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Marx's Value Theory: a Critical Response to Analyses of Digital Prosumption

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Revisiting Marx's value theory: a critical response to analyses of digital prosumption

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In their assessment of value creation through prosumption and other activities related to the use of digital technologies, despite significant differences, Christian Fuchs, Adam Arvidsson (and with Arvidsson, Eleanor Colleoni) misinterpret Marx's value theory. Through their analyses, a totalizing or new form of capitalism is said to have emerged but these, I argue, entail demonstrably idealist theorizations. One important outcome is that the authors occlude more than they clarify in their debates concerning value, exploitation, and the role played by digital technologies. Once we understand the precision needed to apply Marx's complex theory – including his conceptualization of 'labor power' and the distinction he makes between 'productive' and 'unproductive' labor – it becomes apparent that a more careful reading of Marx should be pursued.

In recent years some intriguing claims regarding the transformation of capitalism have been made. Through the use of digital technologies some believe that value itself is being produced in radically new ways as divisions between waged working time and other uses of time are said to have dissolved, while the distinction between labor in general and labor power (the commodity that workers sell for a wage) is being erased. One crucial implication of this remarkable (if not revolutionary) change is that an array of knowledge activities mediated through digital technologies are thought to be generating surplus value. Christian Fuchs, for one, concludes that, through prosumer labor, “an extreme form of exploitation” has emerged – a form in which people participating in everyday activities are being “infinitely exploited” (Fuchs 2010a, 191).

Through a critique of both Fuchs and two of his critics – Adam Arvidsson and Eleanor Colleoni – three points will be made in response: *first*, these authors misinterpret Marx’s value theory; *second*, their views that a totalizing or new form of capitalism has emerged are questionable; and *third*, the errors they make in reading Marx’s theory have yielded two *un*Marxist and, indeed, idealist theorizations of value. In addressing each, this paper demonstrates that the crucial distinction Marx made between production as a *process* and the *moment* of production has been occluded. Fuchs, for example, in rejecting economistic interpretations of Marx’s value theory – as in his criticisms of Arvidsson – responds by (perhaps unknowingly) embracing another extreme. For him, through unpaid prosumer labor, value now can be created in the absence of its objectified (monetary) form. By revisiting Marx’s value theory directly, in what follows the shortcomings of such perspectives are illuminated and the ongoing relevancy of Marx’s original and complex approach is affirmed in the context of our contemporary ‘information society.’

Revisiting Marx’s Value Theory

To understand how significant Fuchs’s, Arvidsson’s and Colleoni's departure from Marx is, particularly in light of their assertions concerning digital prosumption, we first need to review *Marx’s* value theory.

Most simply defined, the value of a commodity, according to Marx, is the “objectified or materialized” expression of the amount of labor that has gone into its creation (Marx 1976, 129). How, then, is this labor objectified or materialized? A common response directly relates this to labor time. However, if one factory owner employs workers to make chairs and these workers are slow, the time it takes to manufacture them will be longer than the time it takes for relatively fast workers in a competing factory to do the same job. Thus, if the value of a commodity constitutes the sum of the time it takes to make it, the identical chair made in the more time-consuming manner would be more valuable. As Marx recognized, obviously this is incorrect. But if a simple temporal perspective is not *itself* the key to understanding value, what is?

Perhaps the answer instead lies in the fact that commodities are exchanged in accordance with their relative demand and, thus, their use value to consumers. Marx rejected this also for if the value of one commodity (such as a chair) is the outcome of its use value in relation to another we become embedded in a circular explanation. If the chair is in fact valued in relation to another commodity, the value of either one -- and all commodities for that matter -- logically should add up to the sum total of such use value comparisons. Marx knew that this could not be true as, empirically, capitalism constitutes a dynamic system in which value generally *grows*.

