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The Internet as Surveilled Workplace and Factory

Christian Fuchs and Daniel Trottier

1. Introduction

“One case is related to a Scotch manufacturer, who rode after a sixteen years old runaway, forced him to return running after the employer as fast as the master’s horse trotted, and beat him the whole way with a long whip. [...] Other manufacturers were yet more barbarous, requiring many heads to work thirty to forty hours at a stretch, several times a week, letting them get a couple of hours of sleep only, because the night-shift was not complete, but calculated to replace a part of the operatives only. [...] The consequences of these cruelties became evident quickly enough. The Commissioners mention a crowd of cripples who appeared before them, who clearly owed their distortion to the long working hours. This distortion usually consists of a curving of the spinal column and legs”.¹

This passage from Friedrich Engels’ book “The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844” describes typical working conditions in the phase of the industrialization of capitalism: work in factories was mentally and physically highly exhausting, had negative health impacts, and was highly controlled by factory owners and security forces.

“Our corporate headquarters, fondly nicknamed the Googleplex, is located in Mountain View, California. Today it’s one of our many offices around the globe. While our offices are not identical, they tend to share some essential elements. Here are a few things you might see in a Google workspace: [...]

- * Bicycles or scooters for efficient travel between meetings; dogs; lava lamps; massage chairs; large inflatable balls. [...]

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- * Foosball, pool tables, volleyball courts, assorted video games, pianos, ping pong tables, and gyms that offer yoga and dance classes.

- * Grassroots employee groups for all interests, like meditation, film, wine tasting and salsa dancing.

- * Healthy lunches and dinners for all staff at a variety of cafés.

- * Break rooms packed with a variety of snacks and drinks to keep Googlers going”

(<http://www.google.com/about/company/culture.html>).

¹ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1892/2010), 152.

The work conditions in companies like Google are different than the ones described by Engels in the 19th century factory: the workplace seems at the same time to be a playground and an area for relaxation. But both Google and the 19th century Scotch manufacturer Engels described have one thing in common: they are profit-making companies that require a workforce to create economic value, and in turn need these value-creating activities to be secured.

Both also expect an intensive engagement from employees. This includes shifts that go beyond the modern standard of eight hours². A discussion thread asked Google employees to describe their workday. Long hours were a constant complaint. One user said for example: I worked for the company for over four years before leaving. [...] It's a competitive environment, though, and without good personal restraint things can really start to pile up. By the end my typical day was 14 hours long and I was starting to underperform on my primary responsibilities. [...]. The fast pace and competitive environment simply make it an easy trap for Googlers to fall into”³. Another Google employee commented: “In terms of the work, I think it can be fast-paced and high-pressure [...]. Most of the people I know put in 50-60 hours a week....no one forces you to but to keep up, you almost sort of have to. That translates to a few late nights and maybe a few hours on the weekends”⁴.

Both are aiming at maximal extraction from their employees: the former in order to maximize their engagement with machinery, physical labour, the latter in order to have fast turnarounds for software projects and ever-faster release dates. While foosball tables may seem preferable to physical beatings, both are efforts to totalize the worker's engagement with the company.

This chapter deals with the question of how workplace surveillance has changed in the age of the Internet. In order to provide an answer, we discuss the notion of workplace surveillance (section 2), the emergence of play labour (section 3), Internet play labour (section 4), the surveillance of Internet play labour (section 5), and finally the emergence of surveilled workplaces (section 6).

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2. Workplace Surveillance

This section aims to give a brief overview of important approaches for understanding workplace surveillance, such as the contributions by Karl Marx and Harry Braverman, discussions about Taylorism, and more recent examples.

For Karl Marx, surveillance of the workplace is a necessary element of capitalist production. He describes it as a function of capital: “The work of directing,

² Ibid.

³ http://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/clz1m/google_employees_on_reddit_fire_up_your_throwaway/

⁴ Ibid.

superintending and adjusting becomes one of the functions of capital, from the moment that the labour under capital's control becomes co-operative. As a specific function of capital, the directing function acquires its own specific characteristics"⁵. During the history of capitalism, work has become ever more distributed, social, and coordinated (more recent examples include the big stress on team work or the use of computer-supported in companies). Workplace surveillance (that is connected to and combined with workforce surveillance⁶) is a method that controls workers in order to ensure that they create value and that they create as much value as possible in their work time. Workplace surveillance is the surveillance of spaces, where work takes place (e.g. a factory space or office), it wants to make visible what happens in the social and physical spaces, where employees create value. Work time surveillance wants to make visible and measure the time span of the day an employee uses for productive activity, the speed of work, the sequence and durations of steps in the work process. Work takes place as activities in space and time that transform nature and culture and create goods and services that satisfy human needs. Work is productive transformative activity that takes place in space and time. It has a spatial and a behavioural aspect. Human behaviour always takes place in space. The surveillance of work is therefore necessarily surveillance of work places, work time, and workforces and these three dimensions are inherently connected.

Taylorism is the attempt to measure, monitor and control the bodily movements of workers in order to increase the value that is created during the work time⁷. It employs time studies, time study sheets, watch books, etc. in order to develop methods for optimizing production, i.e. the creation of more value in less time.

Harry Braverman described in his labour process theory the history of capitalism as a history of the control of the workforce. Technologies and methods like the assembly line, management, Taylorism, mechanization, automation and computerization would bring about capital's "control and dictation of each step of the process".⁸

Workplace surveillance is related to the capitalist production process, in which surplus value is generated.⁹ It is the surveillance of the spaces where work is conducted to ensure that workers conduct the duties that have been assigned to them and create value. Workplace surveillance aims at ensuring that employees do not use work time as idle time, but as surplus value-generating activity. Workforce surveillance is surveillance of the activities of employees. It includes performance measurement and activity assessment, and aims at creating data for making the work process more efficient, i.e., producing more surplus value in less time. Both forms can either be known or unknown to the employees. Known workplace and workforce surveillance makes employees discipline their own activities. Covert workplace surveillance aims at detecting

⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital. Volume I* (London: Penguin, 1867), 449.

⁶ Christian Fuchs, "Political Economy and Surveillance Theory," op cit.

⁷ Fredrick W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Harper, 1911).

⁸ Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), 69.

⁹ For a detailed discussion of how various forms of surveillance relate to the capital accumulation process, see: Fuchs, "Political Economy and Surveillance Theory," *Critical Sociology* 38 (2012, forthcoming).

employees that are considered to be unproductive or it acts as data foundation to make organizational changes (such as promotion of the most loyal and efficient employees, lay-off of employees that are considered as not productive enough). This surveillance either remains unknown or becomes known only later to employees.

Forms of workforce and workplace surveillance include the use of slave masters in slaveholder societies and foremen and overseers in factories in industrial societies. There are also more technologically mediated forms like work time control systems (ranging from punch card systems to automated digital systems), the use of CCTV or workflow management systems.

