Digital Labour in Social Media: Expropriation of Leisure Time, Commercialization of Creative Activity and the Problem of Alienation[*]

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Abstract

The relation between digital labour and exploitation has been widely discussed. A significant branch of analyses focuses on Internet companies, advertising (companies) and user-generated content. Italian autonomist thought is just attached to the body of this argument via the concepts of "social factory", "immaterial labour" and "general intellect". However, the focus of autonomist thought which is capital's diffusion into subjectivities of labour is frequently overlooked. The aim of this paper is to articulate audience commodity and digital labour debate with Italian autonomist thought on the basis of exploitation of social, communicative and creative capabilities of labour. Within this context, expropriation of leisure time and commercialization of creative activity is handled in an attempt to underline exploitation of subjectivities of digital labour with an autonomist emphasis. Besides, alienation in social media has been predominantly argued around users' lack of/limited control over the means, processes, and results of their production. However, with reference to Franco Berardi, this paper discusses the matter of alienation in social media via the concept of estrangement to indicate an "intentional" estrangement from digital work in parallel with the autonomist offer of "refusal of work". Thus, estrangement from digital work through which subjectivities of labour are subsumed under capital is emphasized so as to attract attention to refusal of digital work against sublation of alienation via enhancing users' control over their content and digital platforms.

Keywords: Social media, digital labour, immaterial labour, social factory, alienation.

Sosyal Medyada Dijital Emek: Serbest Zamanın Gaspı, Yaratıcı Etkinliğin Ticarileştirilmesi ve Yabancılaşma Sorunu[*]

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Öz

Dijital emek ve sömürü arasındaki ilişki çokça tartışılmıştır. Yapılan çalışmaların önemli bir kısmı internet şirketleri, reklam (şirketleri) ve kullanıcılar tarafından oluşturan içeriğe odaklanmaktadır. İtalyan otonomist düşünce de "toplumsal fabrika", "maddi olmayan emek" ve "genel zekâ" gibi kavramlar aracılığıyla bu tartışma gövdesine iliştirilmektedir. Ancak otonomist düşüncenin önemli bir odak noktası olan sermayenin emeğin öznelliklerine nüfuz etmesi sıklıkla göz ardı edilmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı izleyici metası ve dijital emek tartışmalarını İtalyan otonomist düşünce ile emeğin sosyal, iletişimsel ve yaratıcı özelliklerinin sömürülmesi bağlamında eklemlemektir. Bu doğrultuda sermaye tarafından serbest zamana el konulması ve yaratıcı etkinliğin ticarileştirilmesi, dijital emeğin özelliklerinin sömürülmesi bağlamında otonomist bir vurguyla tartışılmaktadır. Konunun önemli bir uzantısı olan sosyal medyada yabancılaşma ise çoğunlukla kullanıcıların üretim araçları, süreçleri ve üretimlerinin sonuçlarını kontrol edememeleri veya bunlar üzerinde sınırlı bir kontrole sahip olmaları temelinde tartışılmaktadır. Bu makale sosyal medyada yabancılaşma meselesini, otonomistlerin "işin reddi" vurgusuna paralel olarak kullanıcıların dijital işi "maksatlı yadırgamasına" işaret etmek amacıyla Franco Berardi ve onun "yadırgama" kavramına referansla tartışmaktadır. Böylece dijital emeğin ürettiği içerik ve dijital platformlar üzerindeki kontrolünün artması yoluyla yabancılaşmanın aşılması değil, sermayenin emeğin özelliklerini kendine tabi kılmasına neden olan ve değer üretimine hasredilen dijital işin yadırganması vurgulanmıştır. Yabancılaşmaya içkin olan tartışma, yadırgama kavramı vasıtasıyla dijital işin reddine vurgu yapan bir eksene çekilmiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Sosyal medya, dijital emek, maddi olmayan emek, toplumsal fabrika, yabancılaşma.

Digital Labour in Social Media: Expropriation of Leisure Time, Commercialization of Creative Activity and the Problem of Alienation[1]

