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The Digital Labour Theory of Value and Karl Marx in the Age of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Weibo

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1. Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss some of the foundations for a digital labour theory of value, namely the concepts of time (Section 2), productive labour (Section 3), rent (Section 4) and fetishism (Section 5).¹

2. Time and labour time

Time is a fundamental aspect of matter. “In time, it is said, everything arises and passes away, or rather, there appears precisely the abstraction of arising and falling away” (Hegel 1817, §201). Time is the development of the existence of being from one condition to the next. The German Marxist philosopher Hans Heinz Holz speaks in this context of matter as the dialectic of *Nacheinander* (time) and *Nebeneinander* (space): “Like time is the after-one-another of contents, space is the next-to-one-another of things” (Holz 2005, 170, translation from German).

In capitalism, time plays a role in the form of labour time, reproductive labour time, struggles over the working day, absolute and relative surplus-value production that is based on a dialectic of labour and time (Postone 1993); production, circulation and consumption time of commodities, the acceleration of capital accumulation and circulation, the acceleration of finance, temporal fixes to crises of capital accumulation (Fuchs 2015, chapter 4).

The rise of capitalist social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Weibo² has not rendered the concepts of labour time and the law of value superfluous, but is an expression of a new qualities of the labour theory of value. The more time a user spends on Facebook, the more profile, browsing, communication, behavioural, content data s/he generates that is offered as a commodity to advertising clients. The more time a user spends online, the more targeted ads can be presented to her/him.

The average value of a single ad space is the average number of minutes that a specific user group spends on Facebook per unit of time (e.g. 1 month or 1 year) divided by the average number of targeted ads that is presented to them during this time period.

Targeted online advertising is many social media corporations' core capital accumulation strategy. It is a method of relative surplus-value production: Not just one ad is presented to all users at the same time, but many different ads are presented to different users at the same time. Individual targeting and the splitting up of the screen for presenting multiple ads allows to present and sell many ads at one point of time. In the pay-per-click mode, clicking on an ad is the value realization process.

The emergence of social media is an expression of the tendency of capitalism to increase disposable time. Such media are expressions of a high level of the development of the productive forces. Capital tries to commodify disposable time, which explains the emergence of play labour, digital labour and prosumption. The cause is the imperialistic tendency of capitalism: "But its tendency always, on the one side, to create disposable time, on the other, to convert it into surplus labour" (Marx 1857/58, 708).

The emergence of social media is an expression of the contradiction between time and capitalism. Corporate social media are spaces for the exploitation of new forms of surplus labour under capitalist conditions. They are at the same time germ forms of a society, in which necessary labour time is minimized, surplus labour time abolished and creative activities shape human lifetime.

3. Productive labour

A detailed discussion of Marx's category of productive labour cannot be done in this chapter that has a limit of 6,000 words (for a detailed discussion of almost 100 pages, see chapter 5 in: Fuchs 2015). A frequent misunderstanding of Marx in discussion of digital labour is that

he actually does not have just one concept of productive labour, but several ones. I therefore speak of productive labour (1), (2), (3):

- Productive labour (1): Work that produces use-values
- Productive labour (2): Labour that produces capital and surplus-value for the purpose of accumulation
- Productive labour (3): Labour of the combined/collective worker, labour that contributes to the production of surplus-value and capital

Scholars who argue that you must earn a wage for being a productive worker mostly ignore dimension (3), although the introduction of the concept of the collective worker is at the start of a crucial chapter of *Capital, Volume 1* (Marx 1867), namely chapter 16: Absolute and Relative Surplus-Value. It is not a coincidence that the most prominent definition of productive labour is part of a key chapter in Marx's main work.

There are some scholars in the digital labour debate who argue that only wage labour is productive labour and that Facebook usage and other unpaid labour can therefore not be productive labour and a form of exploitation.