Lidl is one of the largest discount food store chains in Germany. In 2008 it became known that it used detectives and CCTV cameras for monitoring how often employees go to the toilet, how well the work is performed, which employees have intimate relations, what conversations between employees are about, etc. The results of these surveillance processes were documented in reports. *Stern* journalist Malte Arnsperger stated: “Lidl seems to try to know about its employees as much as possible, many details, so to have means of pressure available if one wants to dismiss them, if one [...] maybe does not want to make salary increases, if one wants to carry out salary cuts. It is basically about means for exerting pressure on employees”.¹⁰ In this example, workplace surveillance seems to have aimed at putting pressure on employees in order to accept wage cuts and make them create more surplus value in less time. It was unknown to the employees that they were the objects of surveillance and that the surveillance measures were not aimed at potential thieves.

Workplace and workforce surveillance technologies are means of class struggle by employers that are used for trying to strengthen capital's power against workers, lowering wage costs and increasing absolute and relative surplus value production. Absolute surplus value production means, according to Marx,¹¹ that employees work longer time (e.g. by reducing breaks or conversations with colleagues during work time because they are afraid of being monitored and losing their job). In relative surplus value production, employees work more in the same time, i.e., they create more surplus value than at earlier points of time in the same or shorter time spans.¹²

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Capitalism is necessarily based on economic surveillance. But surveillance methods are older than capitalism. The slave master who monitors the work of a slave in an ancient slaveholder society is a symbol for the connection of surveillance to any form of exploitation. We can therefore say that economic surveillance is as old as the division of labour and the associated power differentials. Surveillance is older than capitalism, was

¹⁰ Translation from German. Überwachung bei Lidl: So wurde der Spitzelskandal aufgedeckt, Stern Online, 25.3.2008, <http://www.stern.de/panorama/ueberwachung-bei-lidl-so-wurde-der-spitzelskandal-aufgedeckt-615056.html> (accessed on March 21st, 2012).

¹¹ Marx, op cit, chapter 12.

¹² Marx, op cit, chapter 12.

incorporated into capitalism as a functional principle and was thereby also transformed.

In classical forms of workforce control, the monitoring of work tends to be experienced by the worker as a form of alienation. In classical industrial work there is also a clear separation between work time and non-work time, alienated labour time and non-alienated free time¹³. Classical critical studies of workplace surveillance have stressed that “the subsequent history of capitalist industry [...] has been a matter of the deepening and extension of information gathering and surveillance to the combined end of planning and control”.¹⁴ In order to understand, how workplace and workforce surveillance have gained new qualities in the age of the Internet, we need to discuss changes that the organization of labour has been undergoing.

Given the discussion of classical workplace and workforce surveillance, we will discuss next some more recent changes of how labour is organized.

3. The Rise of Play Labour

Luc Boltanski and Éve Chiapello argue that the rise of participatory management means the emergence of a new spirit of capitalism that subsumes the anti-authoritarian values of the political revolt of 1968 and the subsequently emerging New Left such as autonomy, spontaneity, mobility, creativity, networking, visions, openness, plurality, informality, authenticity, emancipation, and so on, under capital. The topics of the movement would now be put into the service of those forces that it wanted to destroy. The outcome would have been “the construction of the new, so-called ‘network’ capitalism”¹⁵ so that artistic critique – that calls for authenticity, creativity, freedom and autonomy in contrast to social critique that calls for equality and overcoming class¹⁶ – today “indirectly serves capitalism and is one of the instruments of its ability to endure”.¹⁷

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Boltanski and Chiapello stress that the network concept (that points towards management’s emphasis on semi-autonomous work groups, work time flexibilization, the flattening of organizational hierarchies, the development of organizational philosophies, outsourcing and globalization of organizations, etc) has become a new ideology for justifying capitalism. In addition, it contributes to new forms of work control. Gilles Deleuze¹⁸ has in this context pointed out that Foucauldian disciplinary power has been transformed in such a way that humans increasingly discipline themselves without direct

¹³ Marxist Feminism has stressed that also the free time is not alienation-free: Especially for women the household economy of the family means alienated and unpaid work that reproduces labour power of wage workers in the family.

¹⁴ Kevin Robins and Frank Webster, *Times of Technoculture: From the Information Society to the Virtual Life* (London: Routledge, 1999): 245.

¹⁵ Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007), 429.

¹⁶ *ibid*, 37f.

¹⁷ *ibid*, 490.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” in *Negotiations* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995), 177-82.

external violence. He terms this situation the society of (self-)control. Deleuze compares the individual in disciplinary society to a mole and the individual in the society of control to a serpent. The mole as a symbol of disciplinary society is faceless and dumb and monotonously digs his burrows; the snake is flexible and pluralistic. The Google worker is a serpent: s/he flexibly switches between different activities (leisure, work) so that the distinction between leisure and work, play and labour, collapses. Being employed by Google means having to engage in Google labour life and Google play life. At Google (and similar companies), it becomes difficult to distinguish play and work.¹⁹ One can therefore talk about the emergence of play labour (playbour).

Participatory management promotes the use of incentives and the integration of play into labour. It argues that work should be fun, workers should permanently develop new ideas, realize their creativity, enjoy free time within the factory, etc. The boundaries between work time and spare time, labour and play, become fuzzy. Work tends to acquire qualities of play, whereas entertainment in spare time tends to become labour-like. Work time and spare time become inseparable. At the same time work-related stress intensifies and property relations remain unchanged.²⁰

There is a tendency in contemporary capitalism that in some companies and in the organization of life the boundaries between play and work collapse. During Fordist capitalism, there was a clear separation between work time and spare time. Spare time to a certain extent was the time of play, where one did not have to be productive. At the same time, spare time was the reproduction time of labour power and involved labour-related activities like housework so that industrial logic also shaped spare time and pleasure was administered pleasure and organized spontaneity in consumer society. So spare time was never really free time in capitalism, but it was easier to find spaces for non-productive and non-labour activities. We can distinguish between instances where leisure comes to resemble work (workification of play) and instances where work comes to resemble leisure (the playification of work). Examples for the workification of play include: extreme sports as free time

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activity, the emergence of trade structures in computer games (the selling of avatars that are created and developed by cheap workers – called gold farmers – in developing countries), the recruitment of soldiers with the help of computer games such as America's Army, fantasy football leagues, substitution of idleness by performance-based activities, industries of administered idleness (slow food cooking courses, spas, massages, meditation, etc).

Examples of the playification of work include: the performance of work tasks while commuting or during formal spare time via mobile phones, mobile Internet and laptops;

¹⁹ Christian Fuchs, "A Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy of Google," *Fast Capitalism* 8 (2011, 1).

²⁰ Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter, "Unions and Management by Stress" in *Lean Work: Empowerment and Exploitation in the Global Auto Industry*, ed. Steven Babson (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 41-53.

the integration of recreational possibilities (as e.g. sports facilities) and social activities into the work place, having love for the job in creative work that results in high performance and work dedication, smart phones among employees as an electronic ‘toy’ that extends work responsibilities into leisure time; ‘Barcamps’, happy hours and ‘unconferences’ are examples of seemingly social gatherings after work hours, where employees are expected to ‘network’ on behalf of their company to obtain new clients, promote their brand, and otherwise turn even social life into labour.