Marxists have been thinking over communication, capital and labour for a long time. Adaptations of old arguments to new means of communication enable "audience commodity debate" to keep its relevance to today. Basing on its legacy, studies on digital labour focus on exploitation of users by the Internet and advertising companies via commodification or commercialization of user-generated content. Because considering consumption as production overlaps Italian autonomists' emphasis on expansion of value production into every aspect of life, autonomist concepts are often integrated to digital labour studies. However, autonomists' pivotal focus of capital's subsuming social, communicative and creative capabilities of labour is generally overlooked as two branches of studies have different theoretical foundations within Marxist tradition. Yet even so, it is possible to integrate audience commodity and digital labour debates with autonomist thought in a way to underline autonomist assertions. Such an integration is seen in Jernej Prodnik's article (2012) which articulates audience commodity, data mining and commercial surveillance to immaterial labour and social factory on the basis of expansion and intensification of commodification. A similar approach is available in Mark Coté and Jennifer Pybus' (2014) study on social networks and immaterial labour with a Foucauldian perspective. Undoubtedly, Nick Dyer-Witheford's (2004) earlier notes on the relevance between Dallas Smythe and autonomists, has been a guideway for such kinds of work. As an attempt to support autonomists' emphasis on capital's subsuming subjectivities of labour, this paper aims to articulate audience commodity and digital labour debate with Italian autonomist thought on the basis of exploitation of social, communicative and creative capabilities of labour. For this purpose, expropriation of leisure time and commercialization of creative activity in social media will be discussed. Also the problem of

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alienation will be argued in an attempt to drag the arguments on alienation towards an autonomist axis.

From Audience Commodity to Digital Labour

1970's witnessed vivacious and fertile debates that shaped the political economy of communications. Besides the studies of Graham Murdock, Peter Golding as well as Vincent Mosco, Robert McChesney and Janet Wasko on the role and relevance of communications and media in the making of contemporary capitalism, Dallas Smythe's blindspot argument initiated a new stream of debate that has reached up today. Smythe's concept of audience commodity invited an economy political approach for audiences. The significance of attracting attention to labour of audiences stemmed from its call for thinking means of communication as means of production while mass communication was predominantly focused on manipulation, ideology and discourse. Although Smythe's approach was affected from cultural industry analysis of Theodor Adorno and "base-superstructure" argument of Raymond Williams, he tried to specify how this industry works by considering the role of audiences in the making of value. Smythe asks:

> What is the commodity form of mass-produced, advertiser-supported communications under mo-

nopoly capitalism? – is audiences and readerships ... The material reality under monopoly capitalism is that all non-sleeping time of most of the population is work time. This work time is devoted to the production of commodities-in-general (both where people get paid for their work and as members of audiences) and in the production and reproduction of labour power (the pay for which is subsumed in their income). Of the off-the-job work time, the largest single block is time of the audiences which is sold to advertisers (Smythe, 1977: 3).

This paragraph means that audiences are commodities, which are manufactured and sold on the market. Smythe argued that, the most important commodity produced by media industry is the audience itself, which is constructed and then sold to advertisers (Prodnik, 2012: 290). Smythe's argument started a bunch of debate main stream of which was constituted by Murdock's critiques and Bill Livant and Sut Jhally's contributions and modifications of audience commodity. In defence of Western Marxism, Murdock critiqued Smythe for underestimating the importance and centrality of the state in contemporary capitalism and underplaying the independent role of media content and the power of ideology (Murdock, 1978: 111-113, 116). Livant attempted to probe Smythe's arguments by trying to answer criti-

cisms. In the second endnote of his article in 1979, he concluded that Baran and Sweezy whom Smythe put the target of his critique, treated communications simply as a means to "induce purchase of *all*[2] commodities-in-general" while Enzensberger's mind industry did not produce anything. For Livant, communications has no particular commodity form in these approaches, and "the mixture of the vulgar materialism of Baran and Sweezy and the subjective idealism of Enzensberger is reproduced - in the same place - in Murdock" (1979: 104). In that sense, Livant is right in his support of Smythe as he attempted to grasp "the other side of labour" (1979: 103, 104). Three years after Livant's article, Jhally participated to the debate. He elaborated on some points he thought Smythe theoretically missed. He demonstrated that the audience commodity has use value which is various in types according to the types of consumers. Jhally decided that it has an objective existence and exchange value by arguing that objective/demographic characteristics of a particular audience are sold to advertisers. He argued that, the audience commodity is produced by value-adding labour only if audience labour is performed for the mass media (1982: 207, 208). He ended up with the idea that audience labour is a part of the production process only when it is being performed *for the*

mass media[3] not for advertisers. Accordingly, in an attempt to explain audience commodity in classical Marxist framework, he propounded that programmes are audiences' wages, and surplus or value is created when networks get from advertisers more than programme costs (1982: 208). Jhally's remark on what "is objectively being sold is simply time" finds its repercussion in Livant's article in 1982 as a reply to him. Livant clarified this idea by distinguishing between necessary watching time and surplus watching time. Thus, "The media do not own 'audiences'. They do not own abstract 'time'. They own the extra watching time, the surplus time" (Livant, 1982: 213). Later, Livant and Jhally tried to adapt almost all the concepts of Marx's economic analysis to media economy by formulating programme time as necessary watching time and advertising time as surplus watching time (Kıyan, 2015: 242, 243).