The argument itself is not new and was also directed against Dallas Smythe. Michael Lebowitz (1986, 165) argues that Smythe's approach is only a "Marxist-sounding communications theory". Marxism would assume that "surplus value in capitalism is generated in the direct process of production, the process where workers (having surrendered the property rights over the disposition of their labour-power) are *compelled* to work longer than is necessary to produce the equivalent of their wage. Perhaps it is for this reason that there is hesitation in accepting the conception that audiences work, are exploited, and produce surplus value – in that it is a paradigm quite different to the Marxist paradigm" (Lebowitz 1986, 167). Media capitalists would compete "for the expenditures of competing industrial capitalists", help to "increase the commodity sales of industrial capitalists" and their profits would be "a share of the surplus value of industrial capital" (Lebowitz 1986, 169). Smythe's audience commodity approach would advance an "entirely un-Marxian argument with un-Marxian conclusions" (Lebowitz 1986, 170).

Dallas Smythe wrote his *Blindspot* article also as a criticism of this approach that ignored aspects of communication. This is evident when he says that Baran and Sweezy, in an idealist manner, reduce advertising to a form of manipulation in the sales effort and when he criticizes them for "rejecting expenses of circulation as unproductive of surplus"

(Smythe 1977, 14). Baran and Sweezy developed a theory that puts the main focus on monopolies rather than the exploitation of labour. Consequently, they reduce advertising to an unproductive attribute of monopoly – “the very offspring of monopoly capitalism” (Baran and Sweezy 1966, 122) that is one form of “surplus eaters” (127) and “merely a form of surplus absorption” (141). Smythe concluded that the “denial of the productivity of advertising is unnecessary and diversionary: a cul-de-sac derived from the pre-monopoly-capitalist stage of development, a dutiful but unsuccessful and inappropriate attempt at reconciliation with Capital” (Smythe 1977, 16).

Wage-labour fetishism disregards the complex dialectics of class societies. Marx (1867, 675) defines the wage as “a certain quantity of money that is paid for a certain quantity of labour”. Patriarchy, feudalism and slavery are not over, but continue to exist within capitalism, where these forms of exploitation are mediated with wage-labour and capitalists’ monetary profits. Wage labour-fetishists are so much fixed on the wage labour–capital relation that they exclude non-wage labour constituted in class relations from the category of exploitation. Consequently, houseworkers and slaves are for them not exploited and play a subordinated role in the proletariat or are not considered to be revolutionary at all.

Patriarchy and slavery are historical and contemporary realities of class society’s history. Dominant classes try by all means to extract as much surplus-labour as possible so that paying nothing at all by different means is a way of exploitation that they tend to foster and that is their ultimate dream as it allows maximization of their profits. Forms of unpaid labour differ qualitatively: whereas slaves are threatened by being killed if they stop to work, houseworkers in patriarchal relations are partly coerced by physical violence and partly by affective commitments and Facebook workers are coerced by the threat of missing social advantages (such as being invited to a friends’ party) and monopoly power.

The creation of a commodity’s symbolic ideology is a value-creating activity. Symbolic value establishes a link and mediates between use-value and exchange-value, it helps accomplishing the exchange, in which consumers obtain use-values and capitalists money. Wolfgang Fritz Haug (1986) speaks in this context of the commodity’s use-value promise: the sales and advertising ideology associated with a commodity promises specific positive life enhancement functions that the commodity brings with it and thereby conceals the commodity’s exchange-value behind promises.

Marx argued that the change in use-value that the transportation and communication industry brings about is the change of location of commodities: “The productive capital invested in this industry thus adds value to the products transported, partly through the value carried over from the means of transport, partly through the value added by the work of transport” (Marx 1885, 226).

The production of commodity’s symbolic value (use-value promises) takes labour-time. It is a value-producing activity. Commercial media link commodity ideologies to consumers, they “transport” ideologies to consumers. *Advertising involves informational production and transportation labour*. Advertising transport workers do not transport a commodity in physical space from A to B, rather, they organize a communication space that allows advertisers to communicate their use-value promises to potential customers. Facebook users and employees are transport workers who transport use-value promises (commodity ideologies) to potential consumers. On Facebook and other social media platforms, transportation labour is communication labour. Audiences “work to market [...] things to themselves” (Smythe 1981, 4).

