data, a task that previously belonged to paid staff, is more frequently being outsourced to "the crowd". This even further enhances profits for businesses, because the work that businesses previously had to pay their staff for, is now mostly being done for free by consumers or users. This presents us with a reconfiguration of labour relations and raises questions about labour rights in the digital age.

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10 http://www.youtube.com/static?gl=US&template=terms

Chapter 4: Labour relations

A third approach analyses UGC in terms of labour relations, suggesting that users contribute creative efforts outside of professional routines and practices (OECD, 2007). Users that contribute to UGC sites are often referred to as 'amateurs', 'hobbyists', or 'volunteers'. And these terms contrast with terms such as, 'professionals', 'paid experts', and 'employees'. As seen in the economics perspective, new media conglomerates like Google or YouTube commercialize and incorporate the UGC for profits, causing some to argue that this has led to new mixed models of labour (Van Dijck, 2009; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 2010). The brief history of production and consumption has shown an early interest in the efforts of consumers by companies, and the changes in YouTube's and Google's policies to further integrate amateur efforts, is no different. So far, one could argue that this is just a continuation of the trend that was already around in the 1950's and 1960's, but concerns for labour rights suggest that there is something new about the contemporary situation (Terranova, 2000; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Ross, 2003; Hardt & Negri, 2000).

Since the beginning of the Internet, and notably it's most successful application "The World Wide Web", amateurs, hobbyists and idealists have enabled the development of what some theorists from the Social sciences and humanities have described as a 'gift economy for information exchange' (Barbrook, 2002).[11] It was envisioned as a new space where grassroots initiatives, communal spirit and the free exchange of goods and services in the 'amateur' culture had a chance to blossom, without interference of the state and the market. Labour critics and neo-Marxist scholars have noticed how this utopian vision was a convenient pretence for the mobilization of labour, familiar to the logic of capitalist exploitation (Hardt & Negri, 2000; Terranova, 2000; Terranova, 2004). For labour critics and neo-Marxist scholars UGC involves unpaid work on the part of participants. For instance, Tiziana Terranova wrote about the phenomena of 'free labour', which is "an important, yet unacknowledged, source of value in advanced capitalist societies", and "simultaneously voluntarily given and unwanted, enjoyed and exploited" (2004, pp. 73, 74). Examples of free labour include building websites, modifying software packages, writing reviews, and building virtual spaces. Others have applied similar perspectives to different forms such as television and games. For instance, Mark Andrejevic, writing mostly about television, has written about "the ways in which creative activity and exploitation coexist and interpenetrate one another within the context of the emerging online economy" (2008. pp.25). Andrejevic went on to explore how online viewer activity serves television producers in two ways: by providing feedback, which saves the producers the cost of market research, and by publicising television programmes, which saves them marketing costs (2008). And again two social logics confront each other: the pleasures derived from online participation, and the ability of capitalism to profit from those pleasures. Andrejevic claims that the latter comprises the first.

Writing on games in a similar sense, Greig De Peuter and Nick Dyer-Witheford have explained how, from the 1990's onwards, computer games have increasingly been packaged together with tools, to help foster a participatory culture of game modification (2005). Producers of commercial games recognized how valuable user contribution was, and as a result they are adopting ways of integrating the communities' work into their production processes (Nieborg, 2005). De Peuter & Dyer Witheford go on to argue how the work done by these modders, or amateurs, or hobbyists is

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11 Gift Economy (contrasting 'Market Economy') is a term deriving from the social sciences, describing a society where valuable goods and services are regularly given without any explicit agreement for immediate or future rewards (Cheal, 1988; Barbrook, 2002).

a kind of exploited free labour, and that it also serves as a kind of informal training for the future game development workforce. The latter makes an interesting point because a 2003 study by Postigo on the volunteers of America Online (AOL) has shown that volunteers were less driven by spirit of community, and more driven by the novelty of working with new technologies, and that they needed computer experience to be employable in the emerging tech-economy (Van Dijck, 2009; Postigo, 2003).[12] Elsewhere, Arvidsson has extended the discussions of free labour into debates about consumption, arguing that brand management exploits the 'immaterial labour' of consumers by drawing on resources of ideas and styles generated in contemporary urban environments (Hesmondhalgh, 2010; Arvidsson, 2005). The AOL and their volunteers, the discussions of free labour and immaterial labour are all part of the current transformations in labour relations with regard to the commercialization of UGC sites.