Having rejected both a simple labor time and a relativistic use value understanding of value, Marx advances his inquiry by recognizing that there is a unique commodity in capitalist relations – a commodity that must be purchased by the capitalist to produce other commodities: *labor power*. Unlike the extraction of value in a slave or feudal society, in capitalist political economies a unique process takes place in which everyday or 'concrete' labor is transformed into this commodity. Concrete labor (the physical and/or intellectual labor we perform in the course of life itself), Marx recognizes, is qualitatively heterogeneous and embedded in the production of all sorts of things. While it is everywhere and fundamental to all productive activities, this general form of labor is not easily discernible, let alone quantifiable (how, for example, can knowledge be accurately measured?). In considering this, Marx understands the *analytical* importance of labor power, not as natural or inevitable but, instead, *as an abstraction* – a legal and economic category that is expressed and materialized through its institutionalization and sale through the wage labor contract. Unlike concrete forms of labor, abstract labor power is quantifiable, primarily in terms of its exchange value as represented through prices (using money) and it is this quantification that enables capitalists to measure and exploit something -- labor -- that is inherently *un*measurable and, formally speaking in terms of creating surplus value, *un*exploitable. *By abstracting labor into the commodity called labor power, Marx thus was able to explain value in an altogether novel way*.

Two additional (and essential) points for Marx's value theory are his insistence that it requires a distinction be made between 'productive' and 'unproductive' labor and that surplus value must be quantified in abstract monetary terms. However, he also recognized that such delineations and measurements are by themselves inadequate given the largely hidden dynamics shaping value. One way to think about this complexity is to recall that abstract (waged) labor is crucial if value is to be formally created at the point of production while *also* recognizing that the more general category of concrete labor is fundamental to the reproduction of the broader production process. This dual understanding involving labor's application as a commodity through the mediation of contracts and wages again recognizes that value itself involves both measurable and immeasurable activities and relations.

With these points in mind, the primary question that needs to be answered is not 'what is value?' but, instead, '*what determines its forms?*' (Elson 1979).

According to Marx, the "essential difference between the various economic forms of society, between, for instance, a society based on slave labour and one based on waged labour, lies only in the form in which ... surplus labour is in each case extracted from the actual producer, the labourer" (Marx 1976, 217). Unlike capitalist political economies, where the formal exploitation of labor power is the basis of producing value, in slave or feudal society there is no day-to-day sale of such a commodity. Instead, the extraction of a surplus is based on relatively *explicit* forms of domination, often involving the direct use of violence. The proletarian, unlike the slave or serf, is free to withhold his or her labor (but, of course, he/she also is compelled to enter into some form of wage labor relation given the need for money to survive).

Money, it should be underlined, plays an important role in both materializing value *and* in obscuring the relations that are "objectified or materialized" in capitalism more generally. Money, after all, also is a unique commodity. While it is produced like any other, it serves the logistical function of being the economy's "universal equivalent" (Marx 1976, ch. 2). In effect, the money commodity is relatively autonomous in that its supply is alterable (through state policies, individual hoarding, etc.) while its exchange value is not so directly influenced by demand. According to Michael Williams, value thus "is the form which social evaluation of the worth of an activity or object tendentially takes. In the abstract, value *is* pure, quantitative form, which finds its autonomous physical expression only in money" (Williams 1998, 191. Emphasis in original).

In sum, *value cannot be understood in the absence of its association with money, yet money is not value* (Elson 1979). Neither the labor process itself nor money-mediated relations (as expressions of commensurable use values) explain value. Instead, *each defines the other* and, as such, value in capitalism stems from the labor process and monetary relations being *both independent and interdependent.*

One implication is that the application of labor power itself cannot produce value. Labor power is essential, of course, in the production of commodities that have value (a value that is objectified through price) but it is not itself definable merely through references to price. Similarly, concrete labor cannot itself yield value. Instead, it is the form in which labor power is used to produce other commodities that yields value and this form is comprehensible only through the use of money. As Marx wrote, "If we say that, as values, commodities are simply congealed quantities of human labour [i.e. a relatively empiricist understanding of value] our analysis reduces them ... to the level of *abstract value*..." If, however, value is understood in the absence of its objectified (monetary) form (as in components of Fuchs, for example), the value produced in capitalist political economies is devoid of “a form of value [that is] distinct from their natural forms” (Marx 1976, 141. Emphases in original).