4. Rent

Is rent a concept feasible for explaining the political economy of corporate social media?

Rented property, according to Marx, typically enters the capitalist production process as fixed constant capital: “I have elsewhere used the expression *‘la terre-capital’* to denote capital incorporated into the earth in this way. This is one of the categories of fixed capital” (Marx 1894, 756). For Marx (1894, 772), rented forms of property are “things that have no value in and of themselves” because they either are not “the product of labour, like land” or cannot be reproduced by labour, such as “antiques, works of art by certain masters, etc”. “Value is labour. So surplus-value cannot be earth” (Marx 1894, 954).

Leased property is a conservative type of property that does not need the constant influx of labour for its existence. A piece of land, a building, a Picasso picture, a vineyard or a lake can exist without constant labour inputs.

Some scholars argue that today profit tends to become rent (becoming-rent-of-profit): The “existence of rent is based upon forms of property and positions of power that permit the creation of scarcity and the imposition of higher prices, justified by the cost of production. Scarcity is induced in most cases by institutional artefacts, as shown

today by the policies of reinforcement of Intellectual Property Rights” (Vercellone 2010, 95).

Profit stems from the exploitation of labour; rent stems from profits or wages, but not from exploitation. Profit, therefore, cannot become identical with rent.

Some scholars argue that licensed software or other licensed knowledge is not a commodity because it does not change ownership and can therefore not be re-sold.

For Marx, the commodity is just like money not specific for capitalism, rather “[i]n themselves, money and commodities are no more capital than the means of production and subsistence are. They need to be transformed into capital” (Marx 1867, 874). Marx also speaks of labour-power as commodity, although the wage-worker owns his/her labour-power and sells it as a commodity for a wage.

“In order to become a commodity, the product must be transferred to the other person, for whom it serves as a use-value, through the medium of exchange” (Marx 1867, 131). The transfer of use-value can mean full transfer of ownership or a temporal right to access and control a use-value. Marx says that ground-rent is the prize of land “so that the earth is bought or sold just like any other commodity” (Marx 1867, 762). So also leased land is a commodity.

Compare a landowner and capitalist beer brewery: In contrast to the piece of land, there is labour involved that repeatedly produces something new – beer. A software company can make use of different commodification strategies: it can sell software licenses for limited time periods, or for unlimited usage periods, or it can sell free software whose source code can be changed, re-used and updated by the buyers.

In any case, the software is a commodity and the capitalist software firm will continuously let workers engage in labour in order to further develop and update the software’s quality so that its use-value changes qualitatively, new versions are generated that can again be sold in order to yield more profit. The decisive aspect of a capitalist software company is that it exploits labour in order to accumulate capital. A rentier, by contrast, does not exploit labour, although it sells and re-sells land as commodity for deriving rent.

Knowledge such as software is however dynamic and tends to be updated, renewed, re-worked, re-mixed, re-purposed, and combined with various services. There is also a difference between software that is sold for a one-time price or via licences that expire and must be updated after a year or another time period. A single use-12 month licence for

IBM Advanced SPSS Statistics cost in 2014 £1, 182. By buying this licence you do not buy a static piece of knowledge, but also access to technological support services over 12 months and the access to software updates. IBM's software engineers do not stop coding after they have created one version of SPSS, they rather create one version after another and many smaller updates that licensed users can access. Furthermore technological and administrative support services are offered by IBM, which is also a concrete daily expenditure of labour time. Producing use-values that are turned into profits by capitalists by selling commodities is a sufficient condition for speaking of productive labour that is exploited by capital. But software engineers also *reproduce* software code by the simple fact that they continue to write new code that improves and updates specific versions. The reproduction of software is the creation of a history of versions and updates. Software thereby becomes outdated. If you want to today use MS Word 1.0 published in 1983, you will face problems because you either need the Xenix or MS-DOS operating system that are no longer in use and you will also face file compatibility problems. If software were static and not a constantly updated dynamic commodity, then Microsoft would still sell MS Word 1.0 and IBM SPSS 1.0 that was released in 1968 when computers were large mainframes that looked like huge cupboards.