Alongside the critique of free labour, there have also been discussions of professional and semi-professional workers (amateurs) in the cultural industries and in related industries such as web design (Hesmondhalgh, 2010). It has been argued by various recent critical accounts, such as Ross (2003), and Wittel (2001), that "professional workers in the (digitalising) cultural industries and in related industries are involved in forms of labour that are characterized by high degrees of autonomy, creativity and 'play', but also by overwork, casualisation and precariousness" (ibid, pp. 270). Labour volunteered to UGC sites is not seen of as work, but as fun or play (Van Dijck, 2009). This 'work as play' ethos also exists in many workplaces of the digital creative industries. Designers, software developers and hardware engineers are attracted to places with an 'anti-corporate culture' where young people are willing to work unusual hours for very little money in return. Such insights, often developed in the IT sector, have been increasingly applied to the cultural and creative industries. Hesmondhalgh refers to Gillian Ursell's early contribution on television production that noted "an intensification of the self-commodification processes by which each individual seeks to improve his/her chances of attracting gainful employment" (2000, pp. 807). In the era of casualisation and increasing freelance work, television workers had to take on the work of organizing their own labour markets. In constructing her arguments, Gillian Ursell drew on the political thought of sociologist Nikolas Rose and the idea that, in advanced liberalism, freedom is redefined as "a capacity for self-realisation which can be obtained only through individual activity" (Rose, 1999, pp. 145). Gill & Pratt argue similarly, that "(new) media workers and other cultural labourers are, [...] in more critical discourses, exemplars of the move away from stable notions of 'career' to more informal, insecure and discontinuous employment", and "are said to be iconic representatives of the 'brave new world', in which risks and responsibilities must be borne solely by the individual" (2008, pp. 2, 3). These critical accounts all have in common that they have identified workers in the cultural and creative industries, as the new 'precariat'[13]. While terms such as 'free labour' and 'immaterial labour' are not reducible to each other, their very proliferation points to the significance of contemporary transformations and at the very least, signals that there is 'something' going on (ibid). Yet discussions of free labour and immaterial labour have paid only rather passing attention to questions concerning employment, occupations and careers in these industries, other than to make passing reference to moments of resistance to

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12 In the 1990's AOL employed thousands of what they called 'remote staffers'. They were in charge of monitoring electronic bulletin boards, hosting chat rooms, and enforcing Terms of Service agreements. However, these remote staffers were not compensated for their efforts. As a result, AOL implemented a mixed system of paid and volunteer staff, which caused controversy among its loyal base. After a lawsuit, AOL completely abandoned the system in 2003 (Van Dijck, 2009; Postigo, 2003).

13 'Precariat' is a neologism "that brings together the meanings of precariousness and proletariat to signify both an experience of exploitation and a (potential) new political subjectivity" (Gill & Pratt, 2008, pp. 3).

oppressive working conditions (Hesmondhalgh, 2010).

The perspectives outlined in the previous chapters have provided some stimulating and necessary interventions against celebratory accounts of cultural industry work, and of the relationship between production and consumption in the digital era. However, Hesmondhalgh rightly points out that important conceptual issues remain under-explored (2010, pp. 271, 272). For instance, can we consider people who sit at their computers modifying code or working on a crowdsourcing science project from InnoCentive, 'exploited' in the same way as those who endure appalling conditions and pay in Indonesian sweatshops? The answer is that we cannot, because the conditions are clearly disproportionate to each other. So how can we use these perspectives to better understand capitalism, exploitation, power and freedom in contemporary capitalism? And to what kinds of demands might objections to free labour give rise? Following now will be a look at the concepts of free labour and immaterial labour, which are more critical towards UGC.

Chapter 5: Critique of UGC

> "Precariousness (in relation to work) refers to all forms of insecure, contingent, flexible work, from illegalized, casualized and temporary employment, to homeworking, piecework and freelancing. In turn, precarity signifies both the multiplication of precarious, unstable, insecure forms of living and, simultaneously, new forms of political struggle and solidarity that reach beyond the traditional models of the political party or trade union" (Gill & Pratt, 2008, pp. 3).

Precariousness, precarity and precarization have recently emerged as novel territory for thinking, and intervening in labour and life (Gill & Pratt, 2008). Terms that embody such thinking include 'immaterial labour', 'affective labour', and 'free labour'. They come from work associated with autonomist Marxists, such as Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Maurizio Lazzarato, George Caffentzis, and Tiziana Terranova, and from post-operaist political activism, such as the EuroMayDay movements (ibid).[14] Work or labour has been a pre-eminent focus of autonomist writing and activism, and is understood as representing the central mechanism of capitalism. As Gill and Pratt point out, this is where autonomist Marxists differ from classical Marxist. Autonomist Marxists do not argue from an account of the power of capital, but they stress the autonomy and creativity of labour, and workers' power to bring about change (Gill & Pratt, 2008). In this sense, capital never shifts on its own accord, because workers' movements are the stimulus of development.

Immaterial labour was first defined as "the labour that produces the information and cultural content of the commodity" (Lazzarato, 1996, pp. 133). However, this definition was criticised by other autonomists Marxists for its technological determinism and excessive optimism (Caffentzis, 1998). Consequently, in their book *Empire*, Hardt & Negri expanded the definition to "the labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication" (2000, pp. 290). According to Hesmondhalgh, this definition included 'affective labour' that involves human contact and interaction, and includes the highly gendered caring and health work

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14 "Operaismo, the Italian workerist movements of the 1970's, […] which held that the critique of capital should start fromworking-class struggles and that energy be focused on the strongest parts of proletarian movements" (Gill & Pratt, 2008, pp. 6).

(Hesmondhalgh, 2010).

Hardt and Negri argue that "the introduction and increasing use of computers has tended progressively to redefine labouring practices and relations, along with, indeed, all social practices and relations" (2000, pp. 291). The labouring practices have transformed in such a way that they all follow the logic of information and communication technologies, which means a homogenisation of labouring processes. This view is pessimistic, not to mention technological deterministic. However, this pessimistic view is counteracted by their more optimistic view on affective labour, of which they suggest produces social networks and communities. And for Hardt and Negri, social interaction and cooperation is immanent to immaterial labour (2000, pp. 294). According to Gill and Pratt, they do not call for more work, or less alienated work, but they point to "the refusal of work as a political, potentially revolutionary act" (Gill & Pratt, 2008, pp. 5). And because wealth creation takes place through such co-operative interactivity, Hardt and Negri argue that immaterial labour provides the potential for a kind of "spontaneous and elementary communism" (2000, pp. 294).