Before I proceed to critique Fuchs, Arvidsson and Colleoni, Marx’s conceptualization of how knowledge is related to the creation of value needs to be elaborated. In Marx, what are classified as productive *forces* directly enable the production of valuable commodities and, in this context, knowledge itself may or may not constitute such a force. Marx also was careful to avoid conflating knowledge with productive *relations*. For example, a worker’s religious beliefs may well facilitate the production process and a religious teacher may, in extraordinary circumstances, be a productive worker, but this should not be confused with religious knowledge generally or the labor of a religious instructor specifically as necessary for the production of value. In his chapter “Theories of Productive and Unproductive Labour” in *Theories of Surplus Value* (1863), Marx criticizes Henri Storch for treating “spiritual labour” (generally defined) in ways that many contemporary analysts of digital prosumption might recognize:

According to Storch, the physician produces health (but also illness), professors and writers produce enlightenment (but also obscurantism), poets, painters, etc., produce good taste (but also bad taste). ... This way of saying in fact that all these activities, these services, produce a real or imaginary use-value is repeated by later writers in order to [incorrectly] prove that they are productive workers ... , that is to say, that they directly produce ... products of material labour and consequently immediate wealth (*ibid*).

Elsewhere in *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx makes it clear that activities that merely stimulate production should not be seen to be materially productive. He cites criminal activities, as an example, and extrapolates on these:

The effects of the criminal on the development of productive power can be shown in detail. Would locks ever have reached their present degree of excellence had there been no thieves? Would the making of bank-notes have reached its present perfection had there been no forgers? ... Crime, through its constantly new methods of attack on property, constantly calls into being new methods of defence, and so is as productive as strikes for the invention of machines. And if one leaves the sphere of private crime: would the world-market ever have come into being but for national crime? Indeed, would even the nations have arisen? And hasn't the Tree of Sin been at the same time the Tree of Knowledge ever since the time of Adam? (*ibid*)

A theory of value applied to capitalism requires us to make a distinction between productive and unproductive labor. It also compels us to quantify value in abstract monetary terms, just as the capitalist does in relation to price measurements and the worker when assessing the sale of her labor power.

Digital Labor and Value

Fuchs, Arvidsson and Colleoni convey, build upon, and (in Arvidsson and Colleoni at least) reject value theories attributed to Marx. One example of this involves their mutual recognition that, because digital prosumption rarely entails some kind of monetary payment in exchange for the knowledge expended by participants, the creation of value has transcended the formal conditions laid out in Marx's theory *or* the theory itself is no longer valid. Fuchs believes that digital media capitalists are valorizing, commodifying, or monetizing (terms that the authors use interchangeably) attention, personal information, and online relationships and, as such, almost everyone is being exploited (another concept that is applied quite loosely). Arvidsson and Colleoni disagree with Fuchs on this last point for three reasons. *First*, since, for Marx, value-producing (productive) labor requires a means of quantifying worker exploitation, the absence of such formal mechanisms means that his value theory – at least in the case of digital prosumption – is not applicable. *Second*, in light of the assumed informationalization and financialization of global capitalism, Arvidsson and Colleoni argue that value creation is no longer comprehensible using Marx's focus on the moment of production (the moment that labor power is exploited and surplus value is created). For them, because capitalism today involves the exploitation of 'the general intellect' as much as (if not more than) the waged worker, Marx's nineteenth century (industrial factory-based) understanding of how value is created no longer holds. And *third*, because the realization of surplus value now takes place through "complex networks of interfirm cooperation" (Arvidsson and Colleoni 2012, 141), it is impossible to directly correspond market price with the labor time going into a commodity's production. Instead, the empirical precision that (supposedly) enabled Marx to identify how labor produces value (a precision, it should be noted, that was far more conceptual than empirical) has been eclipsed by less tangible relations characterized by affect, brand reputation, and other difficult to quantify attributes.

According to Fuchs, value-creating relations mediated through digital technologies have enabled exploitation to reach its zenith. Because “knowledge workers” (a category that appears to include most of humanity) generally are not paid to “produce or reproduce the social conditions of the existence of capital and wage labour”, the world’s “exploited class” has been universalized (Fuchs 2010b, 141). But here, in implicitly recognizing (as does Marx) that capitalist production is a process involving the inter-related moments of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption (Marx 1984), Fuchs incorrectly concludes that “all knowledge workers, unpaid and paid, are part of an exploited class” (*ibid*, 149).

