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1

Introduction: Value and Labour in the Digital Age

Christian Fuchs and Eran Fisher

This book attempts to point our attention to contemporary transformations in capitalism by focusing on a single question: how has the process of extracting value from labour changed with the recent digitization of capitalism? This question makes two, seemingly contrasting, assumptions. One is that digital communication technologies have not transformed our society in a way that changes its underlying capitalist nature. Hence, we can and should analyse contemporary capitalism with established analytical and theoretical categories, first and foremost Marxist theory. The other is that digital communication technologies are implicated in a radical transformation in capitalism, one which requires us to re-evaluate, re-formulate, and update our Marxist categories to account for these transmutations.

Capitalism, so agree both Marxian and non-Marxian theorists, has historically been the most flexible and adaptable social system. We therefore need a flexible and adaptable theoretical framework to account for the constants and variables in the ever-changing social environments it faces.

The labour theory of value is one of the core tenets of Marx's theory of historical materialism, and of his understanding of capitalism. It is the theory that connects value to class structure, and that unveils the exploitative social relations that lay behind the prices of commodities. It is obvious, therefore, why contemporary scholars interested in Marxian theory would be keen to find out to what extent Marx's categories still stand and also to what extent they need to be modified to reflect contemporary realities.

If – as the labour theory of value would have it – the source of capital, and the motor for its accumulation is labour, and labour alone, this puts the burden on contemporary Marxian theorists to unveil the new modes by which labour is organized and subsumed to the control of

capital under the new realities of peer production, free social media, the commodification of life itself, the emergence of “playbour”, and many other empirical realities of contemporary digital capitalism.

In this introduction we first outline the background around which these questions emerge: transformations in capitalism, transformations in communication and media technology, and the intersection between the two (1). We then offer two general discussions concerning the return of Marxist theory to social science in general and to media and communication in particular (2) and a recap of Marx’s theory of value and labour (3). Lastly, we discuss how key Marxian concepts – value, productive labour, class, rent, subsumption and so forth – are revised and updated in the context of digital media, and give a brief outline of the chapters that make up this volume (4).

1. Social media, value, and labour

Recent developments in digital technology – from “social media”/“Web 2.0”, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Weibo, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Foursquare, to mobile devices – have spurred the development of new forms of production. A variety of terms have been used to describe the new production practices and new products enabled by the internet, including participatory culture, co-creation, mass collaboration, social production, commons-based peer production, mass customization, prosumption, produsage, crowdsourcing, open source, social production, user-generated content, user participation, folksonomics, wikinomics, collaborative innovation, open innovation, user innovation (see, for example, Hippel 2005; Benkler 2006; Tapscott and Williams 2006; Bruns 2008; Howe 2009; Jenkins 2009).

These terms and debates are often over-optimistic, celebratory, lacking any critical understanding of “social media” as a site of social contestation, and thereby ignoring the social problem-dimension of “*social* media”. The multiplicity of neologisms is also a symptom of a “technologicistic” outlook, which assumes that each technical innovation brings about a paradigmatic change in culture and in society and more democracy and a better society (Robins and Webster 1999). While such a multiplicity of terms attests to a phenomenology of technological innovation and diversity, it is also an analytical and theoretical liability, as it ignores some unifying coordinates underlying these forms, giving precedence to the trees over the forest.

Concurrent with this dominant approach, there have been attempts for a systematic critical analysis of new forms of online production,

digital labour and commodification on social media through the prism of the labour theory of value (see, for example, Fuchs 2014a, 2014b, 2015), as well as the ideologies that have emerged with the turn towards digital and online media (see, for example, Fisher 2010a, 2010b). Such theoretical approaches attempt to apply a unified conceptual framework in order to gain better understanding of the socio-economic foundations of digital media and the social relations, power relations and class relations on which they are founded and which they facilitate. They also help to connect these new productive practices with a long-standing theoretical tradition emerging from Marxian political economy.

In recent years, the labour theory of value has been a field of intense interest and debates, particularly in respect of the appropriateness of using Marxian concepts in the digital context. This discussion has focused on a multitude of such concepts: value, surplus-value, exploitation, class, abstract and concrete labour, alienation, commodities, the dialectic, work and labour, use- and exchange-value, general intellect, labour time, labour power, the law of value, necessary and surplus labour time, absolute and relative surplus-value production, primitive accumulation, rent, reproductive labour, formal and real subsumption of labour under capital, species-being, and social worker.

The critical conceptualization of digital labour has been approached from a variety of approaches, including Marx's theory, Dallas Smythe's theory of audience commodification, Critical Theory, Autonomous Marxism, feminist political economy and labour process theory.

This collected volume explores current interventions into the digital labour theory of value. Such interventions propose theoretical and empirical work that contributes to our understanding of Marx's labour theory of value, proposes how the nexus of labour and value are transformed under conditions of virtuality, or employ the theory in order to shed light on specific practices.