Capitalism connects labour and play in a destructive dialectic. Under Fordist capitalism, play in the form of enjoyment, sex, and entertainment was in capitalism only part of spare time, which was unproductive and separate from labour time. Freud argued that the structure of drives is characterized by a dialectic of Eros (the drive for life, sexuality, lust) and Thanatos (the drive for death, destruction, aggression).²¹ Humans according to Freud strive for the permanent realization of Eros (pleasure principle), but culture would only become possible by a temporal negation and suspension of Eros and the transformation of erotic energy into culture and labour. Labour would be a productive form of desexualisation – the repression of sexual drives. Freud speaks in this context of the reality principle or sublimation. The reality principle sublates the pleasure principle. Human culture thereby sublates human nature and becomes man’s second nature.

Marcuse in his book *Eros and Civilization* connected Freud’s theory of drives to Marx’s theory of capitalism. He argued that alienated labour, domination, and capital accumulation have turned the reality principle into a repressive reality principle – the performance principle: alienated labour constitutes a surplus-repression of Eros. The repression of the pleasure principle takes on a quantity that exceeds the culturally necessary suppression. Marcuse connected Marx’s notions of necessary labour and surplus labour/value to the Freudian drive structure of humans and argued that necessary labour on the level of drives corresponds to necessary suppression and surplus labour to surplus-repression. Necessary labour is the average amount of hours people need to work annually in a society in order to guarantee the survival of this society and the people living in it by creating goods and services that satisfy basic human needs. This means that individuals in society have for a certain share of hours per year to engage in productive work and during this time have to suppress

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their desires for pleasure (=necessary suppression of the pleasure drive that accompanies necessary labour). This means that in order to exist, a society needs a certain amount of necessary labour (measured in hours of work) and hence a certain corresponding amount of suppression of the pleasure principle (also measured in hours). The exploitation of surplus value (labour that is performed for free and generates profit) results not only in the circumstance that workers are forced to work for free for capital to a certain extent, but also in the circumstance that the pleasure principle must be additionally suppressed.

“Behind the reality principle lies the fundamental fact of Ananke or scarcity (*Lebensnot*),

²¹ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Norton, 1961).

which means that the struggle for existence takes place in a world too poor for the satisfaction of human needs without constant restraint, renunciation, delay. In other words, whatever satisfaction is possible necessitates work, more or less painful arrangements and undertakings for the procurement of the means for satisfying needs. For the duration of work, which occupies practically the entire existence of the mature individual, pleasure is ‘suspended’ and pain prevails”.²² In societies that are based on domination, the suppression and postponement of pleasure gratification takes on the form of the so-called “performance principle”²³, according to which pleasure gratification is only allowed as long as it does not interfere or diminish the productivity of the worker. In societies that are based on the principle of domination, the reality principle takes on the form of the performance principle: Domination “is exercised by a particular group or individual in order to sustain and enhance itself in a privileged situation”.²⁴ The performance principle is connected to surplus-repression, a term that describes “the restrictions necessitated by social domination”.²⁵ Domination introduces “additional controls over and above those indispensable for civilized human association”.²⁶

Marcuse argues that the performance principle means that Thanatos governs humans and society and that alienation unleashes aggressive drives within humans (repressive desublimation) that result in an overall violent and aggressive society. Due to the high productivity reached in late-modern society, a historical alternative would be possible: the elimination of the repressive reality principle, the reduction of necessary working time to a minimum and the maximization of free time, an eroticization of society and the body, the shaping of society and humans by Eros, the emergence of libidinous social relations. Such a development would be a historical possibility – but one incompatible with capitalism and patriarchy.

Kücklich first introduced in this context the term playbour (play+labour).²⁷ In the Fordist mode of capitalist production, work time was the time of pain and the

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time of repression and of the human drive for pleasure; whereas leisure time was the time of Eros and pleasure.²⁸ In contemporary capitalism, play and labour, that is Eros (the pleasure principle) and Thanatos (the death drive) partially converge: workers are expected to have fun during work time and play time becomes productive and work-like. Play time and work time intersect and all available time tends to be exploited for the sake of capital accumulation.

The difficulty is that labour feels like play and that exploitation and fun thereby become inseparable. Play and labour are today in certain cases indistinguishable. Eros has

²² Marcuse, op cit, 35.

²³ ibid, 35ff.

²⁴ ibid, 36.

²⁵ ibid, 35.

²⁶ ibid, 37.

²⁷ Julian Kücklich, “Precarious Playbour,” *Fibreculture Journal* 5.

²⁸ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1955).

become fully subsumed under the repressive reality principle. Play is largely commodified, spaces and free time that are not exploited by capital hardly exist today. They are difficult to create and to defend. Play today is productive, surplus value generating labour that is exploited by capital. All human activities, and therefore also all play, tends under the contemporary conditions to become subsumed under and exploited by capital. Play as an expression of Eros is thereby destroyed, human freedom and human capacities are crippled.

The emergence of playbour does not replace Fordist and industrial forms of work that are based on the separation of labour time and reproductive spare time. It is a new quality of the organization of work that is connected to the rising importance of knowledge and creative work and the attempts of capital to overcome crises by reorganizing work. In playbour, surveillance as coercive means of work control is substituted or complemented by ideological forms of control, in which workers monitor and maximize their own performance or monitor themselves mutually. Surveillance thereby becomes transformed into control of the self. Playbour is a biopolitical form of ideology and control. Biopolitics means that “basic biological features of the human species” are “the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power”.²⁹ “Biopower [...] refers to a situation in which what is directly at stake in power is the production and reproduction of life itself”.³⁰ Playbour is an actual control strategy of humans that aims at enhancing productivity and capital accumulation. At the same time, it is an ideology that postulates (e.g. in management ideology, public debates, etc) the democratization of work and thereby wants to create the illusionary impression that we have entered an age without alienation and exploitation.

Playbour is a context for the discussion of changes of the role of mediated surveillance on the Internet.

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4. Internet Playbour

In the so-called *Blindspot Debate*, Dallas Smythe³¹ asked the question what the commodity sold by the commercial media is. He argued that they do not primarily sell content, but the audience as a commodity to advertisers. The consumption of commercial media would be a value-creating and productive activity. Smythe coined in this context the notion of the audience commodity. He argued that if media consumption becomes productive, spare time becomes work time: The “material reality under monopoly capitalism is that all non-sleeping time of most of the population is work time. [...] Of the off-the-job work time, the largest single block is time of the audiences which is sold to advertisers. [...] In ‘their’ time which is sold to advertisers workers (a) perform

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1.

³⁰ Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 24.

³¹ Dallas W. Smythe, “Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism,” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 1 (1977, 3): 1-27.

essential marketing functions for the producers of consumers' goods, and (b) work at the production and reproduction of labour power".³² Sut Jhally and Bill Livant have pinpointed Smythe's concept of audience commodification by saying that it means: "watching as working".³³

If one assumes that also sleeping time is related to work time because it is an activity that reproduces and recreates labour power, then one can argue that for "the great majority of the population [...] 24 hours a day is work time".³⁴ Media consumption is audience work that creates value for media companies. The result of this work is the presentation of commodities to audiences in advertisements. Therefore audiences "work to market [...] things to themselves".³⁵

Dallas Smythe suggests that in the case of media advertisement models, the audience's attention time is sold as a commodity to advertisers (audience commodity). Although the commercial mass media audience that Smythe described (typically found in the case of advertising-financed newspapers, radio, and TV) creates value by watching or reading, it does not create content itself. Commercial surveillance in this model is externally imposed by market and audience research (e.g. by using set top boxes that measure audience activities). The audience is measured by special methods that are not applied to the full audience, but to a sample of study participants. Audience measurement is used for setting advertising rates. It is necessarily based on approximations.