In the SPSS example, there is a base of software code that is often updated and reproduced into licensed copies stored on customers' computers. Furthermore, the license-fee paying users get access to support services. Code and services form an integrated commodity. The coding and service labour necessary for the supply of SPSS account for a specific number of working hours h per year that IBM exploits. A specific number of copies c is sold over these 12 months. One can now on the one hand argue that the total knowledge and service base has the value h and that the total profit and price is not determined by h , but diverges from value. Or one can on the other hand argue that one copy bought during these 12 months has the average value of h/c hours and that this value does not determine the price, i.e. one cannot calculate the price of a copy if one knows the annual number of invested hours. There is a divergence of value and price of knowledge commodities, but one does not need the rent concept for explaining this circumstance because Marx argued that there is "a quantitative incongruity between price and magnitude of value, i.e. the possibility that the price may diverge from the magnitude of value, is inherent in the price-form itself" (Marx 1867, 196).

Knowledge is a peculiar commodity that can quickly be copied and does not disappear by consumption, which does, however, not mean that its producers are unproductive. The software industry is an industry of a substantial size. It is odd to argue that the workers in it are unproductive and consume rather than produce value because this means that they are not exploited and are not relevant political subjects for making a revolution. This is a strange claim that sounds like only classical industrial wage workers in factories are productive, which is an old fashioned notion of class that does not help left movements to make concrete politics that improve the living conditions of workers. Software engineers and other knowledge workers tend to be highly exploited, especially because they conduct a lot of unpaid overtime. To exclude them from the proletariat is an idiosyncratic move. The notion of rent does not help us to advance a revolutionary theory of the information society.

Facebook is not a rent-seeking organization. There are several reasons why this is the case.

- A good that is rented out does not require constant production and reproduction, it can be rented out independently of labour because it does not objectify value:
The owner of a picture, a piece of land, a lake, a building, or a flat can rent out these properties independently of labour. S/he does not necessarily require labour for acquiring rent. Some goods that can be rented out can be turned into capital that is accumulated: the picture can be industrially reproduced and sold as commodity in order to accumulate ever more money. But in contrast, Facebook cannot make money if its users do not constantly use the platform and thereby produce data and attention. If all users quit Facebook, the company cannot make any profit. Without users' activities and online presence, Facebook cannot "rent out" anything in this case because it constantly requires the users' labour-usage activities in order to be able to sell something. Therefore Facebook does not rent out virtual space, but sells a commodity, in which users' attention and personal data is objectified. Users produce this commodity; Facebook exploits them and thereby accumulates capital. Facebook is not a rentier, but a capitalist company that exploits users.
- Capital accumulation requires the constant production of a commodity, surplus-value and a surplus product as well as the constant sale of this commodity at a price that is higher than the investment costs,

whereas rent-seeking does not require productive labour. Rent is a transfer of parts of profits that realise the value created by workers in capital accumulation processes:

Facebook invests money into production and constantly lets users produce data commodities in order to sell ever more advertisements and accumulate ever more capital. Facebook is first and foremost an advertising company: it lets its users produce ever more data and ever more commodities in order to accumulate ever more capital. Such a dynamic process of accumulation of use-values, surplus-labour, surplus-products, commodities and money capital cannot be found in the case of a rentier. Facebook therefore is a capitalist company, not a rentier.

- Property that is rented out to capitalists primarily enters the capital accumulation process as fixed constant capital:

A company uses its leased building or piece of land/nature as a means of production that enters the capitalist production process that results in commodities. Facebook advertisements in contrast enter the capital accumulation cycle of other companies in the realm of circulation $C'-M'$, where a specific commodity is sold. Facebook users are contemporary online equivalents of what Marx termed transport workers – their labour helps transporting use-value promises to themselves. Transport workers are productive workers who create surplus-value and are exploited.