2. Marx's return and communications

Since the onset of the new global economic crisis in 2008, there has been an increased public, academic, and political interest in Marx's works. Among the books that have been published about Marx since 2008 are titles such as *Digital Labour and Karl Marx* (Fuchs 2014a), *Reading Marx in the Information Age: A Media and Communication Studies Perspective on Capital Volume 1* (Fuchs 2016), *Marx and the Political Economy of the Media* (Fuchs and Mosco 2015), *Marx in the Age of Digital Capitalism* (Fuchs and Mosco 2015), *Deciphering Capital: Marx's Capital and its Destiny*

(Callinicos 2014), *Value in Marx: The Persistence of Value in a More-than-Capitalist World* (Henderson 2013), *Karl Marx: An Intellectual Biography* (Hosfeld 2013), *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (Harvey 2013, 2010), *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* (Sperber 2013), *Capitalism: A Companion to Marx's Economy Critique* (Fornäs 2013), *Beyond Marx: Confronting Labour-History and the Concept of Labour with the Global Labour-Relations of the Twenty-First Century* (van der Linden and Roth 2013), *In Marx's Laboratory: Critical Interpretations of the Grundrisse* (Bellofiore, Starosta and Thomas 2013), *Karl Marx* (Ollman and Anderson 2012), *Marx for Today* (Musto 2012), *A Guide to Marx's Capital, Vols I–III* (Smith 2012), *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital* (Heinrich 2012), *Love and Capital: Karl and Jenny Marx and the Birth of a Revolution* (Gabriel 2011), *The Marx Dictionary* (Fraser 2011), *Why Marx Was Right* (Eagleton 2011), *Why Marx Was Wrong* (Eubank 2011), *How to Change the World: Marx and Marxism, 1840–2011* (Hobsbawm 2011), *Representing Capital: A Commentary on Volume One* (Jameson 2011), *Marx Today* (Sitton 2010), *Karl Marx and Contemporary Philosophy* (Chitty and McIvor 2009), *Zombie Capitalism: Global Capitalism and the Relevance of Marx* (Harman 2009).

Figure 1.1 shows that there was a relatively large academic article output about Marx in the period 1978–1987: 3,247 articles. The data were obtained from the social sciences citation index. One can observe a clear contraction of the output of articles that focus on Marx in the periods 1988–1997 (2,305) and 1998–2007 (1,725). Given the historical

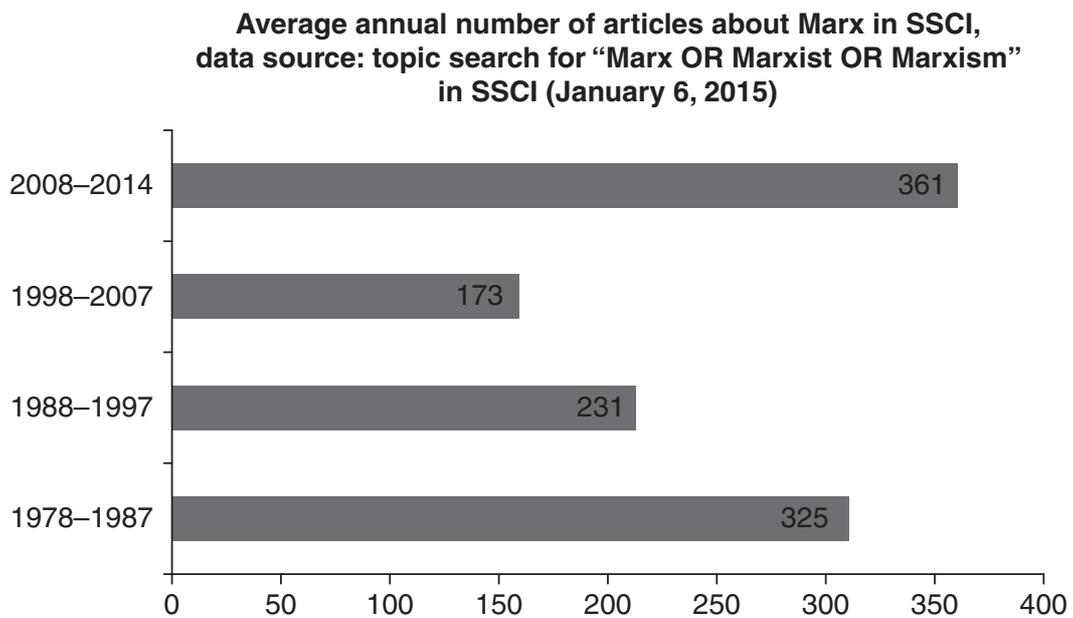


Figure 1.1 Articles published about Marx and Marxism in social sciences citation index

increase in the number of published articles, this contraction is even more severe. This period has also been the time of the intensification of neoliberalism, the commodification of everything (including public service communication in many countries), the end of the Soviet Union – an event that allowed ideologues in the West to argue for an end of history and the endlessness of capitalism – and a strong turn towards post-modernism and culturalism. One can see that the average number of annual articles published about Marxism in the period 2008–2014 (361) has increased in comparison with the periods 1998–2007 (173 per year) and 1988–1997 (239 per year). This circumstance is an empirical indicator for a renewed interest in Marx and Marxism in the social sciences as effect of the new capitalist crisis. The question is if and how this interest can be sustained and materialized in institutional transformations.

This intellectual interest in Marx, however, has not been accompanied at the political level by a substantial strengthening of left-wing parties and movements. Rather, in many countries far right, fascist, neo-Nazi, and conservative parties and groups have been strengthened and there has been a further deepening of neoliberalism. Post-crisis developments are complex, dynamic, unpredictable, and long-term in nature. The general elections held in Greece in 2015 were won by Syriza, which thereby became the only left-wing government in Europe. This development has, first and foremost, tremendous political significance because it is a symbol that governments that question neoliberalism are possible, something which can give an impetus and practical hope to the left in general. It is possible in the near future that a similar development could take place in Spain if Podemos wins the 2015 general elections. Furthermore, there is a chance that the left in other countries in a sort of domino effect is strengthened and gains new confidence.