Internet platforms such as Google, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter share with commercial newspapers and commercial broadcasting the profit orientation and the focus on advertising-generated revenue. The difference is that users on these platforms create and share content, establish and maintain social relations (communication), and that

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surveillance is built into the system as internal mechanism that records, monitors, and assesses all generated content, social relations, and transaction data. Thereby a full profile of user interests, connections and activities emerges that is not limited to audience samples, but encompasses the total surveillance of all user activities. The totality of commercial surveillance on the Internet enables targeted advertising – advertising that is oriented on individual user preferences, relations and activities.

Audience commodification on the corporate Internet can best be described as Internet prosumer commodification:³⁶ economic surveillance on corporate social media is surveillance of prosumers, who create and share user-generated content, browse profiles and data, interact with others, join, create, and build communities, and co-create

³² *ibid*, 3.

³³ Sut Jhally and Bill Livant. "Watching as Working. The Valorization of Audience Consciousness," in *The Spectacle of Accumulation. Essays in Culture, Media, & Politics* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986/2006), 125.

³⁴ Dallas W. Smythe, *Dependency Road* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1981), 47.

³⁵ *ibid*, 4.

³⁶ Christian Fuchs, "Labor in Informational Capitalism and on the Internet," *The Information Society* 26 (2010, 3): 179-96.

information. The conflict between Cultural Studies and Critical Political Economy of the Media³⁷ about the question of the activity and creativity of the audience has been resolved in relation to the Internet today: On Facebook, Twitter, commercial blogs, etc, users are fairly active and creative, which reflects Cultural Studies' insights about the active character of recipients, but this active and creative user character is the very source of exploitation, which reflects Critical Political Economy's stress on class and exploitation.

Internet prosumer commodification signifies that private internet usage, which is motivated by play, entertainment, fun, and joy – aspects of Eros – has become subsumed under capital and has become a sphere of the exploitation of labour. Internet corporations accumulate profit by exploiting the playbour of users. In playbour time, surplus value generation appears to be pleasure-like, but serves the logic of repression (the lack of ownership of capital). Joy and play become toil and work, toil and work feel like joy and play. There is a collapse of leisure time and work time: leisure time becomes work time and work time leisure time. All time becomes exploited, online leisure time becomes surplus value-generating wage labour time that involves a surplus repression time of pleasure. Playbour time is surplus value generating pleasure time.

In commercial Internet surveillance, users work without pay and produce content, communications, social relations, and transaction data. Their unpaid labour creates data commodities (collection of individuals with specific user demographics) that are sold to advertisers. There is an exchange of money with access to specific user groups. The exchange value of the Internet prosumer commodity is at the heart of targeted advertising. This commodity's value is created by playbour – the activities on Facebook and related platforms are strongly playful activities

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conducted in all places at all times. They hardly feel like labour, but create economic value. Permanent real time surveillance is a feature of many forms of Internet playbour.

5. Internet Surveillance

In order to understand, how Internet surveillance and the surveillance of Internet playbour work, we first need a model that explains how the human information process works. One such model is based on Hegelian dialectical philosophy, which allows us to identify three levels/stages of social life: cognition, communication and co-operation³⁸

³⁷ For the discussion between Cultural Studies and Critical Political Economy of the Media & Communication see: Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding, ed. *Cultural Studies in Question* (London: SAGE, 1997). Nicholas Garnham, "Political Economy and Cultural Studies: Reconciliation or Divorce?" in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, ed. John Storey (Harlow: Pearson, 1995/1998), 600-12. Lawrence Grossberg, "Cultural Studies vs. Political Economy. Is Anybody Else Bored with this Debate?" in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, ed. John Storey (Harlow: Pearson, 1995/1998), 613-24.

³⁸ Christian Fuchs, *Internet and Society. Social Theory in the Information Age* (New York: Routledge, 2008). Christian Fuchs, "Social Software and Web 2.0: Their Sociological Foundations and Implications," in *Handbook of Research on Web 2.0, 3.0, and X.0: Technologies, Business, and Social Applications*,

(Fuchs 2008, 2010). This model is dialectical because it corresponds to the three stages of the dialectical logic identified by Hegel: identity/being-in-itself, being-for-another, being-in-and-for-itself. Abstractly speaking, any entity in the world is unique, although it is one of a kind, it is identical with itself (I=I). But an entity does not exist as a monad in the world, it can only exist in relation to another entity. So being is always relational being, one entity exists in difference and relation to others, existence is individual and relational at the same time (being-for-another, contradiction, negation). Out of the relation between entities, new qualities can emerge. This is not an automatic necessity, but always a potentiality. Hegel describes the process of the emergence of new qualities as *Aufhebung* (sublation) or negation of the negation. In society, this model of dialectical logic can be applied to the existence of humans. One stage is the precondition for the next. First, the individual, who acts through cognition. Second, individuals engage in social relations through communication. Third, relational communication contributes to cooperative endeavours and/or community building/maintenance. Organisations and communities are produced and reproduced at this final stage. The three stages correspond to three notions of sociality: Emile Durkheim's social facts (cognition), Max Weber's social action (communication), Ferdinand Tönnies' concept of community as well as Karl Marx's notion of collaborative work (co-operation)³⁹. Both community and collaborative work are expression of co-operation.

This is the structural basis of social life. Individual action is the basis of communication, which in turn is the basis of corporate endeavours as well as community building. Media has always played an important role in these stages. Because it turns thought into digital content, and transmits that content to other users, all media technologies have played a crucial role in these functions.

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What is unique about social media is the fact that it collapses these three processes together. Individual cognition almost automatically becomes a matter of social relations, and a cooperative endeavour. For instance, I may write a reflexion on my profile. By default, other users will see this reflexion, and be able to respond to it. The reflexion becomes a statement towards others, and also becomes a project. If I wrote this statement on a word processor, it would remain in the first stage. If I wrote this statement on a conventional website, it would remain in the second stage.

The ease with which it moves through these social stages is not entirely new. But what is striking about social media – indeed, what makes it a convergence of the three modes of sociality – is the difficulty of remaining in the first or second stage. By virtue of its built-in functionality, individual thought becomes relational and cooperative. Self-reflexion now exists in a relational sense (it has an audience, it is sent to that audience), and it also becomes a kind of cooperative activity (that audience is expected to contribute to that initial reflexion). So for example writing a blog post or a Facebook wall post is a form of self-reflexion that at the same time is outreaching to a community and by way of

Volume II, ed. San Murugesan (Hershey, PA: IGI-Global, 2010), 764-89.

³⁹ Ibid.

comments of this community is shaped by others' ideas.