- Renting is the rentier's sale of landed property to a renter that enables the latter's temporary access to and usage of the property:

I cannot resell my leased flat, garden or car because the state's property laws guarantee the rentier's property rights and only provide a temporary usage right to me. I can therefore only use the leased properties as means of production if I start a business and cannot directly transform it into a commodity that I resell for accumulating capital. In contrast if I buy advertising space on Facebook, I own the content that I advertise. I can therefore start a business that accumulates capital by offering social media marketing to clients. I can sell the advertising spaces on Facebook, Twitter, Google, YouTube that I acquire for this purpose to another person and can fill them with the content that the client provides to me in return for money s/he pays.

Facebook is a capitalist company, not a rent-seeking organization. What is the value of a single ad space? It is the average number of minutes that a specific user group spends on Facebook divided by the

average number of targeted ads that is presented to them during this time period.

5. Fetishism

Marxist feminists have long resisted the reduction of housework to peripheral, secondary or unproductive activities. They have argued that reproductive work in capitalism is productive labour. A few examples suffice to illustrate this circumstance, although this chapter does not allow space for a detailed discussion. Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (1972, 30) challenged the orthodox Marxist assumption that reproductive work is “outside social productivity”. In contrast, a socialist feminist position would have to argue that “domestic work produces not merely use values, but is essential to the production of surplus value” and that the “productivity of wage slavery” is “based on unwaged slavery” in the form of productive “social services which capitalist organization transforms into privatized activity, putting them on the backs of housewives” (Dalla Costa and James 1972, 31). Zillah Eisenstein (1979, 31) argues that the gender division of labour guarantees “a free labour pool” and “a cheap labour pool”.

Maria Mies (1986, 37) says that women are exploited in a triple sense: “they are exploited [...] by men and they are exploited as housewives by capital. If they are wage-workers they are also exploited as wage-workers”. Capitalist production would be based on the “*super-exploitation* of non-wage labourers (women, colonies, peasants) upon which wage labour exploitation then is possible. I define their exploitation as super-exploitation because it is not based on the appropriation (by the capitalist) of the time and labour over and above the ‘necessary’ labour time, the *surplus* labour, but of the time and labour *necessary* for people’s own survival or subsistence production. It is not compensated for by a wage” (Mies 1986, 48).

For me, there is also a historical reason why I think one should not characterize Facebook users as either unproductive or minor productive: Soviet Marxism. In the Soviet Union, the notions of productive and unproductive labour were at the heart of the calculation of national wealth. The Material Product System (MPS) was the Soviet equivalent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The MPS was introduced under Stalin in the 1920s (Árvay 1994). It only considered physical work in agriculture, industry, construction, transport, supply and trade as productive, whereas services, administration, public services, education, culture and housework were seen as unproductive work that

do not contribute to national income, but rather consume it (Noah 1965). Women had especially high employment shares in medicine (physicians, nurses), schools, light industry (e.g. textiles), child-care, culture, retail and catering (Katz 1997). The Soviet wage system privileged domains such as heavy industry, construction, energy, metalwork and mining because the MPS system considered them to contribute strongly to national wealth and productivity (Katz 1997). The feminized employment sectors just mentioned were seen as secondary and unproductive and thus had lower wage levels. A gender bias was “built into perceptions of productivity” (Katz 1997, 446). The gender division of labour and wages was “hidden behind a screen of officially proclaimed ‘equal participation in the national economy’” (Katz 1997, 446). The reality was that “the Soviet wage-structure [...] was in itself male-biased” (Katz 1997, 446).

The notion of unproductive labour has historically been used for signifying reproductive work, service work and feminized work as secondary and peripheral. It has thereby functioned as an ideological support mechanism for discrimination against women. This circumstance should caution us to be careful in whom one analytically characterises as “unproductive”, i.e. not creating surplus-value in the capitalist production process.

One should not be mistaken by the application of the rent argument to Facebook and other corporate social media: To speak of Facebook as a rent-seeking organization implies that its users are unproductive, that they do not create value, and that they are unimportant in class struggles. Approaches that say that Facebook usage is unproductive because advertising is not part of the sphere of production, but located in the sphere of circulation, also imply that users’ activities are parasitic and eat up the surplus-value created by wage workers in other parts of the economy. Some try to combine the rent-argument with the assumption that Facebook users are exploited, but the two concepts of rent and exploitation go uneasily together.