Tiziana Terranova borrows this optimistic perspective in her highly influential piece on free labour (2004). She argues how capital constantly struggles to make profit out of this intractable terrain of collective labour (pp. 88). According to Ritzer and Jurgenson this is the first factor that leads them to conclude that capitalism has transformed in the digital era, because there is greater resistance to the incursions of capitalism (2010, pp. 21). 'Free labour' then has a kind of double meaning to it. At the same time as it helps to perpetuate the economic system, it also opens up possibilities for the 'liberation of subjectivities' that result in practices of cultural expression and knowledge creation in a logic of social emancipation (Proulx et al., 2011, pp. 10). 'Free labour' indeed refers to unpaid work, but in line with autonomist sympathies, it also refers to the way in which labour cannot be fully controlled, because capitalism relies on it. For Terranova, phenomena such as open-source software, represent "the overreliance of the digital economy as such on free labour" (2004, pp. 93). This paradoxical nature can be seen in the characterisation of free labour as "simultaneously voluntarily given and unwanted, enjoyed and exploited" (Terranova, 2004, pp. 74).

The question of exploitation has been raised by sociologist Adam Arvidsson in his piece on free labour in relation to brands (2005). The value of a brand all depends on awareness, associations and loyalties, all of which depend on the attention of consumers. According to Arvidsson, surplus value is based on "the ethical surplus (the set of shared meanings and attachments to a product, generated by consumers), or the surplus community that consumers produce" (2005, pp.250). What Arvidsson then claims about exploitation is that "the qualitative dimension of exploitation thus consists in making the productive sociality of consumers evolve on the premises of brands; to make it unfold through branded consumer goods in such ways that make it produce measurable (and hence valuable) forms of attention" (ibid, pp. 251). However, Hesmondhalgh rightly points out that this cannot be seen as exploitation in any meaningful analytical sense (2010, pp. 273). Use of the concept of exploitation has been overwhelmingly Marxian, meaning that it has been used as a historical, explanatory and ethical concept, that rests upon certain disputed notions of class, labour and compulsion (ibid, pp. 274). This illustrates that the term exploitation has been widely, but uncertainly used in many debates. However, Mark Andrejevic has written a piece on YouTube, where he offers a more developed view on the relationship between free labour and exploitation (2009). Andrejevic argues in this piece that the term free labour refers to unpaid work, but also freely given work, "endowed with a sense of autonomy" (pp. 416). According to this logic, free and spontaneous production of community and sociality is both

autonomous of capital and captured by it. However, the question still remains if the capture or appropriation of such free, immaterial, and affective labour, which are also used to refer to the more positive "user-generated construction of sociality, community and even entertainment on social networking or community-oriented sites like YouTube" (ibid, pp. 417), can be described as a form of exploitation in the autonomist-Marxist sense. A Marxist conception of exploitation implies "forced, surplus and unpaid labor, the product of which is not under the producers' control" (Holmstrom, 1997, pp.87). And "in capitalism, the forcible separation of the worker from the means of production is conserved in workers' forced choice to relinquish control over their labor power" (Andrejevic, 2009, pp. 418). However, Andrejevic also rightly points out that the potential in the critical accounts provided by the autonomist Marxists (i.e. free labour, immaterial labour, and affective labour), lies in the fact that it is freely or autonomously given, making it by definition not forced. This renders the claims of exploitation even more problematic.

In order to seek a better understanding of exploitation in relation to digital labour, Andrejevic argues how exploitation is related to the concept of alienation of the workers from the products of labour. He draws on Nancy Holmstrom's insight regarding the relationship between exploitation and alienation, which argues that "the appropriation of control over workers' labour represents more than a means of capturing surplus value: it simultaneously reproduces the alienation of workers from the product of their labor" (Holmstrom, 1997, pp.85). By invoking the language of Marx, commercial promoters of Web 2.0 technologies tend to directly speak to this alienating aspect of waged labour. The invocation of forms of alienation associated with the exploitation of waged labour becomes a precondition for the popularity of Web 2.0 technologies (Andrejevic, 2009). Web 2.0 technology users can escape from alienation by being offered "modicum control over the product of their creative activity in exchange for the work they do in building up online communities and sociality upon privately controlled network infrastructures" (ibid, pp. 419). By doing work in building online communities and sociality upon privately controlled network infrastructures, users generate data about their social lives, their behaviour, their tastes, preferences, patterns of consumption and responses to advertising. Andrejevic rightly points out that which has already been pointed out in the economics perspective on UGC, that the user's role as data provider is much more important than the user's role as content provider (ibid, pp. 418). Moreover, the user's role as data provider depends on the user's role as content provider. It is the former that is extracted under conditions of private ownership and turned into a commodity.[15]

It would seem that Andrejevic attempts to rescue the concept of exploitation in relation to digital labour by linking it to force indirectly. In response to the oppressive system of alienation people are compelled to seek out ways of re-exerting their control in ways which then become open to appropriation of surplus value by capitalists (Hesmondhalgh, 2010). This is a stimulating idea, but it runs the risk of simplifying the mechanisms of this indirect force by arguing that users are compelled to communicate, and to produce culture and knowledge only in reaction to alienation. Moreover, there is evidence that capitalism might have moved in the direction of attempting to reduce alienation in the interests of accumulation (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). And even if we want to retreat from the view that free labour, immaterial labour, and affective labour, involve exploitation in any meaningful analytical sense, liberals might still want to argue that it is wrong in some way. So what kind of political demands might flow from critiques of free labour, immaterial labour, and affective labour?