The period since 2008 has also seen the strong growth of the interests in and the number of users of “social media” such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Weibo, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, Tumblr, Blogspot, Wordpress, Wikipedia, and so on. This reflects in part the interest of users and citizens in using the internet for networking, community maintenance, and the generation and sharing of content, and is partly an effect of the increasing shift of advertising expenditures from print to the internet. In times of capitalist crisis, targeted online advertising seems for many companies to appear as a more secure, effective and efficient investment than print advertisements, which explains that the share of online advertisement in global advertising expenditure has increased from 15.6% in 2009 to 24.8% in 2013, whereas newspapers and magazines’ combined share decreased from 32.3% to 25.2% (data source: Ofcom International Communications Market Report 2014).

Table 1.1 Number of articles in the journal *Historical Materialism* that contain certain title keywords, Vol. 14 (2006) – Vol. 22 (2014), data

Title keyword	Number of articles
Marx	41
capital	40
capitalism	37
history	31
political	30
Marxism	25
economy	24
class	23
politics	23
crisis	22
labour	21
critique	20
global	17
revolution	17
social	15
imperialism	14
American	12
historical	11
development	8
technology	2
media	1
internet	1
digital	1
communication	0
communications	0
information	0
computer	0
ICT(s)	0
cyberspace	0
web	0
WWW	0

Source: Social sciences citation index.

Although the analysis of communication from a Marxian perspective has since the start of the new world economic crisis in 2008 gained some impetus within media and communication studies (see Fuchs and Mosco 2012, 2015a, 2015b), there has been, with some exceptions, no comparable interest in any study of media, the digital, and communications within general Marxist theory and critical political economy. This becomes evident if, for example, one considers the number of times that specific keywords are mentioned in article titles in the journal *Historical Materialism* over a period of nine volumes (Table 1.1).

Historical Materialism is arguably one of the significant journals of Marxist theory. The analysis in Table 1.1 indicates that it is a journal that focuses on the Marxist critique of the economy and politics in contemporary capitalism. The subjects of media, communications, and the digital have received little attention, illustrating that 38 years after Dallas Smythe (1977) published his famous *Blindspot* article, communications remains the blind spot of Marxist theory. Marxists often consider to regard issues relating to information, communication, culture, and the digital as a mere superstructure that is not worthy of any detailed engagement. Today, however, communications is a capitalist industry of significant size and employing a significant amount of communication workers. Communication processes are at the core of the organization of any modern economic production, exchange and distribution. Communication cuts across the base/superstructure divide. We do not want to lament the fact that relatively little attention is paid to communication(s) in Marxist theory, but it is important to acknowledge the fact.

3. Marx on labour, value, productive labour, and rent

Labour is a key relational and historical category in Marx's theory. One central characteristic that Marx ascertains for labour in capitalism is its dual character as both abstract and concrete labour – that is, human activity that creates both value and use-value. He writes in *Capital, Volume 1*: “On the one hand, all labour is an expenditure of human labour-power, in the physiological sense, and it is in this quality of being equal, or abstract, human labour that it forms the value of commodities. On the other hand, all labour is an expenditure of human labour-power in a particular form and with a definite aim, and it is in this quality of being concrete useful labour that it produces use-values” (Marx 1867, 137).

Similar formulations can already be found in earlier drafts of *Capital*:

- *Grundrisse*: “In the relation of capital and labour, exchange value and use value are brought into relation; the one side (capital) initially stands opposite the other side as exchange value, and the other (labour), stands opposite capital, as use value” (Marx 1857/1858, 267–268).
- *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: “As useful activity directed to the appropriation of natural factors in one form or another, labour is a natural condition of human existence, a condition of material interchange between man and nature, quite independent of the form of society. On the other hand, the labour

which posits exchange value is a specific social form of labour” (Marx 1859, 278).

- *Economic Manuscript of 1861–1863*: “As the commodity is itself from one aspect use value, from another exchange value, so naturally must the commodity *in actu*, in the process of its origin, be a two-sided process: [on the one hand] its production as use-value, as product of useful labour, on the other hand its production as exchange value, and these two processes must only appears as two different forms of the same process, exactly as the commodity is a unity of use value and exchange value” (Marx 1861–1863, 67–68).

It is interesting to see that in these earlier drafts Marx tends to speak of the unity and opposition of use-value and exchange-value, whereas in *Capital* he stresses the duality of use-value and value that forms a dialectic, in which exchange-value emerges from and mediates the relationship of use-value and value. Labour is a relational category: It stands in a class relation to an exploiting class. The notions of concrete labour and use-values have a specific role in capitalism, but at the same time point afore and beyond capitalism because activities that create needs-satisfying goods and services exist in all economies. The distinction between concrete and abstract labour and between use-value and value can be better pinpointed in English than in German because the first allows a distinction between *work* and *labour*. In German, the term *Werktaetigkeit*, which is little used today, corresponds to the English word *work*. Both have their origin in the Indo-European term *uerg*, meaning making/doing/acting. The terms *Arbeit* in German and *labour* in English, in contrast, have their roots in the German term *arba* (slave) and the Latin word *laborem* (toil, hardship, pain), which shows that they necessarily characterize class-divided and alienated forms of human activity.

Work and labour are crucial categories for Marx. Table 1.2 shows how his original six-book plan of *Capital* can be mapped onto the actual final structure of *Capital's* three volumes. We have italicized the chapters that focus on labour and work issues.