Although Livant and Jhally's attempt to adapt audience commodity to the processes of commodity production in-general seems illuminating, it ends up with narrowing down Smythe's arguments that inspire to reconsider "social" production in general. In that sense, Jhally's criticism of Smythe for assuming audience labour as productive is of importance. Kıyan also supports Jhally by arguing that the surplus value should be demon-

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[2] Original emphasis

[3] Original emphasis

strated if there is. Quoting from Jhally, he argues that Smythe and Livant associate productivity with the maintenance of monopoly capital; however, they equate production with functionally distinct parts (as cited in Kıyan, 2015: 241). "Within production, activity is concerned with the production of commodities-in-general. In consumption, activity is geared towards creating something else (labour power)" (Jhally, 1982: 208). However, it is more clear today that capital succeeds to integrate the field of production with the field of reproduction. In terms of the concerns of this paper, Smythe's arguments are inspiring to grasp capital's production of immaterial goods, communications, relations and forms of life in post-Ford era that Italian autonomists have strived to explain.

Similar to Jhally and Livant's reading of Smythe, certain scholars adapt audience commodity approach to the developments of networked communication, William H. J. Hebblewhite supports the idea of thinking means of communication as means of production via the concept of "prosumer" with a critical emphasis. Prosumer refers to users' activity on the Internet with a double function: producing while consuming. As online activity requires the usage of certain means of communications (i.e. information, computers, Internet access), users create the content that companies are looking forward to process and utilize.

As a means of production, the Internet, or in particular, web-based companies such as Google, Facebook and Youtube are able to take the raw material of information that is provided to them by the user and use that information to create new products, whether that be new online games designed to have the user invest time and money or simply a new addition to their integral system which gets such companies more users (Hebblewhite, 2012: 211).

Elaborating on the capital accumulation on Google, Christian Fuchs also argues that Google processes and stores the content users generate to provide targeted advertising. Thus, it monetizes this data by selling it to advertising companies. "Google engages in the economic surveillance of user data and user activities, thereby commodifies and infinitely exploits users and sells users and their data as Internet prosumer commodity to advertising clients in order to generate money profit" (2012: 44). For Fuchs, as commodities are made up by producers, commodities for Internet platforms are the data produced by users. Then, the production process of producing this data should be considered as value-producing labour. Digital labour on social media creates the Internet prosumer commodity that is sold by Internet platforms to advertising clients, which in return present targeted ads to users (2014a: 246).

A number of scholars examine the exploitation in social media

mostly concentrating on users' loss of control over the content they produce, commercialization of this content by Internet companies via economic surveillance and uncompensated labour in social media. Besides Fuchs, Mark Andrejevic underlines a loss of control over one's productive and creative activity, and separation of users from the infrastructure that support their communicative activities (2013: 157; 2012: 86). Eran Fisher argues exploitation in social media in relation to alienation indicating "existential state of not being in control over something (the labour process, the product, etc.), of being estranged from something (one's humanity, etc.)" (2012: 173). Analyses of this kind are based on, with changing emphasises, how Internet companies exploit users via the control of the user-generated content. Autonomist references are just attached to this body of analyses. However, interaction with autonomist thought necessitates a shift in the focus towards capital's setting communicative, creative and social capabilities to work.

Thinking Social Media Inside Social Factory

The relation between communication, technology, capital, and linguistic and social capacities of human has been problematized in a broader scope by Italian autonomists interrogating the character of labour and its relation to capital in post-Fordist conditions. The analyses of second wave autonomists and their followers, together with the continuities and breaks in the tradition, are crucial to understand the changing picture of labour and social life after 1970's. In order to comprehend what is called as digital labour, it is necessary to discover how capitalism capture, colonialize and commoditize elements of the social and the communicative which were mostly outside of capital accumulation before neoliberalism.

In *Multitude*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri analysed the processes of globalization with a highly optimistic search for a global democracy. They attracted attention to the shifts in global economy that entail conceiving production not merely in economic terms but more generally as social production, not only the production of material goods but also the production of communications, relationships, and forms of life (2004: xv). Social factory is a metaphor to explain the capital's tendency to go beyond the borders of factory and commodify every aspect of social life including main humane activities. Social factory refers to the diffusion between work (time/place) and leisure (time/place) as well as sweat and fun. It means expansion of value production into society in general. "In the final decades of the twentieth century, industrial labour lost its hegemony and instead emerged 'immaterial labour' that creates immaterial products, such

as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response." (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 108).

Maurizio Lazzarato more satisfactorily describes the concept of immaterial labour that refers to two different aspects of labour. On the one hand, "immaterial labour refers to 'informational content' of the commodity that refers to the changes taking place in workers' labour processes ... where the skills involved in direct labour are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control" (1996: 133). On the other hand, it refers to the activities that produce the "cultural content" of the commodity. In this respect,

> immaterial labour involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as "work" - in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion. (Lazzarato, 1996: 133).