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15 Andrejevic relates this form of subjection to the forms of subjection traditionally associated with women's affective and immaterial labour (Andrejevic, 2009).

Andrejevic compared free labour to the most discussed version of unpaid labour, domestic labour. However, just because these debates concerned a form of unpaid labour, one should not think that the fact that this labour being unpaid, was the principal point under debate. Hesmondhalgh rightly argues that these debates were more about the many injustices associated with the gendered division of labour, including the expectation that women, more than any other group, and by virtue only of their biological and cultural differences from men, were expected to perform this work without financial compensation. And also connected to this was a set of disadvantages for women in paid labour markets. The ethical problems were those of inequalities and injustice, and the political problems were those concerned with, for example, whether a demand for wages would really serve to address these problems or whether we should question the institutional separation of, for example (unpaid) childrearing from paid work (Hesmondhalgh, 2010, pp. 276). If the objection to unpaid household labour is that it contributes significantly to broader patterns of inequality and injustice, can the same objection be made to free labour? In other words, would the socialist-feminists object to free labour just as they have objected to domestic labour? What is evident is that life will always involve a huge amount of labour, some of it answering more urgent needs than others. Moreover, societies will continue to be based on a complex division of labour, with some forms within the realm of paid labour, and others outside it. Unpaid work may not be a problem in itself, and it may in fact be an inevitability. Both hesmondhalgh and Andrejevic rightly point out that a critique of contemporary capitalism mounted on unpaid labour is rather unconvincing, and lacks a connection to pragmatic political struggle (Hesmondhalgh, 2010; Andrejevic, 2004). What can be taken from the accounts given by the autonomist Marxists? And how can we connect it to the broader context of production and consumption?

On the one hand, transformations in advanced capitalism, under the impact of globalization, information and communication technologies, have been conceptualized by terms such as, prosumption, participation, citizen journalism, user-generated content, and crowdsourcing, to name but a few. On the other hand, these transformations have also been conceptualized by terms such as, exploitation, free labour, precarity, and alienation, also naming but a few. Cultural theorist Søren Mørk Petersen rightly points out that these two sets of words are not dichotomous, and are in fact part of what happens online and elsewhere these years, and for the sake of history, always have happened (2008).

According to Marxist conceptions, the value of a commodity was measured by the labour time incorporated in it. However, as work becomes more automated through machines, the creation of wealth will come to depend on two interrelated factors: knowledge and technological expertise objectified in machines combined with the organization of the 'general intellect'. The increasing automation and the mobilization of the general intellect are primarily fostered by machinery, infrastructure and communication technologies. Within this new mode of production, autonomist Marxist emphasize the variable and more uncontrollable form of human or subjective capital, where subversive thought and creativity can prosper (Petersen, 2008). But as shown above, it is also important to acknowledge the fact that the Internet, always and already operates within the confinement of capitalism (Terranova, 2004). Furthermore, where Marx (1993) conceptualized a future of capitalism in a way that it ultimately undermines itself, leading to communism, Deleuze & Guattari (1987) have rightly pointed out that the system of capitalism has an inherent capacity to reterritorialize and reinvent itself (Petersen, 2008). The subversive potential online is fostered by the same technical infrastructure and standards that make capitalism so easily profit from this subversive potential. For instance, Petersen

provides a great example of capitalism profiting from UGC, with the acquisition of Deja News' archive of Usenet by Google in 2001. Started in 1981, Usenet functioned as a distributed system of loosely connected servers, with no general server to host postings. This is different from a Bulletin Board System (BBS) or a list hosted by a company. In 1995 Deja News started archiving old and new posts to Usenet and made an interface with search options. Google's appropriation of this database of 'free labour' for its own commercial purposes, is a subtle example of how such a distributed network of participation can easily turn into a closed architecture of 'exploitation'. According to Petersen, this strategy can be characterized as a reterritorialization of 'free labour' into a capitalistic structure of profit-making (ibid). A different example of a commercial company profiting from the creative activity of users is the case of the telecommunications company Verizon. In July 2009, Verizon began an experiment with what they called "company-sponsored online communities for customer service", where unpaid volunteers, worked as long as 20 hours a week for the company (Lohr, 2009). One volunteer reported that he found the experience deeply satisfying, because in his role, he had the opportunity to help thousands of people. Today, volunteers and amateurs translate documents, write encyclopedia articles, moderate online discussion groups, fill in surveys, and even provide legal, medical, and scientific expertise.