The lines that connect Table 1.2's left and right column show how Roman Rosdolsky (1977, 56) reconstructed the way Marx transformed the original six-book plan of *Capital* into the three-volume edition (respectively four volumes if one takes into account the *Theories of Surplus Value* as an additional volume focusing on the history of classical political economy theory). Marx formulated the six-book plan in 1857 and the three-book plan in 1865 (Rosdolsky 1977, 10). He made his

Table 1.2 Mapping of the original six-volume plan of *Capital* and the final three volumes

Original plan (6 books)	<i>Capital</i> volume I–III
I. On capital	Book I: The process of production of capital
I.1 Capital in general	I.1 Commodity and money
I.1a Production process	Chapter 1: The commodity
	...
	1.2 <i>The dual character of the labour embodied in commodities</i>
	I.2 The transformation of money into capital
	...
	<i>Chapter 6: The sale and purchase of labour-power</i>
	I.3 The production of absolute surplus-value
	<i>Chapter 7: The labour process and the valorization process</i>
	...
	<i>Chapter 9: The rate of surplus-value</i>
	<i>Chapter 10: The working day</i>
	I.4 The production of relative surplus-value
	...
	<i>Chapter 14: The division of labour and manufacture</i>
	<i>Chapter 15: Machinery and large-scale industry [effects of machines on workers, struggle between worker and machine, repulsion and attraction of workers]</i>
	I.5 The production of absolute and relative surplus-value
	<i>Chapter 16: Absolute and relative surplus-value [concept of productive labour]</i>
	<i>Chapter 17: Changes of magnitude in the price of labour-power and in surplus-value</i>
	I.6 Wages
	<i>Chapter 19: Transformation of the value of labour-power into wages</i>
	<i>Chapter 20: Time-wages</i>
	<i>Chapter 21: Piece-wages</i>
	<i>Chapter 22: National differences in wages</i>
	I.7 The process of accumulation of capital
	<i>Chapter 24: The transformation of surplus-value into capital [5: labour fund]</i>

Table 1.2 (Continued)

Original plan (6 books)	<i>Capital</i> volume I–III
	<i>Chapter 25: General law of capitalist accumulation [growing demand and relative diminution of labour-power, relative surplus population]</i>
	I.8 So-called primitive accumulation <i>[double-free labour]</i>
I.1b Circulation process	Book II: The process of circulation of capital <i>Chapter 16: The turnover of variable capital</i> ... <i>Chapter 20 [7: Variable capital and surplus-value in the two departments, 10: Capital and revenue: Variable capital and wages]</i> Book III: The process of capitalist production as a whole
	III.1–3 Profit and profit rate
	<i>Chapter 5: Economy in the use of constant capital [2: Saving on the conditions of work at the workers' expense]</i>
	<i>Chapter 11: Effects of general fluctuations in wages</i>
	<i>Chapter 14: Counteracting tendencies to the law of the tendential fall in the rate of profit [intensification of labour, reduction of wages below their value]</i>
I.1c Profit and interest	III.4 Merchant's capital
I.2 Competition	III.5 Interest and credit
I.3 Credit system	III.6 Ground-rent
I.4 Share-capital	III.7 Revenues
II. On landed property	<i>Chapter 48: The trinity formula</i>
III. On wage labour	<i>Chapter 52: Classes</i>
IV. State	
V. Foreign trade	
VI. World market	

Sources: Marx and Ferdinand Lassalle, 22. February 1858, MEW 29, 551. Marx 1857/1858 (German), 188. Marx 1857/1858 (English), 264

Sources: Marx (1867, 1885, 1894)

first mention of the three-/four-book version in a letter to Engels dated 31 July 1865 (MEW Band 31, 131–133) and formulated it in greater detail in a letter to Ludwig Kugelmann dated 13 October 1866 (MEW Band 31, 533–534). Kugelmann was a friend of Marx and Engels as well as a member of the German Social Democratic Party and the International Workingmen’s Association.

In Table 1.2 we departed from Rosdolsky’s mapping of the book on wage labour. Rosdolsky maps it to *Capital, Volume I*’s Part VI (chapters 19–22), in which Marx discusses the transformation of the value of labour-power into wages, time-wages, piece-wages, and the national differences in wages. Labour, however, plays a role throughout the entire three volumes of *Capital*, especially in *Volume I*, but not just in its sixth part.

Marx’s first plan was based on the idea that bourgeois society consists of three classes – capitalists, rentiers, and labour – that should each have been the subject of an individual volume (Rosdolsky 1977, chapter IV.5), followed by three additional books – on the state, foreign trade, and the world market. The initial plan, therefore, reflected capitalism’s class structure and inner logic. The basic change was that the book on landed property became part of *Capital, Volume III*, that Book I was extended over *Capital*’s first two books, and that Marx never found the time to start work on books 4–6 and therefore began to see them as subject for a possible continuation (Rosdolsky 1977, chapter V). One cannot easily agree with Rosdolsky (1977, 53) that the “material for the third book (on wage-labour) was incorporated in the last section but one of *Volume I*”, namely section VI, where Marx deals with wages. As Table 1.2 shows, labour and wage-labour are important topics in all of *Capital, Volume I*’s eight sections.

Rosdolsky (1977, 54) argues that Marx abandoned the idea of a separate book on wage labour and an incorporation into *Volume I* in order to “create one of the necessary ‘links’ between the value-theory in *Volume I* and the theory of prices of production developed in *Volume III*”. Marx saw that although capital and labour form different classes, meaning not just that they have opposing interests, but also that they have analytically distinct qualities, they are inherently connected in a labour–capital dialectic in the production process. Marx made the dialectic of the class relation an epistemological principle and a principle of presentation in *Capital*, which explains why many chapters on capital contain sections on labour. Earlier he had formulated this dialectic in the *Grundrisse* in the following way: Capital “presupposes labour which is not capital, and presupposes that labour has become its opposite – not-labour”

(Marx 1857/1858, 288). Labour is not-capital and opposed to capital and produces capital.