Social media makes reflection and communication a complex form of sociality by pushing both of these towards a cooperative stage. This has specific implications for both visibility and labour. In terms of visibility, content that would otherwise stay with an individual is by default pushed to a broad audience. Any content that is uploaded to a site like Facebook (on the profile, excluding the private message) is sent to that person's entire social network. It may possibly be sent beyond this network if their privacy settings are relaxed.

Something can remain cognition by not being put on Facebook. While this is true, this either-or approach differs from other media. The word processor keeps the content with the individual, who may decide to print or transmit the content. Even the email allows you to save a draft before sending it to others. Yet with social media the only option is to publish.

Social media pushes activity into the realm of labour by making it visible (as seen above) and collaborative, no matter if it is an intentional act of communication or an act of browsing. Everything becomes an entry point to a comment. Users are positioned vis-à-vis one another, obliged to intake what others produce, and produce a response. Statements become conversations; there is no final word. Photographs and videos become conversations. News items linked from an outside site become conversations. With social advertising schemes, conversations about products in a community of friends and contacts are invited by the ad mechanism itself on a digital platform with the help of the constant monitoring of online behaviour, purchasing patterns and the social networks/relations of users. Social advertising is based on the gathering, analysis, and comparison of online behaviour and the predictive algorithmic calculation of potential purchasing choices.

Social saturation contributes to its value for companies, and its potential for exploitation. It is not only that cognition can become cooperation, but the specific status and location of sites like Facebook, especially for individual users. They frame their functionality in a very generic light. They are simply designed to 'share'

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with the 'people' that 'matter' to you. They are therefore cross-contextual, or rather they contribute to a convergence of social contexts. They monopolize the user's social life.

Modern society is based on the differentiation of social roles. In modern society, human beings act in different capacities in different social roles. Consider the modern middle-class office worker, who also has roles as a husband, father, lover, friend, voter, citizen, child, fan, neighbour, to say nothing of the various associations to which he may belong. In these different roles, humans are expected to behave according to specific rules that govern the various social systems of which modern society is composed (such as the company, the schools, the family, the church, fan clubs, political parties, etc).

Jürgen Habermas⁴⁰ describes how modern society is grounded in different spheres, in which humans act in different roles. He says that modernity resulted in:

- a) the separation of the economy from the family and the household so that the modern economy (based on wage labour and capital) emerged,
- b) the rise of a political public sphere, in which humans act as citizens, who vote, hold a political opinion, etc, in contrast to the earlier monarchic system, in which political power was controlled by the monarch, aristocracy, and the church. This includes the shift of the economy towards a capitalist economy grounded in private ownership of the means of production and on the logic of capital accumulation. The economy started to no longer be part of private households, but became organized with the help of large commodity markets that go beyond single households. The modern economy has become “a private sphere of society that [...] [is] publicly relevant”⁴¹ The family started to no longer be primarily an economic sphere, but the sphere of intimacy and the household economy based on reproductive labour. Connected to this was the separation of the private and the public sphere that is based on humans acting in different roles⁴². Habermas mentions the following social roles that are constitutive for modern society: employee, consumer, client, citizen⁴³. Other roles, as e.g. wife, husband, houseworker, immigrant, convicts, etc can certainly be added. So what is constitutive for modern society is not just the separation of spheres and roles, but also the creation of power structures, in which roles are constituted by power relations (as e.g. employer-employee, state bureaucracy-citizen, citizen of a nation state-immigrant, manager-assistant, dominant gender roles – marginalised gender roles).

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With social media, the constitutive features are the following:

- *Integrated sociality*: The convergence of the three modes of sociality (cognition, communication, cooperation) in an integrated sociality. This means for example on Facebook, and individual creates a multi-media content like a video on the cognitive level, publishes it so that others can comment (the communicative level), and allows others to manipulate and remix the content, so that new content with multiple authorship can emerge. One step does not necessarily result in the next, but the technology has the potential to enable the combination of all three activities in one space. Facebook, by default, encourages the transition from one stage of sociality to the next, within the same social space.
- *Integrated roles*: Social media like Facebook are based on the creation of personal

⁴⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The theory of communicative action. Volume 2: Lifeworld and system: a critique of functionalist reason* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987). Jürgen Habermas. *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

⁴¹ Jürgen Habermas. *The structural transformation of the public sphere*, op cit, 19.

⁴² ibid. 152, 154. See also Hannah Arendt, *The human condition*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 47, 68. 2nd edition.

⁴³ Jürgen Habermas, *The theory of communicative action. Volume 2: Lifeworld and system: a critique of functionalist reason* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987), 320.

profiles that describe the various roles of a human being's life. In contemporary modern society, different social roles tend to converge in various social spaces. The boundaries between public life and private life as well as the work place and the home have become fuzzy and liquid. A new form of liquid and porous sociality has emerged, in which we partly act in different social roles in the same social space. On social media like Facebook, we act in various roles, but all of these roles become mapped onto single profiles that are observed by different people that are associated with our different social roles. This means that Facebook is a social space, in which social roles tend to converge and become integrated in single profiles.

- *Integrated and converging surveillance on social media:* On social media like Facebook, various social activities (cognition, communication, co-operation) in different social roles are mapped to single profiles. In this mapping process, data about a) social activities within b) social roles are generated. This means that a Facebook profile holds a1) personal data, a2) communicative data, a3) social network data/community data in relation to b1) personal roles (friend, lover, father, mother, child, neighbour, fan, consumer, etc), b2) civic roles (audience, association member, protestor, etc) b3) systemic roles (in politics: voter, politician, bureaucrat, etc; in the economy: worker, manager, owner, purchaser, etc. The different social roles and activity tend to converge, as e.g. in the situation, where the workplace is also a playground, where friendships and intimate relations are formed and where spare time activities are conducted. This means that social media surveillance is an integrated form of surveillance, in which one finds surveillance of different (partly converging) activities in different partly converging social roles with the help of profiles that hold a complex networked multitude of data about humans.

Figure 1 visualizes the surveillance process on one single social media system (such as Facebook, etc). The total social media surveillance process is a combination and network of a multitude of such processes.