According to media scholar Trebor Scholz, there is a long tradition of people volunteering in hospitals, soup kitchens, museums, and non-profit organizations (Scholz, 2011, pp. 34). And as shown above, unpaid labour has always taken hold throughout the economy and society as a whole. Furthermore, the history of production and consumption has shown that customers in fast-food restaurants, have taken on some of the work that was traditionally done by waiters. In grocery stores, shoppers use machines that scan their purchases and accept their payment, tasks that were traditionally only done by cashiers. And in the fashion industry, companies like *Forever 21* use street graffiti for the design of their clothes without crediting or paying the artist (Scholz, 2011). This shows that free labour is ubiquitous and for the sake of history, has long been around. So what causes critics to cast a certain form of free labour as exploitative?

Trebor Scholz convened several major converences, of which *The Internet as Playground and Factory* is an important one, relating to digital labour. Scholz mentions that, when speaking of exploitative digital labour, perhaps Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (Mturk) is the runaway leader. Internet law professor and speaker at *The Internet as Playground and Factory* conference, Jonathan Zittrain mentions in a video that, at Mturk, people are seen as an 'elastic workforce', and get paid by the penny or nickel to do tasks. He used the same mechanism in a contest for his book cover at *worth1000.*com. Scholz also cites media artist Xtine Burrough, creator of Mechanical Olympics, which she calls the open version of the Olympic Games, where anyone can play and vote for gold medal winners. Similarly, artist Aaron Koblin created *The Sheep Market*, where 10000 sheep are drawn by random strangers, through Amazon's task-distribution mechanism (Scholz, 2011). These are all examples of free digital labour, but if they are, are they all equally exploitative?

Terms such as "free labour", "immaterial labour", and "affective labour", coming from autonomist Marxism, do not necessarily point to labour that is subject to exploitation. What these terms actually point to is the fact that the digital environment is a place where individual creativity has a chance to prosper, and individuals have the chance to liberate themselves from certain subjectivities. However, always operating within the confinements of Capitalism, the same digital environment, ironically makes it so easy for capital to profit from the previously mentioned, subversive

potential. Moreover, casting free labour, immaterial labour, and affective labour as exploitative, is more proof that the conflict between capital and labour, that for the sake of history has long been around, has taken on a different and perhaps new form in the digital environment. In this sense, crowdsourcing can be seen as a mechanism that directs the products of the subversive potential of the digital environment towards profits for capitalism.

Chapter 6: Crowdsourcing

A term that is frequently used in the context of the developments described above, is *Crowdsourcing,* first coined by Jeff Howe, in the June 2006 issue of Wired. Crowdsourcing "represents the act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call […] The crucial prerequisite is the use of the open call format and the large network of potential laborers" (Howe, 2006, paragraph 5). Kleemann et al. (2008) point out that "crowdsourcing takes place when a profit oriented firm outsources specific tasks essential for the making or sale of its product to the general public in the form of an open call over the internet, with the intention of animating individuals to make a (voluntary) contribution to the firm's production process for free or for significantly less than the contribution is worth for the firm"(pp. 6). For instance, *Threadless.com*, a web-based t-shirt company applies crowdsourcing to the design process for their t-shirts through an ongoing online competition (Brabham, 2008; Howe, 2008). Another example is the call announced by the auto-manufacturer Fiat for its new Fiat 500. "In just a few months, the call generated ten million clicks, 170,000 designs from (potential) consumers, and 20,000 specific comments on things like particular exhaust pipe forms, chrome bumpers, or Italian flags under the rear view mirror" (Kleemann et al., 2008, pp. 11, 12). *InnoCentive.com*, is an example of the fact that crowdsourcing does not limit itself to creative disciplines. Here, scientific research and development challenges from companies are put up for an online community, where individuals can attempt to solve the challenges.

The phenomena of crowdsourcing has often been conflated with phenomena such as open source, open innovation, co-creation, and commons-based peer production (Brabham, 2012). Firms often attempt to closely imitate the aesthetics and rhetoric of the open source and open content culture in order to properly motivate users to participate in crowdsourcing projects (Kleemann et al., 2008). Just as the double meaning ascribed by the autonomist Marxists to digital labour, crowdsourcing too has a kind of double meaning. It "simultaneously inspires unambiguous excitement about the potentials of the Open Web and moral indignation about the exploitation of new forms of labor" (Scholz, 2011, pp. 48). Scholz rightfully argues that, crowdsourcing has yet to be fully addressed in its complexity, because it is mobilized in the service of capitalism, but it is also employed in support of non commercial and explicitly anti-capitalist projects. Crowdsourcing finds its roots in outsourcing, a term used to describe how companies outsource subcontract tasks to communities of people online, who get the job done at significantly lower costs. And as seen, discussions about digital labour often come with a dourness that frames this form of work as exploitation, and therefore ignoring the pleasures of those who generate and submit content. However, Scholz rightly points out that using the term in this manner, doesn't really account for projects that bring together people who create something because there is no centralized company or entrepreneur who subcontracts tasks (Scholz, 2011).

Crowdsourcing is just one aspect of this labour market, a form of digital labour that has the goal of

distributing the workload from one (usually paid) individual, or employee to many (frequently unwaged) volunteers, or amateurs. I will return to the problematic reference to internet users as volunteers or amateurs briefly. *Wikinomics* authors Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams proclaim that, in order to survive in the new economy, firms must connect to external ideas and energies (2010, pp. 63). It could be argued that crowdsourcing is part of a broad and historically significant trend, by which the capitalist firm is targeting consumers for integration into the process of value creation more than even before, and in new ways now possible via the World Wide Web (Kleemann et al., 2008).