Labour is not-capital because it does not own the means of production, but it is at the same time the source of and activity that creates value and general wealth. It is simultaneously both capitalism's absolute poverty and also the foundation of wealth.

"Separation of property from labour appears as the necessary law of this exchange between capital and labour. Labour posited as not-capital as such is: (1) not-objectified labour [nicht-vergegenständlichte Arbeit], conceived negatively (itself still objective; the not-objective itself in objective form). As such it is not-raw-material, not-instrument of labour, not-raw-product: labour separated from all means and objects of labour, from its entire objectivity. This living labour, existing as an abstraction from these moments of its actual reality (also, not-value); this complete denudation, purely subjective existence of labour, stripped of all objectivity. Labour as absolute poverty: poverty not as shortage, but as total exclusion of objective wealth. Or also as the existing not-value, and hence purely objective use value, existing without mediation, this objectivity can only be an objectivity not separated from the person: only an objectivity coinciding with his immediate bodily existence. Since the objectivity is purely immediate, it is just as much direct not-objectivity. In other words, not an objectivity which falls outside the immediate presence [Dasein] of the individual himself. (2) Not-objectified labour, not-value, conceived positively, or as a negativity in relation to itself, is the not-objectified, hence non-objective, i.e. subjective existence of labour itself. Labour not as an object, but as activity; not as itself value, but as the living source of value. [Namely, it is] general wealth (in contrast to capital in which it exists objectively, as reality) as the general possibility of the same, which proves itself as such in action. Thus, it is not at all contradictory, or, rather, the in-every-way mutually contradictory statements that labour is absolute poverty as object, on one side, and is, on the other side, the general possibility of wealth as subject and as activity, are reciprocally determined and follow from the essence of labour, such as it is pre-supposed by capital as its contradiction and as its contradictory being, and such as it, in turn, presupposes capital" (Marx 1857/1858, 295–296).

In *Capital*, Marx has made this dialectical relationship of capital and labour a fundamental methodological principle so that when he is discussing capital he immediately relates it to labour. Already in *Capital Volume I's* chapter 1, Marx introduces the dialectic of concrete and abstract labour, in the analysis of the commodity contained in the

chapter's second section. This corresponds to the dialectic of use-value and value with which he starts the analysis in chapter 1's section 1. Concrete labour produces the commodity's use-value and abstract labour its value. Marx bases the analysis of the commodity on two related dialectics (of the commodity and labour), i.e. a dialectic of dialectics. The distinction between these two levels can be interpreted as the commodity's dialectic of structure and agency. The dialectic of the commodity and labour is sublated in the capital form, which practically speaking, describes the capital accumulation process $M - C.. P - C' - M'$, in which capital as starting point purchases labour-power and means of production as commodities so that labour based on the commodity form produces a new commodity C' that, after the sales process, is turned into capital M' .

In chapter 6, Marx introduces a dialectic of the use-value, value, and exchange-value of labour-power. In chapter 7, he discusses the dialectic of the work process and the valorization process. In it, he conceives both the work process and valorization as a dialectic of subject and object. In chapter 9, Marx introduces the notion of the rate of surplus-value that he also terms the rate of the exploitation of labour. Parts III and IV focus on the class conflict, i.e. the relationship between capital and labour as not-capital, or labour and capital as not-labour. Here the methods of absolute surplus-value production (especially in chapter 10) and relative surplus-value production (especially in chapters 14 and 15) as well as their relation (section V, especially chapters 16 and 17) play a role. Further aspects of labour in *Capital* include, for example, the notion of the collective worker (in various parts of *Volume I*, especially chapter 16), wages (*Volume I's* section 6, chapters 19–22), surplus population (= the unemployed, *Volume I's* chapter 25), and double-free labour (*Volume I's* section 8), variable capital (especially *Volume II's* chapters 16 and 20), class conflict and the tendential fall in the profit rate (*Volume III's* chapter 14), and class relations (*Volume III's* chapters 48 and 52).

Marx did not write a separate book on labour because he realized that the dialectic of capital and labour in the class relation requires its analysis as part of the analysis of capital in general. As part of this analysis Marx also presents the various dialectics of labour. The dialectical analysis of labour that Marx in the *Grundrisse*, for example, formulated as the dialectic of labour and capital as non-labour, and capital and labour as non-capital, became in *Capital* a systematic epistemology and a method of thought and presentation that represents the actual dialectical character of capitalism.

For theorizing digital labour, especially three Marxian concepts have thus far been evoked: value, productive labour, and rent.

In the *Grundrisse*, there is only one section that is explicitly dedicated to the analysis of **value**. It appears right at the end before the manuscript breaks off (Marx 1857/1858 [English], 881–882). Value, however, repeatedly plays a role throughout the discussion of the category of capital in general in the *Grundrisse* (see, for example, 136–140 [English]). In *A Contribution to Critique of Political Economy*, Marx (1859) starts the book's analysis of capital in general with a chapter on the commodity that distinguishes between use-value and exchange-value as the two dimensions of the commodity. Marx here does not clearly discern between value and exchange-value, but gives attention to the value category. Also in the *Economic Manuscript of 1861–63*, Marx (1861–1863) speaks on numerous occasions of the commodity's "unity of use value and exchange value" (68, 80, 92) or the "unity of exchange-value and use-value". In *Capital*, Marx (1867) discusses value in Volume I's chapter 1 as forming together with use-value the two factors of the commodity. He also analyses the forms of value in the same chapter and the valorization process in chapter 7. Volume III Part 2 (The Transformation of Profit into Average Profit, chapters 8–12) focuses on the transformation of commodity-values into production prices. In the *Theories of Surplus-Value*, Marx (1862/1863) discusses how other economists conceived value and surplus-value. This includes the discussion of the Physiocrats and Adam Smith's value concepts in *Theories of Surplus Value Part 1*, those of David Ricardo and Adam Smith in *Part 2*, and the ones by Thomas Robert Malthus, Robert Torrens, James Mill, John Ramsey McCulloch, Edward Gibbon Wakefield, Patrick James Stirling, John Stuart Mill, and George Ramsay in *Part 3*.