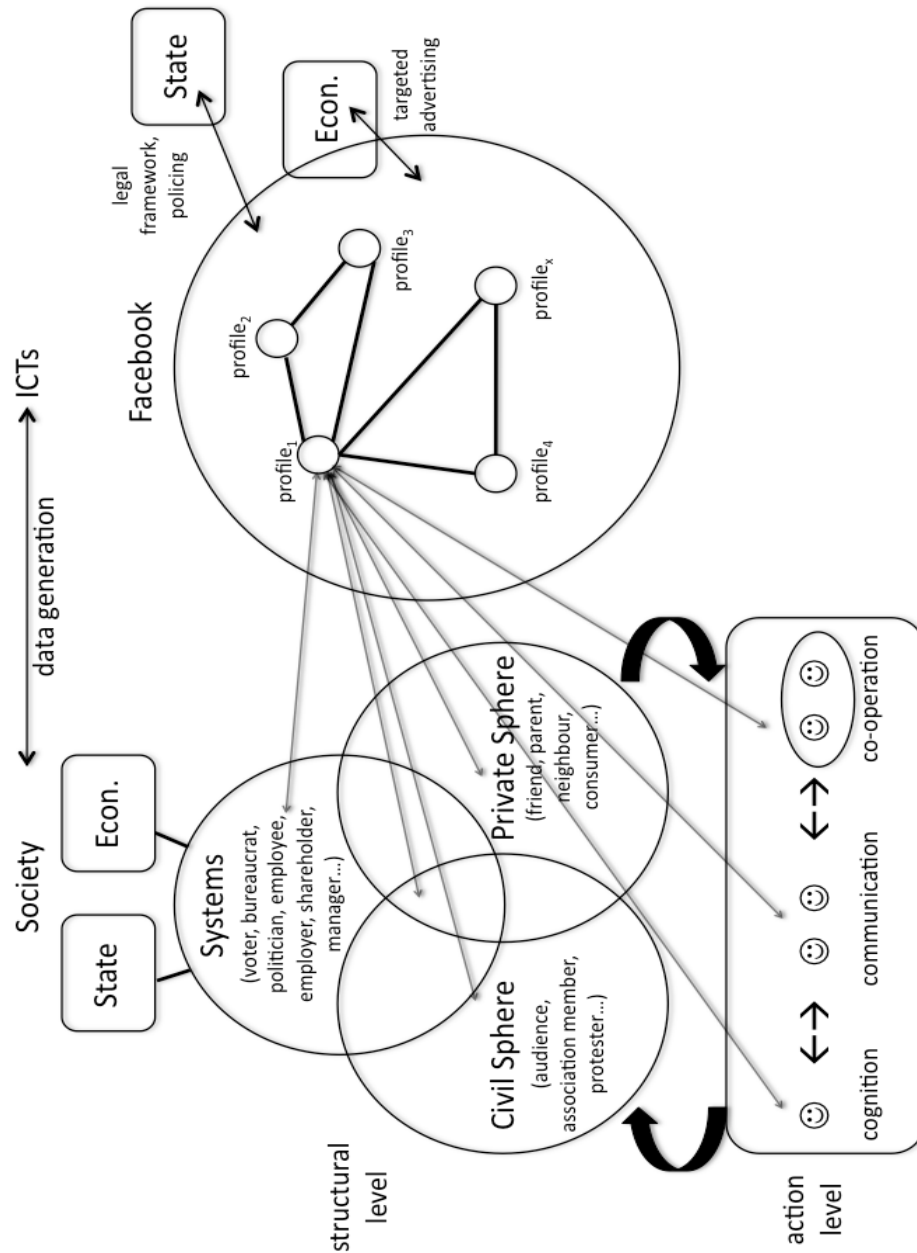


Fig. 1 The process of social media surveillance

Social media is made up of voluntary and involuntary forms of exposure and information exchange. Users rely on social media for social and cultural life. These activities are made visible to social media companies like Facebook, and by extension to whomever these companies wish to sell this data.

Communication occurs within, but also across different social actors. This is often voluntary, but surveillance underscores when information is obtained in a manner that is involuntary by the sender. One aspect of social media surveillance is the mutual

augmentation of surveillance⁴⁴, which dictates that the coexistence of so many social actors on one media platform means that users will have access to so much more information from other social actors. Thus, any attempt to gather information will be augmented by the visibility of so many other social relations. Voluntary visibility augments involuntary visibility.

Surveillance of Internet users includes:

- * surveillance of personal profile data,
- * surveillance of produced content,
- * surveillance of browsing and clicking behaviour,
- * surveillance of social relations and networks,

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- * surveillance of communication.

The hybrid of play and labour is apparent in the case of social media surveillance. This activity is framed in terms of “sharing” and “connecting”. Friends and colleagues are placed in the foreground, and the value-adding process and business outcomes are obscured. Yet this activity is intercepted, gathered, and monitored, part of the process by which social activity on social media is transformed into a commodity.

The legal mechanism that enables the exploitation of social media users are privacy policies and terms of use. Surveillance of user activities for the purpose of selling targeted advertisements is legally guaranteed by these policies. Facebook, the major social networking site and the second most popular web platform in the world, says in its data use policy: “When an advertiser creates an ad on Facebook, they are given the opportunity to choose their audience by location, demographics, likes, keywords, and any other information we receive or can tell about you and other users. [...] Sometimes we get data from our advertising partners, customers and other third parties that helps us (or them) deliver ads, understand online activity, and generally make Facebook better”.⁴⁵

Facebook avoids the term selling and instead speaks of “getting” and “sharing” user data, just as users “share” with other users. Both interpersonal communication and exploitative labour are collapsed into the same term. The terms “sell” and “selling” do not appear once in the policy that legitimates the surveillance of user activities and the selling of their data as commodity, whereas the term sharing appears 59 times in the 6911 word long policy.

There are two connections of social media surveillance to the topic of workplace surveillance.

1) *Corporate social media are a surveilled workplace.*

⁴⁴ Daniel Trotter, *Social media as surveillance* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

⁴⁵ https://www.facebook.com/full_data_use_policy, version from September 23, 2011.

When using corporate social media, users engage in value-creating labour that is constantly monitored and feels like play.

2) Facebook and other *social media* are used as *technologies for the surveillance of wage labour* in conventional workplaces.

The matching of different roles and activities into roles onto single profiles enables employers to gain insights into a lot of details of the lives of their employees. It has become a common practice that companies check job candidates' social media profiles, which constitutes a new form of applicant surveillance. A survey showed that in 2009 45% of US companies used social media for applicant surveillance.⁴⁶

In the case of employer-employee relations, new issues arise: What to do if your boss befriends you on Facebook? Should private Facebook use be allowed at the

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workplace? What to do if your company asks you to use your private social media profiles for promoting their products, services, or events? Should there be Facebook groups for individual companies, on which employees, managers, etc connect? All of these questions indicate the circumstance that the boundaries between private life and working life have become porous. This circumstance can pose problems because although social media are networked spaces, workplaces are enmeshed into and shaped by power structures, in which employees and managers have an asymmetrical share of authority and influence. Social media are technologies that help extending workplace surveillance into realms that were previously thought to be autonomous, but now become increasingly subsumed under the gaze of capital and management.

The use of social media (especially social networking sites like Facebook) as tools of applicant and workforce surveillance is a relatively new area of research and concern⁴⁷. The published works on this topic⁴⁸ tend to agree that this issue is legally relatively unregulated and that more social scientific and legal research is needed in this area.