Michel Bauwens, creator of the Peer-to-Peer Foundation says that online, there are people who share knowledge, software codes, and increasingly also designs for making things, and around that all kinds of entities try to create sustainable businesses. Out of this dynamic, he sees three models emerging. The first one is the sharing model, which is mostly characterized by people creating and sharing their own things on an individual basis, with no common project, and weak links amongst each other. And this, empirically gives rise to third party platforms, which are privately owned (Bauwens, 2009). Examples of this model can bee seen in YouTube, Flickr, and Google. The second model is a commons-oriented peer-production, which is characterized by a common project, and strong ties between the community members, who usually create their own platform (ibid). This is similar to legal scholar Yochai Benkler's description of hierarchy-defying, often unpaid, commons-based peer production (2006). Examples of this can be found in the computer operating system *Linux,* or news and announcements websites such as *Slashdot.* And finally there is crowdsourcing, which, according to Bauwens is the most capitalistic model, that captures part of the value created by outside producers. Through its platform, the private firm profits from the public pool (Bauwens, 2009). For instance, in Lego's 'Lego Factory' model, users can generate designs and other users can order the new kits, but it is Lego that makes and delivers the packages, and Lego that gives commissions to the designers. Bauwens stresses the potential of public-minded peer production, just as the autonomist Marxists stress the potential of free labour (Bauwens, 2009).

Yochai Benkler's notion of commons-based peer-production reminds us that , while commercial interests exert an iron grip on the Internet, there are also large meaningful projects that are not market-oriented. For instance, people do not contribute to Wikipedia for financial gains, the encyclopedia benefits from the wisdom-of-the-crowd effect. However, Scholz argues that "Wikipedia also benefits from the dynamics of the digital economy, specifically a symbiosis with Google" (2011, pp. 49).

> "Wikipedia materialized as a Godsend for Google's business plan. Moreover, the supposed Chinese wall between Google and Wikipedia makes it possible for wiki-workers to think they are squirreling for the betterment of humankind, while Google positions itself to be the premier portal for information on the web and the biggest corporate success story of the 'New Information Economy'" (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009, pp. 425, in: Scholz, 2009, pp. 49).

The quote above shows that even though projects are not profit-driven, they are not outside the dynamics of the digital economy. The work that goes into Wikipedia also indirectly aids corporate giants like Google. This is also highlighted in the emerging models by Bauwens. Companies that open up their boundaries to external ideas and human capital outperform companies that rely solely on the internal resources and capabilities. The progenitor of Cybernetics, Norbert Wiener explained how the role of new technology under capitalism is to intensify the exploitation

of workers (Barbrook, 2007, pp. 60). Scholz refers to this exploitative aspect as a necessity for the survival of companies who merely have to learn to be more receptive for taking in outside resources (Scholz, 2011, pp. 51). Abigail de Kosnik, also a speaker at the Internet as Playground and Factory conference, says that even fan creativity contributes considerably to the market value of copyright material, and is increasingly seen as just another set of productions in the realm of the creative industries (De Kosnik, 2009).

Scholz seems to agree with Andrejevic when he also claims that digital labour and domestic labour have much in common. Companies circumvent labour regulations if people work at home and any hour of the day could be work time. Domestic work such as caring for babies, or caring for the sick doesn't result in a tangible product. This makes it easier to not think of it as labour in the traditional Marxist sense. As a consequence these activities are frequently unpaid, undervalued, and largely go unnoticed. Furthermore, Scholz mentions that "the inequalities between the largely unpaid workforce and the corporate hyper giants are growing" (2011, pp. 51). Yet, he provides no analytical evidence that proves that the inequalities in the asymmetrical relationship between the unpaid workforce and corporate giants are in fact growing. What seems to be the case is that within these asymmetrical relationships, which capitalize on free labour, those who live on less than $2 a day, are placed at the bottom of the participation gap. For instance, *TxtEagle,* a service that delivers access to a cheap labour force in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond, which invites companies to "harness the capacity of two billion people in over 80 countries to accomplish work with unprecedented speed, scale and quality" (Karlman, 2010). The company forms the interface that connects the workers from the underdeveloped world with the overdeveloped world. And this is what *Washington Post* writer Matt Miller calls "Liberalism's crisis on trade", where agony exists for progressives or liberals, who see themselves as fighting liberals at home, and as global humanists abroad. According to Miller, we have reached a point in history where we cannot pretend that there is no tension between the two stances. Furthermore, he rightly points to the benefits for some workers to develop marketable skills, but Scholz points out that, at the same time, Miller ignores the globalization utopia of crowdsourcing, "because such (exploitative) labor practices would not even be possible without the uneven global development produced in the first place by the Global North" (2011, pp. 52).