The notion of **productive labour** is for Marx closely related to the concept of value. This connection becomes evident in *Capital, Volume I* when Marx (1867, 644) writes that the "only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus-value for the capitalist, or in other words contributes towards the self-valorization of capital". There are some passages in the *Grundrisse*, in which Marx (1857/1858, 93, 271–274, 305–306, 310, 328, 418, 494, 538, 625, 709, 716) talks about productive labour. The category of productive labour does not play an important role in the two chapters that Marx (1859) published as *A Contribution to Critique of Political Economy*. In the *Theories of Surplus-Value*, Marx (1862/1863) devoted Part 1's chapter IV to the discussion of *Theories of Productive and Unproductive Labour*, in which he considered the ideas of many earlier thinkers, including those of the Physiocrats,

the Mercantilists, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi, Charles D'Avenant, William Petty, John Stuart Mill, German Garnier, Charles Ganilh, François-Louis-Auguste Ferrier, James Maitland Lauderdale, Jean-Baptiste Say, Destutt de Tracy, Henri Storch, Nassau Senior, Pellegrino Rossi, and Thomas Chalmers. There is furthermore an addendum on *Productivity of Capital. Productive and Unproductive Labour*. Part 3 has sections discussing *Malthus on Productive Labour and Accumulation* and [Richard] *Jones' Views on Capital and the Problem of Productive and Unproductive Labour*. In the *Economic Manuscript of 1861–63*, Marx (1861–1863, 306–317) wrote a *Disgression on Productive Labour*. In the *Results of the Immediate Process of Production*, a draft that was not included in *Capital Volume 1*, Marx (1863–1865) provided a subsection titled *Productive and Unproductive Labour*. In *Capital Volume I*, chapter 16 (*Absolute and Relative Surplus-Value*) is devoted to the discussion of productive and unproductive labour. In *Capital Volume II's* (Marx 1885) chapter 6 that discusses costs of circulation and in *Capital Volume III's* (Marx 1894) Part IV (chapters 16–20) that focuses on commercial capital, the notion of productive labour plays an implicit role, but in the German original Marx makes barely any mention of the terms “produktive Arbeit” (productive labour) and “unproduktive Arbeit” (unproductive labour) in these chapters. Whereas in the *Grundrisse*, Marx had formulated some ideas on productive labour; in the *Theories of Surplus-Value* he engaged in a detailed study of classical political economy's views on this topic, which resulted as part of this work as well as in the *Economic Manuscript of 1861–63* and the *Results of the Immediate Process of Production* in the formulation of some of his own reflections on productive labour. He revised these ideas further and then chose to present his analysis of the issue in *Capital Volume I's* chapter 16 (chapter 14 in the German edition), where he also connects the idea of the collective labourer (*Gesamtarbeiter*) to the one of the productive worker (Marx 1867, 643–644).

The notions of *rent and ground-rent* are mentioned a couple of times in the *Grundrisse, A Contribution to Critique of Political Economy* and the *Economic Manuscript of 1861–63*, but there is no systematic analysis of its genesis and role in capitalism, which shows that Marx was planning a more systematic engagement with it outside of the analysis of capital in general. In Part I of the *Theories of Surplus-Value*, Marx (1862/1863) discusses Adam Smith's concept of rent (chapter III's sections 6 and 7) and in an addendum to the same work he also considered John Locke's treatment of the same matter. In part II, chapter VIII is devoted to an analysis of Johann Karl Rodbertus' theory of rent, chapters IX–XIII focus

on David Ricardo's theory of rent, chapter IV focuses on Adam Smith's concept of rent, and there is an addendum on Thomas Hopkins' views on the relationship between rent and profit. In *Capital Volume I*, Part VIII includes a discussion of the role of ground-rent in emerging capitalist societies that experienced primitive accumulation. In *Capital Volume I*, Marx mentions briefly Smith, Ricardo, and Rodbertus' concepts of rent. *Capital Volume III* contains a detailed discussion of rent in Part VI: *The Transformation of Surplus Profit into Ground-Rent* (chapters 37–47). It is here that Marx realized parts of the initially planned separate book *On Landed Property*. Marx analyses differential rent I (chapter 39), differential rent II (chapters 40–43), and absolute ground-rent (chapter 45). He also discusses monopoly rent (chapter 46) and the genesis of capitalist ground-rent (chapter 47). In chapters 48 and 49, he takes up the discussion of ground-rent again as part of the analysis of the trinity formula that relates ground-rent to profit and wages. In chapter 52, Marx distinguishes between the three modern classes of workers, capitalists, and landowners. The latter earn ground-rent. The chapter remained unfinished and therefore breaks off abruptly. It becomes evident that, for Marx's analysis of rent, *Capital Volume I* is the key work.

4. Marx, labour, value, productive labour, and rent in the digital age

This volume features 14 chapters, all of which attempt to grapple with this basic question of how the creation and extraction of value has changed in contemporary capitalism and how Marx's theory may account for that.

The book is organized into five parts, each employing the categories of Marx's labour theory of value differently, or dealing with another aspect of it.