Sánchez Abril, Levin and Del Riego argue that “employer intrusion into an employee’s personal life threatens the employee’s freedom, dignity, and privacy – and may lead to

⁴⁶ Jenna Wortham, ‘More employers use social networks to check out applicants’, The New York Times Bits Blog, August 20 2009, available at <http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/08/20/more-employers-use-social-networks-to-check-out-applicants/>

⁴⁷ See: Leigh A. Clark and Sherry J. Roberts. 2010. “Employer’s Use of Social Networking Sites: A Socially Irresponsible Practice.” *Journal of Business Ethics* 95 (4): 507-525. Kristl H Davison, Catherine Maraist, R.H. Hamilton and Mark N. Bing. 2012. “To Screen or Not To Screen? Using The Internet For Selection Decisions.” *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* 24 (1,): 1-21. Kristl H Davison, Catherine Maraist and Mark N. Bing. 2011. “Fiend or Foe? The Promise and Pitfalls of Using Social Networking Sites for HR Decisions.” *Journal of Business and Psychology* 26 (2): 153-159. Patricia Sánchez Abril, Avner Levin and Alissa Del Riego. 2012. “Blurred Boundaries. Social Media Privacy and the Twenty-First-Century Employee.” *American Business Law Journal* 49 (1): 63-124.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

discriminatory practices”⁴⁹. They conducted a survey, in which 2500 undergraduate students participated and found that 71% agreed that the following scenario could result in physical, economic, or reputational injury in the offline world⁵⁰: “You called in sick to work because you really wanted to go to your friend’s all day graduation party. The next day you see several pictures of you having a great time at the party. Because the pictures are dated you start to worry about whether you might be caught in your lie about being sick. You contact the developers of the social network and ask that the pictures be taken down because the tagging goes so far, it would take you too long to find all the pictures. There was no response from the network. You are stunned to be called in by your supervisor a week later to be advised that you were being ’written up’ for taking advantage of sick leave and put on notice that if it happened again you would be terminated”⁵¹.

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Clark and Roberts argue that notwithstanding all legal debates, employer’s monitoring of employees’ or applicants’ social networking sites profiles is a socially irresponsible practice because it allows “employers to be undetectable voyeurs to very personal information and make employment decisions based on that information”⁵², such monitoring can due to the persistence of online information have negative career effects that impact a whole working life, and employment decisions can become based on very sensitive information that are inappropriate values for decision making in the economy (“she is too conservative or too liberal; “she is a sinner for sexual preference”⁵³).

Protecting employees and job applicants from decisions being made based on information derived from social media is important because there is an asymmetrical power relationship between employers and managers on the one hand and employees and applicants on the other side. There is a class relationship, i.e. an asymmetric power structure of the capitalist economy, in which employers and companies have the power to determine and control many aspects of the lives of workers and consumers. Given the power of companies in the capitalist economy, economic privacy needs to be contextualized in a way that protects consumers and workers from capitalist control and at the same time makes corporate interests and corporate power transparent. The existence of this asymmetrical power relationship, in which employers can decide if employees are hired and fired, requires special protection of workers and applicants. It is therefore an interesting question for policy makers if basing employment and lay-off decisions on information obtained from social media should be outlawed and if companies engaging in such practices should face severe penalties.

⁴⁹ Sánchez Abril, Levin and Del Riego, op cit, 69.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, 104f.

⁵¹ *ibid*, 104.

⁵² Clark and Roberts, op cit, 518.

⁵³ *ibid*, 51.

6. Conclusion: The Surveilled Workplace Factory

We encountered various examples of the surveillance of workers in this paper: Engels described the brutal physical beating and control of workers in the UK in the 1840s. Taylorism and Fordism made use of the conveyor belt and scientific management to control workers. Employees at Lidl have been monitored by CCTV. Internet prosumers' activities are monitored and commodified in real time by companies like Google and Facebook. Workers in developing countries are working long hours and are facing sanctions, threats, and permanent observation of their work.

All of these forms of surveillance have in common that they aim at the control of workers' activities in order to accumulate a maximum of capital with the least expenses and as quickly as possible. The history of capitalism is also a history of the development of methods of exploitation and workers' control. Newer forms of economic surveillance did not supplant older ones, but rather complemented them and added new dimensions. Physical surveillance that includes beatings, whipping,

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sanctions, etc was complemented by a form of control that is built into production technology (e.g. the conveyor belt) and dictates the speed and organization of work. In 20th century, the role of the manager as organizer and controller of the work process emerged. Management has developed many different methods (ranging from overt control to "participatory management") that are all focused on ensuring that employees work, work more intense, and on containing and foreclosing workers struggles. The rise of Fordist mass consumption and mass production brought about the rise of consumer surveillance: various methods of consumer and advertising research were developed for studying, measuring, controlling, and creating consumer needs. 20th century saw also the rise of computing and the diffusion of computing into surveillance technologies that increasingly became digital, automated, and networked. The bureaucratic file turned into digital database sets, the punch time card into networked monitoring. The rise of Internet use has extended and intensified the rise of productive consumption (prosumption). This has resulted in commercial Internet platforms that allow user-generated content production. Surveillance of productive online consumption has brought about new forms of real-time surveillance that are at the heart of a capital accumulation model that is based on targeted advertising. At the same time, this latest development of economic surveillance is based on, connected to and mediated with older forms of surveillance.

The factory is the space for the production of economic value. Sut Jhally⁵⁴ says that in mediated audience commodification "watching is an extension of factory labour" and that the living room is therefore a factory and space of the surveillance of audience labour. The family is the social realm of housework that recreates labour power. Its main organizational unit is the household. In this respect one can say that the factory in modern society has always extended into the household.

⁵⁴ Sut Jhally, *The Codes of Advertising* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 83.

Italian Autonomist theory has argued that the production of value has especially since the capitalist crisis in the 1970s diffused from the factory as space of the organization of wage labour into the broader realm of society. The contemporary globalization of capitalism has dispersed the walls of the wage labour factory all over the globe. Due to the circumstance that capital cannot exist without non-wage labour and exploits the commons that are created by all, society has become a factory. Different forms of unpaid and low paid work would be at the heart of what Autonomists call the social worker, who works in the social factory: “all of society lives as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over all of society”.⁵⁵

The commons of society are structures that are needed for all humans to exist. They are created and consumed by all humans as part of their basic life activities. They include communication, nature, welfare, health care, education, knowledge, arts and culture, food, housing. Communication is part of the commons of society. Denying

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humans to communicate is like denying them to breathe fresh air; it undermines the conditions of their survival. Communication is part of basic human survival processes. In recent decades, the commons have become strongly commodified.

David Harvey describes neoliberalism as an ideology and organizational form of capitalism that is based on the principle of the commodification of everything. “Commodification presumes the existence of property rights over processes, things, and social relations, that a price can be put on them, and that they can be traded subject to legal contract. [...] In practice, of course, every society sets some bounds on where commodification begins and ends”.⁵⁶ Neoliberal capitalism has largely widened the boundaries of what is treated as a commodity. “The commodification of sexuality, culture, history, heritage; of nature as spectacle or as rest cure; [...] – these all amount to putting a price on things that were never actually produced as commodities”.⁵⁷ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt argue that the “metropolis is a factory for the production of the common. [...] With the passage to the hegemony of biopolitical production, the space of economic production and the space of the city tend to overlap. There is no longer a factory wall that divides the one from the other, and ‘externalities’ are no longer external to the site of production that valorizes them. Workers produce throughout the metropolis, in its every crack and crevice. In fact, production of the common is becoming nothing but the life of the city itself”.⁵⁸ Nick Dyer-Witheford says that the rise of the social workers has resulted in the emergence of the “factory planet”⁵⁹ – the factory as locus for the production of value and commodities is everywhere, commodification has become

⁵⁵ Mario Tronti. In: Harry Cleaver, *The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory*. From *Valorisation to Self-Valorisation*, in *Open Marxism*. Vol. 2, ed. Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn and Kosmos Psychopedis (London: Pluto, 1992), 137.