In the absence of conceptualizing value and exploitation in terms of Marx's rejection of either/orisms, what remains for Fuchs is an analysis in which capital is more than just all-encompassing; exploitative capitalist relations literally are everywhere and all the time. If, however, all the time we spend engaged in digital prosumption or knowledge production (broadly defined) is exploited labor time, key categories from Marxist economics (such as socially necessary labor time – the time needed to reproduce labor power) are rendered moot. Given that a portion of the monies paid to wage earning (including knowledge) workers must cover the costs of their reproduction, the assertion that prosumers and other unwaged workers (including homeworkers, students, and parents) produce for free (as neither variable nor constant investment costs are directly associated with their labor) raises an important question – one asked by Arvidsson and Colleoni: how does this "extreme form of exploitation" take place in the absence of the remuneration needed to reproduce it? By conflating our general labor as 'knowledge workers' (involving, to repeat, the conceptual expulsion of socially necessary labor time) with the formal economic process of exploiting waged workers, economic precision is lost and generalizations abound. Indeed, if everyone who directly or indirectly produces or reproduces the social conditions of capitalist production are exploited – at least in any sense of Marx's formal understanding of exploitation – who do we include or exclude as the exploited, and why? Saying that everyone *except capitalists* are exploited (as does Fuchs) simply will not do.[1]

According to Arvidsson and Colleoni's reading of Marx, "it is difficult to apply the labor theory of value to productive practices that do not have a given price, that unfold outside of the wage relation" (2011, 265). Fuchs responds by rejecting Arvidsson and Colleoni's economistic reading of Marx. Fuchs is both correct and incorrect on this point but rather than grasping the dual nature of value – value creation as a process involving both the mobilization of concrete and abstract labor – Marx, to repeat, is thought to have focused primarily on the temporal dimension of exploitation. Arvidsson and Colleoni concur with this assumption, arguing that Marx's "basic premise is that (abstract) labor time is the only source of value and that capital thus exploits labor by paying it less than the true value of the time in which it was deployed" (137) while Fuchs recognizes that value is the objectification of this time but the role played by money in measuring and materializing it is in rapid decline. Quantifiable time, of course, is central to Marx's theory but, to repeat, Marx rejected this if used as some sort of reductionist means of evaluation. While the speed in which a commodity is made effects the surplus value produced, this value is not materialized nor realizable in the absence of its money-mediated form and, as such, the temporal dimension of value production yields part of the commodity's potential value only. Yet then to explain or define a commodity's value in terms of money-mediated exchange relations propels us into the kind of relativistic assessment that logically and empirically makes little sense in the context of capitalism's dynamic growth (as addressed at the outset).

The categories Marx uses in his explication of value, if they are to capture the complexity of what he is theorizing, thus must be understood and utilized together. Divorcing them from one another neuters his theory, opening it up totalizing interpretations (as in Fuchs) or rendering it into the conceptual relic of a different kind of capitalism (as portrayed in Arvidsson and Colleoni). Fuchs, for instance, in assuming that the objectification of value through the use of money is of little relevance in digital capitalism, is free to conclude that exploitation can take place *before* a commodity is *formally* produced (as in the garnering of personal information through social media) and that "[e]ven if a commodity is not sold ... labour has been exploited" (Fuchs 2012, 634). This position, to reiterate, in effect frames value in terms of a labor time *or* market price either/orism. It also enables Fuchs to argue that, today, both paid and "unpaid workers are productive" as "they create the commons that are exploited by capital, and are therefore part of the proletariat" (*ibid*). In this totalization of exploitative and value-creating relationships, however, the precise historical position of the knowledge worker generally and the prosumer more specifically as participants in or contributors to our contemporary political economy is obscured to the point of analytical dissolution.[2]