Part I of the book, **Foundations**, presents a broad engagement with the very idea of employing Marx's labour theory of value to contemporary capitalism. In addition to this introductory chapter, it includes two more chapters. Christian Fuchs' chapter "The Digital Labour: Theory of Value and Karl Marx in the Age of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Weibo" discusses Marx's notions of labour-time, productive labour, rent, and fetishism and how to make sense of them in attempting to understand digital labour. It is in part a response to authors who claim one of the following: that users' digital labour on Facebook and other corporate social media is not exploited, but is part of the sphere of circulation of capital that only realizes, but does not create value; and/or

that users' activities are one or several of the following: unproductive, no labour at all, less productive, a consumption of value generated by paid employees in sectors and companies that advertise on social media, the realization of value generated by paid employees of social media corporations, or an expression of a system where what appears as profits are rents derived from the profits of advertisers. This approach and critique has been developed in more detail in chapter 5 of the book *Culture and Economy in the Age of Social Media* (Fuchs 2015). Fuchs argues for theorizing social media users as labourers. Against the notion that social media companies are rentiers of advertising space, and users are indeed merely using a free service and not creating value (a position held by Fraysse, this volume), Fuchs argues that they are a capitalist institution engaged in the accumulation of surplus-value based on users' exploitation. By denying the productivity of audience labour we fail to see the exploitative nature of social media companies, but also neglect to see users as a class, thus failing to see an opening for a class struggle from within digital capitalism.

The last contribution in this part is Marisol Sandoval's "The Hands and Brains of Digital Culture. Arguments for an Inclusive Approach to Cultural Labour". Sandoval offers us to rethink our basic concept of cultural labour. Contrasting the idyllic tendency to see cultural labour as merely symbolic and informational, and hence mental and immaterial, she suggests considering the full spectrum of work – including physical, manual work – sustaining the production of cultural, immaterial, digital products. All labour – however immaterial, mental, and cognitive it may be – is founded also on very material labour, which is often organized and governed by "old" industrial techniques and rationale.

Part II of the book features two chapters that approach the question of value from the angle of "Labour and Class". One of the central themes that emerges in many of the chapters is the blurring of boundaries between work and leisure, work and play, production and reproduction, production and consumption, and so forth, distinctions that were part and parcel of modernity in general and modern, industrial capitalism in particular.

In "A Contribution to a Critique of the Concept Playbour", Arwid Lund deconstructs one of the epitomes of these blurred boundaries: the notion of playbour. Lund asks the critical question of whether this is purely an ideological construct aimed at infusing images of fun, play, and self-realization into the labour process, or whether indeed the two can be fused to create an economy where play becomes productive and satisfying – both in its process and in its results. Lund dismantles

the ideological concept of “playbour”, by a careful examination and definition of the concepts playing and labouring along shared dimensions: degree of voluntariness, form of practice, historic or trans-historic character, organizing purpose, and associated feeling. Lund furthers the investigation by focusing on the character of the relation between the two categories. He sees a potential for the empowerment of labourers by demanding that playbour – ideologically – promises: freedom and open access to the commons.

In Chapter 5, “Marx in Chinese Online Space: Some Thoughts on the Labour Problem in Chinese Internet Industries”, Bingqing Xia offers an analytical review of the class position of workers in the internet industries in China. Anchored in Marxist, neo-Marxist, and Weberian conceptions of class, she argues that Chinese internet workers suffer twice: from being deprived of ownership over the means of production in the capitalist market and from their lack of political power within the power structure of state capitalism. Precariousness of digital labour, then, takes on an especially poignant flavour in the Chinese context.

Part III of the book looks at “The Labour of Internet Users”, a relatively new realm of value creation in capitalism, closely linked with the emergence of digital communication technology.

Brice Nixon too engages the question of value and labour in the digital age through a consideration of audience labour theory. In Chapter 6, “The Exploitation of Audience Labour: A Missing Perspective on Communication and Capital in the Digital Era”, Nixon upholds the necessity to analyse the forms of labour underlying cultural consumption as a particular form of digital labour. He suggests the notion of communicative capital to capture this. According to him, the main problem with contemporary scholarship on digital labour has been neglecting to account for the relationship between communicative capital and digital audience labour, a relationship that defines digital media users as consumers of meaning. Nixon then offers us a reconceptualization of digital cultural work of audience by putting together Marxist political economy and cultural studies.

If Nixon theorizes the cultural work of users, mostly as consumers, Eran Fisher seeks to highlight the production of the mundane by users. In Chapter 7, “Audience Labour on Social Media”, Fisher underlines the everyday fragments of users’ data that cannot merely be said to be collected by social media companies. Instead, he argues, we should think of social media as a platform for the production of such information. Furthermore, he describes the “social compact” between social media companies and its users as consisting of a trade-off: the exploitation

of users' labour is based on the ideological promise of social media for de-alienation through communication.

The ideological underpinnings of this arrangement are further explored in a chapter by Yuqi Na, entitled "Advertising on Social Media: The Reality behind the Ideology of 'Free Access': The Case of Chinese Social Media Platforms". Na offers us an ideology critique of the notion of free access in the context of social media platforms. Social media companies, Na argues, exploit user data as commodity and hide this purpose behind the ideologies of "free access", "connecting", and "sharing" – a phenomenon prevalent also in China. Both chapters by Fisher and Na exemplify their theoretical arguments by reference to empirical case studies: Facebook's Sponsored Stories advertising program and Chinese social media companies, respectively.

Part IV of the book, "Rent and the Commons", continues the discussion on the political economy of social media, bringing to the foreground alternative interpretations grounded in Marxist theory.