Within this context, cultural content of the commodity comprised by immaterial labour is vital for understanding the user activity in networks, and especially in social media, as a form of labour. Tiziana Terranova calls this "both voluntarily given and unwaged" (2013: 34) activity on the Internet as "free labour" which is a source of value in advanced capitalist societies (2004: 73, 74).

How social media companies maintain free labour is related with capital's tendency to commercialize, monetize and commodify subjective experiences. "Commoditizing relationships ... by means of coding technologies is exactly what corporate platforms, particularly Google and Facebook, discovered as the golden egg their geese produced." (van Dijck, 2013: 16). "In the passage to imperial society, the first aspect of the modern condition is certainly still the case, that is, subjectivities are still produced in the social factory." (Hardt and Negri, 2001: 196). André Gorz, also, conspicuously argues that "life becomes the most valuable capital". That is why people must be self-entrepreneurs and hold as much human capital as possible (as cited in Prodnik, 2012: 295). Users learn their network-based subjectivities on social networks, which means they learn being productive (Coté and Pybus, 2014: 247, 254).

On the other hand, Italian autonomist tradition and various approaches conceptualizing digital/immaterial/free labour or cognitive/informational/cyber-capitalism have a common tendency towards finding a potential in this new form of labour to struggle against capital. They argue that diffusion of capital in every aspect of life paradoxically enhances the qualifications and capacities of labour that is hegemonically informationalized. Based on *Grundrisse*, the concept of general intellect represents this capacity. For Hardt and Negri:

… such new forms of labour present new possibilities for economic self-management, since the mechanisms of cooperation necessary for production are contained in the labour itself. Now we can see that this potential applies not only to economic self-management but also political and social self-organization." (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 336).

Similarly, Lazzarato speaks of a new "mass intellectuality", a combination of the demands of capitalist production and the forms of "self-valorization" that struggle against work, because new communication technologies increasingly require subjectivities that are rich in knowledge (1996: 132). General intellect has an antagonistic relation with cognitive capitalism which continuously tries to seize the information collectively produced (Vercellone, 2015). These arguments imply that communicative, cognitive, informational and affective functions are now intrinsic to capital accumulation in post-Ford era, and this has enriched composition and capacity of labour.

However, there is not much evidence in favour of the capacities of labour to challenge the hegemony of capital. While findings of autonomists strikingly present the diffusion of capital into every cell of life, even including subjectivities, their optimistic expectations about cognitive/digital/immaterial labour seem to be a short-cut de-

duction. General intellect is not, by nature, in an antagonistic relationship with capital (Ross, 2013: 25; McRobbie, 2004). On the contrary, capital seems to be winning in terms of the propriety algorithms on the Internet and the data extracted from those networks that capitalist class is doing its best to make it private property (Wark, 2012: 74). Also as Berardi states, "the economy, like a general semiotic cage, forbids the development of the potential still existing in the material and intellectual structure of technology" (2009: 64). For Paolo Virno, "post-Fordism mobilises all the faculties that characterise our species: language, abstract thinking, disposition toward learning, plasticity, the habit of not having solid habits" (as cited in Prodnik, 2012: 297). Thus, understanding exploitation in social media requires to focus on capital's subsuming subjectivities of labour more than exploitation of user-generated data by Internet companies. Within this perspective, expropriation of leisure time and commercialization of creative activity will be discussed.

Expropriation of Leisure Time as a Source of Value

Time has always been one of the core issues in the analysis of the relations of production. In post-Fordism debates, the blurring of the boundaries between leisure and work time is a main topic in understanding the intertwinement of the

fields of production and consumption, thus, expansion of value production into all spheres of life. Autonomist authors frequently highlight this point and stress the difference between Fordist and post-Fordist types of workers and working experiences as well as changing the notion of work. In that sense, the notion and experience of time has also changed. The activities that was previously out of the scope of work has been included by the processes of capital accumulation. This inclusion of social life by capital has owed a lot to the changing notion and experience of time that is closely related to transformation of leisure time and leisure activities to value producing processes.

In that sense, social media is highly functional in the extraction of value via the intermingling of connectedness, games, advertising and flow of news[4]. One of the most radical aspects of socialization of labour in post-Ford era is the blurring distinction between paid work and unpaid work. The place which exploitation located is not in the factory but in network, and the measure for time is not working day but a lifetime anymore (Dyer-Witheford, 2004: 122,123). Thus, digital labour that create cultural and informational content produce

and reproduce that content in an infinite cyber time. "It is also true that the time apparently freed by technology is in fact transformed into cyber time, a time of mental processing absorbed into the infinite production processes of cyberspace." (Berardi, 2009: 79). Thus, although automation and technology seems to reduce work time and enhance leisure time, they create a new cyber space in which all linguistic, cognitive and affective human capacities are set to work for value creation. Within this context, proliferation of automated/mediated sociability or connectivity via social media platforms are crucially significant for the capital accumulation realized on the basis of networks.