I now return to the problems with referring to the crowd in crowdsourcing as amateurs. Apart from the fact that it is freely and autonomously given, there is another reason why claims about exploitation in regards to crowdsourcing are so difficult to make. Crowdsourcing has been coloured with the hue of amateurism ever since Jeff Howe coined the term (Brabham, 2012). In a study on the messages conveyed in the popular press discourse about crowdsourcing and amateurism, and the social implications of that discourse, Brabham concluded that "crowdsourcing coverage perpetuates a false image of an amateur crowd through condescending discourse that obscures laborers' location within capitalist regimes and inhibits organized resistance to exploitive labor practices on the part of crowdsourcing organizations" (2012, pp. 407). Apart from the dominant cultural understanding of the term 'amateur' as unpaid, untrained, and inexperienced, this is done in several ways. Especially in the business and trade publications, crowdsourcing is spoken of as an unwelcome and impending paradigm shift in the professional world, with the creative professionals struck the most by it. Most of the discourse also describes these amateurs as adorable for aspiring to be just like the professionals that have already 'made it', and scapegoats amateurs as the reason artists suffer. Furthermore, the discourse of amateurism in crowdsourcing falsely positions amateurs as bargains at the gate, disrupting the status quo of enterprise, when they are in fact, just as qualified and committed as professionals.

Brabham rightly points out that "these so-called amateurs are really just outsourced professionals, and the products and media content we are sold are not much different, certainly no more democratically created, and never beyond the grip of capitalist logic" (ibid, pp. 406). The case of CNN's *iReport.com*, launched on august 2, 2006 as a citizen journalism experiment, where people from everywhere in the world have the opportunity to contribute unedited, unfiltered, and uncensored user-generated video and text-based news reports, serves as an example. Through this user-generated citizen media, CNN is tapping into a mine of free labour from all over the world. Furthermore, CNN also takes advantage of creative labour by way of creating a section called 'Assignment Desk', where CNN producers list topics for 'iReporters' to investigate and report (Kperogi, 2011). Most of these reports end up being used on CNN's main newscast, which really means that the CNN producers set an agenda for citizen journalists. Another example is that of LinkedIn, a professional networking site with over 42 million members worldwide (Newman, 2009). In mid 2009, the creators conducted a survey asking its members whether they would be willing to volunteer to translate the site into other languages, for no pay. This is highly skilled work for which people are well-paid in many other contexts. Being accessible in more languages meant that LinkedIn would increase its profits by reaching a much larger audience. It comes as no surprise that one respondent was surprised that LinkedIn "would have the effrontery to ask for a professional service for free" (Newman, 2009). Similarly, Google asked a number of illustrators to provide free art work for its browser, Chrome, and Facebook asked volunteers to translate explanatory texts on its website into over 20 languages. Reactions to such attempts have sometimes been strongly negative and it is an indication of capitalism's struggle of making a profit out of the freely and autonomously given creative labour, and the cyber-libertarians struggles against incursions of capitalism.[16] More importantly, one could argue that the line between amateur and professional becomes even more blurry.

Web 2.0 emerged primarily after the dotcom crisis. In its early commercial stage, the Internet proved bad at selling commodities but really good at creating hype and economic bubbles. The discourses surrounding Web 2.0 often seems very seductive in highlighting concepts such as democracy, participation, collaborative culture, mass creativity, co-creation (Petersen, 2008; Van Dijck, 2009). And with good reasons because, Web 2.0 technologies are extremely useful and they create desire, joy and pleasure, through their affective integration into everyday life. The Internet has often been promoted as counter-cultural (or cyber-libertarian) and inherently democratic. Autonomist Marxist theorists such as Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, and those mentioned above have ridiculed capitalism for its struggle to capitalize the collective intelligence and piggyback on immaterial products, produced by informational structures organized around mass intellectuality (Dyer-Witheford, 2005, pp. 145). Commodification of users and their content have proved itself as the answer to the problems that capitalism supposedly faced when online communication sparked off. And according to Cova et al., exploitation takes place on two related, but different levels. First, consumers are not generally paid for the know-how, enthusiasm, and social cooperation that they contribute to the designing, developing, and manufacturing processes of goods and services. Second, the customer labour that goes into customizing goods and services ends up increasing the price the same customers have to pay for their creations (Cova et al., 2011). While this

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16 Cyber-libertarian of 'hacker' ethic refers to the belief that individuals, acting in whatever capacity they choose (as citizens, consumers, companies, or collectives) should be at the liberty to pursue their own tastes and interests online (Thierer, 2009). This often stands in opposition to capitalist organization that seeks to control and exploit those involved in it (Turner, 2006).

may seem exploitative, Cova et al. argue that we should question whether the term 'labor' or 'labour' is descriptive of the kinds of activities and contributions that take place on UGC sites. In both classical and neo-classical economics, the term labor refers to the division of labour of Fordist regimes of production (ibid, pp. 234). The concept implies necessity, coercion and command, and the value of such (wage) labour is a function of the time spent working and the output generated. Understood this way, the term labour might be very misleading when applied to the current and emerging forms of social production and cooperation found in today's Web 2.0 environments (ibid). What is needed is a theory of labour that is able to map both exploitation and free labour, along with considering the value these sites create for their users. Considering this, many have mentioned Yochai Benkler's (2006) utopian project of a commons based peer production and the development of a non–market and non–proprietary mode of production is a way forward. Scholz mentions scholar Christian Fuchs, who points to Negri and Hardt's latest book *Commonwealth* (2009) , and proposes a communist (self-managed) Internet for a communist society (Fuchs, 2009). Scholz rightly argues that such visions are utopia's that build on a full-fledged revolution and reduces the critiques to mere complaints (Scholz, 2009). It simply does not expand the capacity for action. The discussion of crowdsourcing in the context of other phenomena highlighted above, such as, user agency, user-generated content, open-source, and free labour, has provided a glimpse of the inequalities and vulnerabilities of expropriated publics.