In Chapter 9, "Mapping Approaches to User Participation and Digital Labour: A Critical Perspective", Thomas Allmer, Sebastian Sevignani, and Jernej Prodnik offer an overview of critical perspectives on user-generated content, one of the key promises of new media. They identify and present two central critical conceptualizations to user-generated content in the Marxian tradition: one framing users' actions online as labour (also presented in Part III of this volume); the other revising the notion of rent to the digital age. This, they argue, is not merely a scholastic argument, but has concrete political implications: to the extent that social media involves exploitation, it places users at the centre of digital capitalism, possibly as antagonistic to contemporary class arrangements. If however, users generating content cannot be seen as part of the process of capital accumulation, then this puts them into a marginal situation.

In Chapter 10, Olivier Frayssé asks the question: "Is the Concept of Rent Relevant to a Discussion of Surplus-Value in the Digital World?" Frayssé examines the question of value creation in the digital age through the concept of rent, insisting on the polysemy of that notion. He distinguishes between different interpretations of the concept from classic political economists to Marx's notions of differential and absolute ground-rent. Frayssé suggests that the Marxian notion of rent sheds some light in the case of the underpinnings of the political economy of the internet – advertising and market research. In advertising, it brings to the fore the ability of media owners to monopolize screen-space in order to levy a "ground-rent" on the brain power, or attention,

of internet users. In market research, since the internet is a fertile ground for collective users' information, the element of rent lies in the expropriation of ground-rent by placing tracker on users' devices.

The question of where value emerges in contemporary capitalism is taken up also in a chapter by Jakob Rigi, entitled "The Demise of the Marxian Law of Value? A Critique of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri". Rigi offers a critique of Hardt and Negri's central idea that Marx's law of value no longer holds true for cognitive capitalism. In contrast, Rigi argues that while the law of value tends to be abolished by the extraction of value from the "social factory" and from the commons of knowledge and information, the emergence of immaterial labour also dramatically expanded the domain of value extraction from labour. The total global economy, he insists, is still under the sway of the law of value. Moreover, he argues that the expansion of those branches of the economy that undermine the law of value is dependent on the expansion of the law at the global level. Thus, viewed from vantage of value, capital accumulation is a contradictory process. It undermines the law partially, but expands it globally.

The final part of the book, "Productivity in Reproduction", further engages sites of production and value-creation which are relatively new and have been hitherto neglected by Marxist theory. In Chapter 12, "Devaluing Binaries: Marxist Feminism and the Value of Consumer Labour", Kylie Jarret takes the question of how consumers can be theorized to engage in value creating activity (a theme we have encountered earlier in this volume in a number of chapters) a step further by questioning the production/reproduction dichotomy with the aid of Marxist feminist theory. Jarret shows the continuity between the labour of digital media consumers and the reproductive activity of capitalism in – mostly unpaid and feminized – domestic labour. Rather than digital media technologies creating a new social reality, Jarret shows that the mobilization of unpaid labour – seen as reproductive activities – has always been part and parcel of capitalism. Where it was once mostly the purview of women in the domestic space, this kind of exploitation is more "democratized" now, exploiting the reproductive capacities of users on cyberspace. Jarret points to another important thing: this labour – being immaterial and mobilizing subjectivity itself – is simultaneously generating exchange-value, but also reproducing the subject of communicative capitalism. This has implications for the notion of audience labour exploitation (discussed by other authors in this volume), which Jarret finds misleading as parts of this work cannot be subsumed

by capital, and because these activities – for example, using social media – constitute a means by which people today realize themselves (a point made also by Fisher, this volume).

Another question central to our understanding of value creation in contemporary capitalism revolves around the control of capital over labour, or subsumption. Andrea Fumagalli takes on this question in Chapter 13, “The Concept of the Subsumption of Labour under Capital: Life Subsumption in Cognitive-Biocapitalism”. For surplus-value to be extracted, capital needs to exercise control over labour. This has been achieved in the past through *formal* and *real subsumption*, resulting in the elongation of the work day and in rendering work more efficient, respectively. But these forms of subsumption were adequate for industrial capitalism where labour took place under the strict scrutiny of capital, mostly in the factory and in the office. In contemporary capitalism, which Fumagalli dubs cognitive bio-capitalism, and is founded on knowledge and learning, a new form of subsumption emerges – *life subsumption*. Fumagalli argues that valorization in life subsumption takes place through both formal and real subsumption that, in fact, merge and feed off of each other. Furthermore, Fumagalli shows how this new regime of subsumption carries with it a new regime of governance, based on debt, precarity, and the construction of a neoliberal, entrepreneurial subject.

Lastly, in Part V of the book, Frederick H. Pitts attends to another component in the valorization process of capital, which Marx saw as marginal and in fact unproductive. In “Form-Giving Fire: Creative Industries as Marx’s ‘Work of Combustion’ and the Distinction between Productive and Unproductive Labour”, Pitts takes a closer look at the importance of circulation in the accumulation process, arguing that Marx had only hinted at, but could not have guessed, the level of work and value-creation it entails in contemporary capitalism. Pitts argues that the work of combustion, as Marx argued, i.e. moving commodities and selling them, is today central to rendering production productive, i.e. in valorizing the “productivity” of production. This approach questions many key assumptions of the labour theory of value, such as the distinction between productive and unproductive labour, arguing that the ultimate criterion for productiveness rests in exchange rather than labour, and shifting the focus to the valorization process of commodities. This reformulation accounts for, and theorizes from within Marxist theory, the central role that creative workers – engaged in the work of circulation, such as designers, advertisers, marketers, and so on – play.

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