For Fuchs, "corporate social media prosumption[5] is a form of continuous primitive accumulation of capital that turns non-commodified leisure time into productive labour time that generates value and profit for capital." (2014b: 120). For Ritzer and Jurgensen, "the capture of value online represents the extension of the logic of capital into new spaces and temporalities" (as cited in Andrejevic, 2013: 153). Thus, capital's expropriation of leisure time enlarges the scope of capital accumulation by expanding work time. Correspondingly, it presents value producing activity as leisure activity, and exploitation does not seem so grieved

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[4]   Although play labour/"playbor" is a part of expropriation of leisure time in social media, this paper prefers to deal with this phenomenon in a broader sense which is not specific to play labour. For analyses on "playbor", please see Scholz, 2013; Kline et al., 2003; Bulut, 2015.

[5]   A term used by Fuchs, that refers to the blurring relation of production and consumption especially in social media.

anymore. This long passage from Berardi is really worth quoting as it gives a highly satisfactory account of the changing relation between labour and time in today's world:

> Info-workers, instead, constantly move all along the breadth and depth of cyberspace. … But at every moment and place they are reachable be called back to perform a productive function that will be reinserted into the global cycle of production. In a certain cellular phones realize the dream of capital: that of absorbing every possible atom of time at the exact moment the productive cycle needs it. In this way, workers offer their entire day to capital and are paid only for the moments when their time is made cellular. Info-producers can be seen as neuro-workers. They prepare their nervous system as an active receiving terminal for as much time as possible. The entire lived day becomes subject to a semiotic activation which becomes directly productive only when necessary (Berardi, 2009: 90).

At the end of this process, he asks what the emotional, psychological and existential cost of this constant stress of cognitive electrocution is. The answer is the factory of unhappiness. In that sense, Adorno's words about the relation between leisure time, work and happiness seems to resonate with Berardi's notion. "The reason why this entire question of spare time is so unfortunate is that people unconsciously mimic the work process, whereas what they really want is to stop working altogether. Happiness necessarily presupposes the element of effort." (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2011: 33). Horkheimer also consolidates this notion in his letter to Leo Lowenthal by arguing that "The mechanisms which govern man in his leisure time are absolutely the same [as] those which govern him when he works" (as cited in Jay, 1976: 213-214). In a really early date, Horkheimer talks about the tendency that the field of consumption becomes a field of production. He argues that "Consumption tends to vanish today, or should I say, eating, drinking, looking, loving, sleeping become 'consumption', for consumption already means that man has become a machine outside as well as inside of the workshop?" (1976: 214). Thus, expropriation of leisure time in social media is more than "surplus watching time" (Livant, 1982: 213; Kıyan; 2015: 243) and producing "more valuable data commodity" sold to advertisers (Fuchs, 2014b: 116). It is also a space where immaterial labour "prepares its nervous system as an active receiving terminal for as much time as possible" as neuro-workers (Berardi, 2009: 90) so that its communicative, creative and affective capabilities are subsumed under value production.

Commercialization of Creative Activity

The emphasis on the notion and concept of creativity has been ex-

panding in the literature of cultural industries in parallel with capital's search for new resources as a cure for its inner crisis. The rising popularity of creativity both in scholarly and practical terms has owed a lot to formation of creative industries. This new tendency, flattered by cultural policies and industries, has its repercussions in intellectual arena who are optimistic and enthusiastic about the rising of a new creative class which is free from "traditional" capital-labour contradictions (Florida, 2012; Hartley, 2005; Potts et al., 2008). On the other hand, critical analyses associate creative industries and creative work with precarity (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Ross, 2009; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008, 2010; de Peuter, 2011; Lovink and Rossiter, 2007) by focusing on the issue overwhelmingly on the basis of waged workforce in cultural industries. This focus, of course, is crucial as the rising dependency of production processes on creative, communicative and social activity of labour is the driving force behind the change in the regime of labour and the flourishing of creative industries.

On the other hand, capital's extraction of creativity as a source of value is not limited to the industries mostly based on waged workforce. Social media, as a part of media industry, is a very influential space where creative activity of users are extracted, utilized and commercialized by Internet companies. This way of commercializa-tion of creative activity is basically based on unwaged digital labour or immaterial labour, which is an infinite source of creative, communicative and affective activity. According to Lazzarato's definition of immaterial labour as producing cultural content of the commodity, the labour in social media also contributes to the production and reproduction of neoliberal ethos via the generation of opinions, values, norms and tastes which is crucial in the constitution of why creativity matters. That is why "Over the past decade, the emphasis in the cultural industry sector has shifted from products to services, pressing media companies to develop new ways of monetizing online creativity and sociality" (van Dijck, 2013: 39).