Conceptualizing somebody as unproductive is not just an analytical term, it is also a slur and quite emotive. Nobody wants to be called unproductive as it carries the connotation of being useless and parasitic. Saying that Facebook users do not create value and that Facebook is a rentier that consumes the value produced by waged workers employed by other companies politically implies that users are unimportant in class struggles in the digital age. Waged workers in the non-digital economy are seen as the true locus of power. Hence recommended political measures to be taken focus on how to organize these workers in unions, parties

or other organizations and struggles for higher wages and better wage labour conditions. Users and Facebook are seen as being outside the locus of class struggle or only as something that unions and parties can also use in wage labour struggles.

The Marxist theorist Moishe Postone argues that in capitalism, value is “abstract, general, homogeneous”, whereas use-value is “concrete, particular, material” (Postone 2003, 90). In commodity fetishism, the abstract dimension appears as natural and endless, the concrete dimension as thing without social relations (Postone 2003, 91).

In the value form capitalism’s “dialectical tension between value and use-value” is doubled in the appearance of money as abstract and the commodity as concrete (Postone 1980, 109). Commodity fetishism is a form of appearance, in which the abstract sociality of commodities is split-off from its concreteness: only the immediate concrete (the good one consumes, the money one holds in the hand) is taken as reality. Ideology is often based on the “notion that the concrete is ‘natural’” and that the “natural” is “more ‘essential’ and closer to origins” (Postone 1980, 111).

“Industrial capital then appears as the linear descendent of ‘natural’ artisanal labor”, “industrial production” appears as “a purely material, creative process” (Postone 1980, 110). Ideology separates industrial capital and industrial labour from the sphere of circulation, exchange and money that is seen as “parasitic” (Postone 1980, 110). Horkheimer and Adorno argue that “money and mind, the exponents of circulation, are [...] an image which power uses to perpetuate itself” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1944/2002, 141). In advertising, mind and money come together as exponents of circulation.

Denying that audience labour and digital labour are exploited is also a reduction of productivity to the concrete dimension of capitalism and labour – commodities that have a concrete use-value and labour that has a concrete result in the form of wages.

The theoretical denial of digital labour’s productivity is the ideological reflection of the inverse commodity fetishism (Fuchs and Sevignani 2013, Fuchs 2014) characteristic for corporate social media: The abstract status of labour and the commodity that cannot be directly experienced by the user is veiled by the pseudo-concreteness of free access to the platform, social benefits and a playful atmosphere.

Facebook creates the impression that users are free and not exploited and that the platform is a gift without commodity logic in order to maximize its users and profits. Hiding the commodity form behind the social and the gift is big business.

The claim that Facebook users eat up surplus, conduct unproductive circulation-sided activities or that Facebook is a rentier reproduce the capitalist ideology that users are not exploited, that there is no problem with capitalist social media, and that everything can continue as it is now.

6. Conclusion

My argument in this chapter has been that the concept of rent is mistaken for understanding the political economy of Facebook and that Facebook users are productive transport workers who communicate advertising ideologies that make use-value promises. Their activities are productive labour (1, 2, 3). Politics for the digital age need to consider users as political subjects. Unions, organizations of the Left and struggles are nothing that should be left to waged workers, but need to be extended to digital media users. Pirate Parties have understood this circumstance better than the orthodox wage-labour fetishistic parts of the Left, but they have not well understood that the exploitation of digital labour is connected to the commodification of the commons that include the communication commons and that as a consequence internet politics need to be connected to the critique of the political economy of capitalism as a whole. So whereas the orthodox part of the Left tends to dismiss users as politically unimportant and to neglect internet politics, Pirate Parties see users as the only political subjects.

The only feasible political way forward is to create unions and organizations of users that are connected and part of a broader political Left. To do so, the orthodox part of the Left needs to overcome its ignorance of and technophobic biases against the internet and users need to perceive themselves as being ripped off by internet companies. We need social media unions and a fusion of Pirate Parties and left-wing parties.