Applying Marx

Even if we ignore these problems it is unclear why digital capitalism and prosumption are historically or substantively new or different. Critical academics (not to mention marketers and advertisers) have known for decades that audiences of all kinds are active in the production process (Van Dijck 2009) while (pre-digital) versions of Dallas Smythe's audience commodity thesis recognized this also as marketers and advertisers have long used the creative ideas of an unpaid public. Take, for example, the annual U.S. Pillsbury Bake-Off competition, that began in 1949, in which recipes using the company's products were (and still are) submitted for judgment and their potential inclusion in a collection that is published annually (Young and Young 2010, 269). Here the unpaid prosumer consensually provides a corporation with his creative labor in the form of a recipe. Prosumption and the knowledge it yields then are used to market Pillsbury commodities. People thus labor to facilitate the production process, reducing the costs of finding new ways to use Pillsbury products and to provide the company with an effective marketing vehicle. The important point to make here is that the surplus value (and not, of course, the profit) of what Pillsbury makes remains a matter of getting more for less out of the waged workers it employs to produce the food it sells. This drive to get more for less out of waged workers and the role of prosumption in obtaining new ideas and stimulating sales seems straightforward enough yet, for Fuchs, Arvidsson and

Colleoni it is not a sufficient explanation for how value is being generated in a supposedly new kind of capitalism.

This is not to say that today's capitalism is identical to yesterday's. Obviously the means of obtaining, expropriating, and utilizing knowledge has changed in line with a complex of developments such as new competitive circumstances, technological capabilities, and modified cultural orientations. While user-generated content, advertising, and audience labor have been integral in the production process for centuries, digital communications and information processing are facilitating remarkable changes as the volume, speed, and flexibility of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption are being quantitatively and qualitatively modified. But, having stated the obvious, in the absence of evidence that transcends such expressions and appearances (particularly as Marx's original work has not been substantively falsified), it makes little sense to so fundamentally change or reject Marx's value theory, at least not in response to the arguments made by Fuchs, Arvidsson and Colleoni.

Given the complexity and precision of Marx’s theory, Fuchs, Arvidsson and Colleoni might consider different interpretations of digital prosumption and how value is being created. While surplus value remains the outcome of capital’s exploitation of waged labor, technological applications, capitalism’s enormous ongoing dependency on credit, trade agreements enabling capital to access labor and produce goods all over the world -- not to mention an almost universal curbing of organized labor -- have all facilitated the suppression of wages and the extension of corporate power in the extraction and realization of surplus value. It is this extraordinary ability to produce value on the backs and through the minds of waged workers, coupled with the ascent of the powers held by capitalists engaged in distribution and sales (including financiers, shippers, marketers, retailers, telecommunications companies, as well as internet services and social media corporations) that best explains our contemporary political economic (dis)order and, indeed, the ephemerality that Fuchs, Arvidsson and Colleoni mistake for a radically new form of capitalism. In this context, Facebook – to reference the company that is most extensively addressed by these authors – gathers, organizes, and sells user-generated content *but* the work it formally exploits, and thus the value it directly produces, is the result of its processing and packaging of this content mostly for its primary clients: advertisers and marketers.

According to Fuchs, digital media capitalists, such as the executives at Facebook, are valorizing online participants, not because users are paid a formal wage (as they are not) but, instead, because their attention, personal information, and online relationships are being commodified. Commodification, however, is not the unproblematic precursor to exploitation and value creation. To, for example, commodify a game that my son and his friends have co-created does not in and of itself mean that my child has been formally exploited (while, likewise, the teacher who used her knowledge of safe play and childhood development to supervise him is not necessarily exploited either). However, had the school paid my son and others for their time when developing the game -- implying a contract used to mediate and abstract their play into labor power -- and, then, perhaps hired me to codify the ideas and procedures needed to transform the game into something that can be exchanged using money (another necessary step if we are to eventually realize whatever surplus value has been derived from its production), then both the children and I would have been formally exploited.[3]

For capital generally, Facebook and others mediate the development of market research and efficiencies contributing to the realization of surplus values (i.e. converting production into consumption). For social media corporations more specifically, the personal and meta-data they collect is commodified by their employees whose labor power is exploited to produce the information sold (directly or indirectly) to (mostly) corporate interests who use it to pursue various commercial activities including their targeting and tailoring of online or mobile advertising. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and many others generate the vast bulk of revenue from activities that do not directly produce surplus value.