In parallel with the ideas of "a new creative class", users' activity on the Internet or social media has been associated with the idea of valorization of individual talent, entrepreneurial creativity and self-entrepreneurship as a compulsory work of reputation construction based on new forms of sociality (Gandini, 2016). Likewise, social networks are regarded as fundamental sites of innovation and activity within the creative industries while social media platforms such as YouTube are seen as examples of "co-creative" culture, interconnectedness and participation (Burgess and Green, 2009: 90). However, this creative and participatory environment is highly controversial in the light of digital labour debate

that problematize the commercialization and commodification of user-generated content. Fuchs, in that sense, associates user-generated content to permanent creative activity, communication, community building and content production that constitute audience commodity sold to advertisers (2014a: 100). Van Dijck also criticizes YouTube's Partnership Program by asking "whether this business model stimulates the creativity of individual users or whether it is aimed at commercializing content" (2013: 127).

Adam Arvidsson also argues this issue in terms of brands. Branding activity is carried out via altering the *common*[6] produced through communicative interaction and filtering the creativity of consumers (2005: 251). With reference to Hardt and Negri, Arvidsson underlines the real productive potential of the net-worked multitude that produce the *common* as a challenge against capital's filtering creative activity. For Hardt and Negri, the primary values of network struggle are creativity, communication, and self-organized cooperation (2004: 83). Within this context, creative activity in social media seems to stand for collective intelligence or mass intellectuality. Contrary to Italian autonomists' optimistic expectations from general intellect, capital penetrates into subjectivities.

As a highly critical theorist

among autonomists, Berardi attracts attention to capital's inclusion of subjective human features such as communication, feelings, creative activity or imagination in which autonomists invest anti-hegemonic potentials. In this context, he asserts that the soul is put to work beyond the limits of the intellect. With reference to Berardi's work, *The Soul at Work*, Jason Smith states that "to say the soul is put to work is to affirm the social brain or general intellect (…) is not the primary source of value in the production process. Rather the soul as a web of attachments and tastes, attractions and inclinations" (as cited in Berardi, 2009: 10). The soul is affective and libidinal forces that embrace the world. It is the ability to pay attention, address, care for and appeal to others. Capitalism is the mobilization of a pathos and the organization of a mood (2009: 10). While "In classic industrial society, workers felt expropriated of their intellectuality, individuality and creativity. In high tech production cognitive faculties are in fact put to work, and personal peculiarities seem to be valorized" (2009: 95-96).

In this respect, the soul starts working in social media when considered the ability and activities of users to contact, pay attention and follow other profiles and construct his/her own profile so as to attract the attention of others all of which are, by nature, subjective and creative activities. As sociality and creativity, a part of everyday life, are

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[6]   Original emphasis

performed in commercial network-ked communication, not only the user-generated content but also social, communicative and creative capabilities of users are exploited.

A Tough Topic: Ongoing Debate on Alienation[7]

The concept of alienation has been central and highly controversial within Marxist tradition, and the ongoing debate on the concept goes around Marx's *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*.

> While alienation is prominent in his early works, such as *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, it disappears in the late 1840s as Marx explores principles of historical materialism (e.g. in *The German Ideology*) only to reappear as a central conception in the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973/1857). It then seemingly fades into the background of *Capital* (Marx 1976/ 1867) and disappears almost entirely in his later works and notebooks (as cited in Harvey, 2018: 425)

In an attempt to adapt the concept of alienation to digital labour,

Fuchs and Sevignani chart a triangle of alienation by basing on the commonly quoted references of Marx's notes "On Estrange Labour" in *Manuscripts of 1844* as well as the notes in the *Grundrisse.* Their interpretation of the alienation process in capitalism is formulated by three aspects in a Hegelian sense: alienation of labour power, alienation from the means of production comprising of both the object and instrument of labour, and alienation from the product of labour. These forms of alienation constitute together the system of exploitation (Fuchs and Sevignani, 2013: 245, 146). Alienation of digital labour from its labour power corresponds to alienation of digital labour by social violence or coercion (by isolation and social disadvantages). Alienation of digital labour from the object of labour refers to human experiences' coming under capital's control. Alienation from instruments of labour connotes to private ownership of platforms and social media ideologies. They claim that the fetish character of the commodity takes on an inverted form in terms of the digital labour in social media, which means commodity character of commercial Internet platforms is hidden in their (social, communicative, etc.) use-value (Fuchs, 2014a: 261; Fuchs and Sevignani, 2013: 261). Thus, understanding alienation in social media is preponderantly oriented in this hidden relationship in their analyses. The fact that labour cannot control the

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[7] This section handles the issue with reference to the authors who interpret Marx's analyses on alienation or estrangement within the context of the labour in a digital world. As how these authors interpret the original sources is a topic in itself and out of the scope of this paper, the study purposefully refrained from directly quoting from Marx in order to avert any distortion or misreading.

means, processes, and the results of its production is a central theme around which the authors weave their argumentation.