Some people argue that if wage-workers in classical industries go on strike, then society comes to a halt, whereas cultural workers cannot have the same effect, which would show that there are less productive, powerful and important. Raymond Williams was once asked if he did not concede that a strike of novelists and people working for “television, radio and press [...] would not be comparable to major strikes in the docks, mines or power stations. The workers in these industries have the capacity to disrupt the whole fabric of social life, so decisive is the importance of their productive activity” (Williams 1979, 354). The question implies that cultural workers are rather unimportant and unproductive. Williams answered: “After all, stoppages of electrical

power or oil would now make life impossible in the very short terms yet it is obvious enough historically that our society didn't possess them until recently, yet life could be sustained by other methods" (Williams 1979, 355). So Williams' argument is that given these activities are historical achievements of industrial societies and we know that life was possible without them, alternatives can be organized. He continued to say that if half the population were active and employed in producing and handling information, as is the case in many societies today, then "an information strike would call the maintenance of human life *in that social order* very quickly into question" (Williams 1979, 355). Williams rejects a separation of agricultural and industrial labour as primary, productive and base on the one side and information work as secondary, unproductive and superstructure on the other side. In contemporary societies both would be so important that workers going on strike could cause serious disruption.

That Facebook users are productive workers means that they have the power to bring corporate social media to a standstill. If users go on strike, then Facebook immediately loses money. If Facebook's wageworkers go on strike, the platform is still online and can be further operated for exploiting users. Users are economically powerful because they create economic value. Organizing a collective Facebook strike or shifting to alternative non-commercial platforms is a refusal of digital labour. Besides unionization and online strikes, also policy-oriented measures are feasible in order to strengthen the protection of users from capitalist exploitation. Ad block software is a tool that deactivates advertisements on the websites a user visits. It can either be used as add-on to web browsers or is automatically integrated into a browser. Using ad block software is digital class struggle: it disables Facebook and others' monetization of personal data by blocking targeted ads. Think of a legal requirement that makes ad block the standard option in all web browsers: users are empowered because commodification of data is not the standard, but an opt-in chosen by the users if they turn off the ad blocker. A useful complementary legal measure is to require all internet platforms to deactivate targeted and other forms of advertising and to make users opt-in if they want to enable such mechanisms.

One question about the Do Not Track protocol is if browsers should implement it as automatically activated or deactivated. If one assumes that users value being in control of their privacy settings, then a point can be made for an automatic activation in web browsers. Opt-in is also a stronger form of consent than opt-out. Opt-out assumes that users agree to certain data processing even if they do not really know about

it. Opt-in, on the other hand, can better guarantee that consensus is explicit, unambiguous and specific. Another issue is that the Do Not Track protocol sends information to websites that a user does not wish to be tracked. The technical task of not collecting and storing data about such a user is accomplished, however, by the website itself. If a website has commercial interest in targeting users with ads, one can imagine that it may not automatically be inclined to stop collecting data about users. Therefore if Do Not Track should have some effect, legal measures are needed that require all websites to collect no data about users for commercial purposes if they have the Do Not Track protocol activated. To enforce such a standard, adequate penalties may be needed.

The advertising industry is afraid of ad block software and similar mechanisms. This is an indication that struggles against the commercial character of media and culture need to see social media as a sphere of production, not just one of circulation. The commercial internet is not just a sphere of commodity ideologies and sales, it is also a sphere of the exploitation of labour. Those who are concerned about workers' rights therefore need to take users' realities as exploited workers serious. Exploitation is not tied to earning a wage, but extends into broad realms of society. Class struggles need to extend from factories and offices to Google, Facebook, and Twitter. The theory of digital labour is an ally of users, whereas the digital rent concept and related approaches are a slur that does not side with the interest of users and denigrates them as unproductive and unimportant in class struggles.

Notes

1. For a more in-depth discussion of these topics, please refer to *Culture and Economy in the Age of Social Media* (Fuchs 2015).
2. For a discussion of the commonalities and differences of social media's political economy in China and the West, see: Fuchs (2015, chapter 7).

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