Conclusion

The contemporary user or consumer is a paradoxical figure. The act of expressing himself creatively and freely, by producing, remixing, and distributing content, is also an act of subjection and submission to the economic system upon which the internet is based (Proulx et al., 2011, pp.22). The history of production and consumption outlined in the first chapter, has shown that firms have long been interested in contributions by consumers for profits. This was previously done by way of allowing, or letting consumers do some of the work themselves. This conveniently answered consumer's demands for more involvement, autonomy, and freedom. And by speaking directly to the consumer's demands, firms are able to cut back on a diverse set of costs, by letting consumers do some of the work that was previously done by paid employees, or other firms. One could argue that crowdsourcing is a continuation of the trend of letting consumers do the work, but a more effective, direct and open version, due to the Internet, it's most successful application the World Wide Web, and particularly Web 2.0 applications, which facilitate easy publishing, and content sharing.

The perspectives provided by the cultural theorists teaches us that consumers have not necessarily acquired a new role as users, which states that consumers went from passive recipients to active participants. One could argue that the discourse on crowdsourcing upholds this historical fallacy, to emphasize an increase in empowerment of consumers, who accordingly have the power to drive the future of businesses. Nor can the user activities be solely characterized by participation, autonomy, and freedom. This runs the risk of neglecting the substantial role a site's interface plays, with its diverse algorithms that steer individual users and communities. A more important factor to point out is, that in the digital era users have better access to cheap and easy-to-use networked technology, enabling them to perform tasks that were previously the privilege of companies, or paid professionals. This adds a new dimension to the trend of incorporating consumers in the production process, because greater and better access to

cheap and easy-to-use networked technology, increases the amount of potential labourers. Hence, the growth in crowdsourcing initiatives.

The economics perspective reminds us of the user's role as both content provider and data provider. The ways in which corporations profit from users' and communities' data has already been extensively discussed. Web 2.0 technologies, and in particular the many UGC sites, have further enhanced the reach of advertisers. What is most important to take from this is that even though users have more power over content distribution, they still have none over data distribution. We should not neglect the fact that underlying power structures are not necessarily reconfigured (Schäfer, 2008, pp. 17). New media practice does challenge traditional business models, but it doesn't make the industries exploiting those models disappear. In this light, one could argue that crowdsourcing is a way for businesses to also profit from the user's role as content provider. If we compare crowdsourcing to the trend of incorporating consumers in the production process, recognized around the 1950's and 1960's, one could argue that this is a continuation, but only now firms allow users to tackle less pre-defined tasks. For example, where firms used to provide do-it-yourself blood pressure monitors, they now provide a format where users can provide ideas for better ways of monitoring one's blood pressure.

Labour relations teach us that life will always involve a huge amount of labour, some of it answering more urgent needs than others. Moreover, societies will continue to be based on a complex division of labour, with some forms within the realm of paid labour, and others outside it. Unpaid work may not be a problem in itself, and it may in fact be an inevitability. One only has to consider the gendered household work, or childrearing work, work that is unpaid, but inevitable. One could argue that with crowdsourcing, firms have found direct ways of making profits out of labour that is considered outside the realm of paid labour, simply because users enjoy their activities, and do not necessarily feel manipulated into such feelings by capitalists. For firms, this system serves as a mechanism to reduce the need to hire paid personnel. Instead, consumers do these formerly paid tasks for no pay, or at least significantly less than the work is worth to the firm. Indeed users are the producers, but the profit, or at least the potential for profit, still belongs to corporations. This is mainly the reason why claims of exploitation have been made in regards to crowdsourcing. This is in line with the Marxian view of capitalism as an exploitative system that is constantly searching for new ways to ratchet up the level of exploitation (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010, pp. 26). However, conceptualizing exploitation in combination with crowdsourcing has been overwhelmingly unconvincing. In a world where network technology is leading the economy and society, relations are the key. Therefore, Petersen reminds us that we need to acknowledge that relations of subjectivity, everyday life, technology, media and publics are related to dimensions of capitalism (Petersen, 2008, pp. 9). This relation reconfigures patterns of use into practices which carries a resemblance of work relations.

The phenomenological perspectives mentioned in the opening chapters "will naturally privilege concepts like 'produser', 'participation', 'user-generated content', 'creative industries', 'collective intelligence', 'crowdsourcing', 'distributed problem solving', etc. From a structural perspective, on the other hand, the very same activities stand out as restricted, circumscribed by constraints and limited choices, and instead of the concepts listed in the previous sentence we are presented with the phenomena in terms of 'exploitation', 'free labour', 'surveillance' and 'information capitalism'. While neither of these perspectives is entirely wrong, neither of them alone does full justice to the entire process" (Bolin, 2011, pp. 71). In this sense, crowdsourcing cannot solely be described in terms that are more

favourable towards users and consumers, and neither solely in terms that are more favourable to capitalists. Both the consumers interests and the interests of the capitalists are both necessary factors in the development of crowdsourcing. When speaking of crowdsourcing as consisting of exploitative labour, one should at least consider it an expression of the continuing collision between capital and labour.

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