Such a notion of hidden relationship is seen in Fisher's referring to young Marx's humanist criticism of the concept. "Alienation entails not only a social-economic condition whereby 'value' and the product are separated from their real producers and are transferred from one class to another", but also it "signals an existential state of not being in control over something (the labour process, the product, etc.), of being estranged from something (one's humanity, etc.)" (Fisher, 2012: 173). He understands alienation in social media via these two aspects of the concept, the first of which refers to the ownership and control of Internet companies, and the latter connotes to users' being estranged from their "essence" or their humanity. He sees a dialectical relation between exploitation and alienation by suggesting that "in order to be de-alienated, Facebook users must communicate and socialize, thus exacerbating their exploitation. And vice-versa, in order for Facebook to exploit the work of its users, it must contribute to their de-alienation". Similarly, P.J. Rey defines social media with "exploitation in the (relative) absence of alienation" (2012: 416) by arguing that "a general diminution of alienation actually enhances the capacity of social media to generate value" (2012: 403).

Andrejevic, also, approaches to the issue in a similar manner with Fuchs, Sevignani and Fisher by focusing on users' lack of control on their own activities and its results. Based on *Manuscripts of 1844,* Andrejevicsuggests that "commercial surveillance has a central role to play in the forms of alienation, manipulation, and control associated with the interactive economy" (2011: 279). Users confront the product of their labour (the content they produce) as an alien power (such as advertisement or political campaign massages), and the data they generate return to consumers as an unrecognisable form thanks to data-mining or predictive analytics (2011: 287).

From a depth-hermeneutic method, Krüger and Johanssen, put forward a psychosocial inquiry into the concept of alienation through the analysis of Facebook posts. Benefitting from Rahel Jaeggi's social-philosophical approach to alienation, they argue -just like Andrejevic- that "It is our own activities and products, the social institutions and relations that we have created ourselves, which here become an alien power" (as cited in Krüger and Johanssen, 2014: 635). They understand alienation as a subjective state of *being alienated*[8] such as a feeling of meaninglessness and powerlessness (2014: 635). It means that people continue to use Facebook although they know they are exploited. Thus,

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[8] Original emphasis

"alienation emphasises the failing act of identification and appropriation on part of the workers, as well as the concurring feelings of meaninglessness and powerlessness (2014: 644).

However, this paper differentiates itself from these approaches to alienation in social media in two aspects. First, Fuchs, Andrejevic, Fisher and Rey[9] understand alienation basically as a reified relation between users and the content they produce that they cannot control, which is characteristic of material production. Different from their focus on objective dimension, Krüger and Johanssen define alienation as a subjective state of being alienated (feelings of meaninglessness and powerlessness), which is subjective aspect of this reified relation between labour and its product.[10] Berardi interprets this phenomenon as the effect of reification (the effect of the self-becoming a thing) specific to the problems of industrialisation era

(2009: 108). However, "within the post-industrial domain, we should talk of de-realization rather than reification". In an era of immaterial production provided by mass intellectuality, rather than a reified relation between labour and its product, by basing on Berardi, this paper suggests to understand alienation as "a pathogenic separation between cognitive functions and material sociality" where the soul - "creative, linguistic, emotional corporeality- is subsumed and incorporated by the production of value" (2009: 109). Such an approach to alienation is expected to comply with the effort to understand exploitation as capital's subsuming subjectivities of labour.[11]

Second, this paper does not handle alienation as something to be overcome as it is a consequence of assuming a reified relation between labour and its product. In that sense, Fuchs and Sevignani call for the sublation of online alienation via self-determination of digital labour and the common control of online platforms by stating that "We require the transformation of digital labour into digital work. "We require a true social media revolution" (2013: 273). Fisher also suggests that work could

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[9] Although Rey underlines exploitation as rising human productivity in general with autonomist references, he also thinks on the basis of a reified relation between labour and its product as he explains exploitation as the divergence between use-value and exchange value. "The more useful content is to the prosumer, the less exploitative prosumption is." (2012: 415).

[10] The critique here is different from Reveley's criticism of the same authors because it is based on the loose usages of "exploitation." As users do not involve in any sort of market relation, he does not see an "exploitation" but rather a utilization of user-generated content in line with preventing crisis of underconsumption (2013: 89). On the contrary, this paper adopts an inclusionary approach to exploitation.