⁵⁶ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 165.

⁵⁷ *ibid*, 166.

⁵⁸ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 250f.

⁵⁹ Nick Dyer-Witheford, “Digital Labour, Species Being and the Global Worker,” *Ephemera* 10 (3/4): 485.

universal and total. What Harvey, Negri & Hardt and Dyer-Witheford point out is that the boundaries of the factory have enlarged from the wage labour place into society and that thereby exploitation has become more global and more pervasive.

The factory is an inherent creation of capitalism. It is the space, where the exploitation of labour and the creation of value take place. The factory is not static, but develops and changes its organizational forms along with the historical trajectory of capitalism. This means that there is not one type of factory in a historical period of capitalism, but there are different types of factories that are all connected to each other and are necessary organizational forms of capital accumulation. In contemporary capitalism, we find e.g. the blue collar/white collar factories, the Internet factory, the sweatshop factory, the domestic factory (household), etc.

The rise of online playbour is situated in the context of the neoliberal commodification of the commons: the Internet is a strongly commercialized and commodified system

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that is based on knowledge as commodity. The Internet is an almost ubiquitous factory and realm of the production of audience commodities and a space of the surveillance of playbour. Not everyone in the world has access to and is exploited on the Internet factory: as of December 31, 2011, 32.7% of the world population was online⁶⁰. The Internet is a highly commercialized and commodified space. When we talk about broadcasting (television or radio), we have an idea of what public service broadcasting is about (although it has also largely been privatized). But in relation to the Internet, there are hardly any ideas and visions of what a public service or commons-based Internet could look like because it is so heavily controlled and in the hands of capitalists, which shows the ubiquity of exploitation and commodification on the Internet. Wikipedia is the only site under the top-100 used web platforms in the world that is not operated by a profit-oriented business. It is run by a non-profit foundation (the Wikimedia Foundation). This shows that exploitation and commodification are not total, but nearly total. Most of the online time is commodified online time, a smaller share is non-commodified.

Social media and the mobile Internet make the audience commodity ubiquitous and the factory not limited to your living room and your wage work place – the factory and work place surveillance are also in all in-between spaces. The entire planet is today a surveilled capitalist factory. Internet user commodification is part of the tendency of the commodification of everything that has resulted in the generalization of the factory and of exploitation. Neoliberal capitalism has largely widened the boundaries of what is treated as a commodity.

Internet labour and its surveillance are based on the surveillance, blood and sweat of super-exploited labour in developing countries. Alain Lipietz (1995) has in this context spoken of the emergence of “bloody Taylorism” as a contemporary accumulation regime

⁶⁰ <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

that is coupled to two other accumulation regimes (peripheral Fordism, post-Fordism).⁶¹ Bloody Taylorism is based on the “delocalization of certain limited Taylorist industrial activities towards social formations with very high rates of exploitation”.⁶² “To the traditional oppression of women, this strategy adds all the modern weapons of anti-labour repression (official unions, absence of civil rights, imprisonment and torture of opponents)”.⁶³ Taylorism has not been replaced, we do not live in an age of post-Taylorism, rather we are experiencing an extension and intensification of Taylorism that is complemented by new ideological forms of workforce control. The emergence of workplaces is a tendency in contemporary capitalism that interacts with established forms of work and play. The corporate Internet requires for its existence the exploitation of the labour that exists under bloody Taylorist conditions. On top of this foundation that makes heavy use of

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traditional workplace surveillance, we find various workplaces on the Internet, where users work without payment and deterritorialize the boundaries between play and work.

Students & Scholars Against Corporate Misbehaviour (SACOM)⁶⁴ reported that Chinese Foxconn workers who produce iPhones, iPads, iPods, MacBooks and other ICTs are facing the withholding of wages, forced and unpaid overtime, the exposure to chemicals, harsh management, low wages, bad work safety, lack of basic facilities, etc. In 2010, 18 Foxconn employees attempted suicide, 14 of them succeeded.⁶⁵ SACOM describes Foxconn workers as “iSlave Behind the iPhone”.⁶⁶ This example shows that the exploitation and surveillance of digital labour, i.e. labour that is needed for capital accumulation with the help of ICTs, is in no way limited to unpaid user labour, but includes various forms of labour – user labour, wage labour in Western companies for the creation of applications, and slave-like labour that creates hardware (and partly software) in developing countries under inhumane conditions. Surveillance of Foxconn workers is direct, coercive, disciplinary, and Taylorist. “Foxconn's stringent military-like culture is one of surveillance, obedience and not challenging authority. Workers are told obey or leave”.⁶⁷ “Supervisors yell at workers with foul language. Workers experience pressure and humiliation. Workers are warned that they may be replaced by robots if they are not efficient enough. Apart from scolding by frontline supervisors, other forms of punishment include being required to write confession letters and copying the CEO’s quotations. A majority of workers have to stand for 10 hours during work shifts. There is

⁶¹ Alain Lipietz. 1995. “The Post-Fordist World: Labour Relations, International Hierarchy and Global Ecology,” *Review of International Political Economy* 4 (1): 1-41.

⁶² *ibid.*, 10.

⁶³ *ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁴ Students & Scholars Against Corporate Misbehaviour (SACOM), iSlave Behind the iPhone: Foxconn Workers in Central China. <http://sacom.hk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/20110924-islave-behind-the-iphone.pdf>

⁶⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foxconn_suicides, accessed on February 8, 2011.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ CNN Online, Apple Manufacturing Plant Workers Complain of Long Hours, Militant Culture. <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/02/06/world/asia/china-apple-foxconn-worker/index.html>

no recess as promised by Foxconn. Some workers suffer from leg cramps after work. Workers have extra workloads or have to skip the second meal break under the arrangement of 'continuous shifts'. [...] At the entrance of each building, there is a worker station to check the identities of the workers".⁶⁸

Different forms of surveillance and control are needed for controlling and exploiting digital labour. Self-control and playbour that feels like fun, but creates parts of the value, is only one part of the labour process that has its foundation in a racist mode of production and exploitation of workers in developing countries. The exploitation of play workers in the West is based on the pain, sweat, blood and death of workers in developing countries. The corporate Internet needs for its existence both playbour and toil, fun and misery, biopolitical power and disciplinary power, self-control and surveillance. The example of the Foxconn factories discussed earlier shows that the exploitation of Internet playbour needs as a precondition and is coupled to the bloody Taylorist exploitation of workers in the developing world.

The factory is not only the space of surveillance, but also a space for potential or actual resistance. To overcome the old and new forms of workplace surveillance that are tightly coupled to each other and form parts of a global capitalist factory, social

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struggles are needed. Ongoing struggles in the context of the crisis of capitalism are attempts to resist the commodification of everything. Resisting the commodification and surveillance of the communication commons requires realizing that the creation of an alternative Internet is in need of struggles for a society that transcends the universe of exploitation and commodification. These are struggles for the appropriation of the commons.

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⁶⁸ SACOM, op cit.

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