[11] Embedded in a different debate, Hardt and Negri state that "two concepts of subsumption- formal and real- are together able to illuminate better than alienation the multiplicities of capitalist rule, also providing an avenue to extend the analysis beyond Marx and hence opening up our understanding of range of forms of contemporary anticapitalist struggle" (2018: 441).

have been "the real essence of a person, objectified in what he does, a means of self-realization and authentic expression, and could have helped a person connect, communicate, and collaborate with other human beings" but it resulted in alienation under capitalism (2012: 173). This approach is not in line with the notion of refusal of work which is a central focus in autonomist thought. For Berardi, alienation "inevitably alludes to a previous human essence, lost in the historical process, waiting for a synthesis capable of reestablishing it, of calling it into being as a positivity" (2009: 44). He rather proposes to use "estrangement" as a political concept that refers to an intentional estrangement from all forms of labour dependent to capital, which is crystalized in the refusal of work (2009: 44-47). He warns against identification either with work or labour. Thus, this paper suggests to think the issue immanent to alienation via estrangement, which enables to attract attention to refusal of digital work rather than focusing on how much users own/control the product of their labour. In that sense, work could not have been a real essence of a person and the call for transforming digital labour to digital work might end up with intensification of digital labour. As "in the sphere of digitalproduction, exploitation is exerted essentially on the semiotic flux produced by human time at work" (2009: 21-22), call for the refusal of digital work and deepening its theoretical foundations might contribute to the critique of exploitation of digital labour.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to articulate audience commodity and digital labour debate with Italian autonomist thought on the basis of exploitation of social, communicative and creative capabilities of labour. "Audience commodity" of Smythe is discussed in terms of its call for reconsidering reproduction or consumption as production, which makes communications as a part of production. Audience commodity thesis indicates two aspects in terms of communication, labour and production. First, on the basis of audiences' being produced and sold to advertisers as commodities, it indicates exploitation of audience/user labour by mass media/advertising/Internet companies. Jhally and Livant, in their subsequent studies, develop this aspect via their formulation of necessary watching time and surplus watching time producing surplus value for mass media. In the period of new means of communication, this first aspect of the issue has been improved by a number of authors such as Fuchs, Andrejevic, Hebblewhite and Fisher within the framework social networks, commodity production, audience/digital labour and advertising. They mainly focus on the exploitation via Internet companies' commodi-

fication or commercialization of user-generated content. Second, Smythe's argument refers to capital's subsuming the field of reproduction by turning consumption into production. It connotes to extension of the scope of production towards every aspect of life, which is the core issue of the autonomist concept -social factory. Although the authors of the first aspect also deal with this second aspect with autonomist references, the latter seems to be an attachment to the former. Livant's former position contributes to this second aspect. The authors such as Coté and Pybus (with a Foucauldian perspective) and Prodnik mainly elaborate on this second aspect by underlying autonomist assumption about capital's setting communicative, linguistic, collaborative and creative capabilities of human into work. In that sense, Smythe's especially second aspect of audience commodity is articulated to immaterial labour, social factory and general intellect which are responsible for immaterial production. In an attempt to underline exploitation in social media as exploitation of social, cognitive, communicative and creative capabilities of labour, the paper articulates digital labour argument to autonomist ideas by focusing on expropriation of leisure time and commercialization of creative activity. Being reachable at any time turns every moment into a productive activity. The labour in social media contributes to the production and reproduction of opin-

ions, values, norms and tastes that generate cultural content of the commodity, which explains why capital needs commercialization of creativity. All in all, one can even talk of exploitation of capacities of labour characterised in general intellect by going beyond the exploitation of its capabilities.

In terms of the debate on alienation in social media, the paper focuses on the leading studies of Fuchs and Sevignani, Fisher, Rey, Andrejevic and Krüger and Johanssen. Although they might differ in their conclusions, users' lack of/limited control of user-generated content- based on a reified relation between labour and its product- is a common theme in their studies. This paper differentiates itself from these approaches to alienation in two aspects. First, by basing on Berardi who suggests to talk of derealization rather than reification in post-industrial epoch, the paper offers to think alienation as "a pathogenic separation between cognitive functions and material sociality" (2009: 109) where cognitive, social, communicative and creative capabilities -even capacities- of labour is subsumed by value production. In that sense, the relation between alienation and exploitation is not argued over "objective" state of the relation between labour and its product or "subjective" state of being alienated. It is about rising subsumption of labour under capital. Thus, the matter is not the levels of alienation/dealienation that determine exploitation in the web -

and in social media- but an intentional estrangement of users from digital work. Accordingly, the paper differs from the approaches suggesting self-determination of digital labour or common control over social media platforms to overcome alienation because it might end up with intensification of digital labour as the "semiotic flux produced by human time at work" (2009: 21-22) which is the source of exploitation would not cease.

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