For Arvidsson and Colleoni, having rejected the contemporary relevance of Marx, value is linked to the quantification of brand reputation and the qualitative engagement of audiences and customers. Thus, they argue, "there seems to be a general tendency in the online advertising economy for affect to become objectified as a parameter for the measurement of the value of advertising space" (Arvidsson and Colleoni: 144). Facebook and others, they explain,

attract and objectify such affective investments. ... In effect, social media platforms ... function as channels by means of which affective investments on the part of the multitude can be translated into objectified forms of abstract affect that support financial valuations.

... Facebook is a utility that ... could potentially be a sort of deliberative device on which a new and perhaps more participatory "law of value" could operate (146).

While, in relation to Fuchs, this approach makes no attempt to conflate productive labor and its exploitation with (unproductive) concrete labor, Arvidsson and Colleoni replace Marx's theory with an entirely idealist explanation; one that conceptualizes value as an inter-subjective convention rather than both a relational and material process. The proof of the legitimacy of such a convention (and thus the convention's power) lies, they argue, in the ability to attract the attention of "the multitude" and investments from financial markets (146). They conclude that social media platforms play "an important part in determining the parameters of the distribution of such financial value (by enabling the affect of the multitude to be objectified into a brand, or conventions, that can justify financial valuations)" (147). Arvidsson and Colleoni thus replace Marx's value theory with one that pays scant attention to the material form of value production itself. Value, they seem to be saying, is the monetary representation -- defined, essentially, by investors -- of the engagement of audiences. While it is clear that this 'solution' generally is in keeping with Marx's recognition that value in capitalism is an abstraction, it fails to comprehend that value *also* has a material form in relation to productive labor (as they convey in turning to *inter-subjective* investment decisions as the central means of measuring it). In other words, in rejecting (or misunderstanding) the relationship between material and immaterial relations and realities, Arvidsson and Colleoni return to the kind of surface-level or illusory conceptualization of value that Marx critiqued so extensively.

Conclusion

For Marx, of course, time spent during each moment of the production process needs to be minimized. Temporal inefficiencies and gaps between the moments of production and consumption are costly, particularly in relation to the efforts of competitors to accelerate this same process. Advertisements of various kinds are almost as old as capitalism itself (Comor 2008) and resources allocated to it are justified in light of the need to increase and accelerate sales while also minimizing the costs associated with circulation. Commercial media thus developed (and continue to develop) largely in response to (or in conjunction with) improved production efficiencies. Today, advertising and marketing, as specialized service industries, are evolving in relation to the needs of all kinds of commodity producers to sell what the workers they hire produce (whether their commodities are seemingly 'material' or 'immaterial') enabling them to realize the surplus values generated in their production. Digital capitalists are paid a share of the surplus produced and materialized in the form of money.[4] As for digital prosumption, to repeat, prosumer labor has existed throughout capitalist history. The question then is not 'is prosumption new?' but, instead, 'is *digital* prosumption a *fundamentally* new means of exploiting labor power in capitalist society?' The answer to this question, at least according to a precise reading of Marx's theory and the demonstrable shortcomings of alternative positions, generally is *no*.

Too many analyses of digital prosumption engage in many of the illusions that Marx sought to redress. Arvidsson and Colleoni reject what they incorrectly assume to be

Marx’s economistic empiricism which, ironically, is the very ('bourgeois') approach that much of Marx's work critiques. Fuchs’s modification of value theory, unfortunately, is not much better, generating, as discussed above, a quite different version of the idealism that Marx criticized.

Maintaining the precision and consistency of Marx’s categories is crucial if we are to accurately use or test his theory. If, for example, as Fuchs argues, ‘free’ time or ‘living’ time (in the absence of a wage-mediated relationship) has become some kind of exploited labor time, what then is the analytical meaning of ‘free’ time or ‘living’ time or, for that matter, ‘labor’ time itself? While verifiable facts regarding digital prosumption are attainable – such as the demonstrable utilization of creativity and human know-how by capital – these do not and cannot independently disclose the dynamics and potentials of these activities. If the question of value creation is not pursued both holistically and with analytical rigor, the resulting debates are more than just unfocused – the conceptual perspectives they cultivate tend to generate more confusion than clarity. In the case of the assessments provided by Fuchs, Arvidsson and Colleoni, the essential common denominator – a proper comprehension of what Marx actually theorized – is absent and the resulting discussion, while certainly provocative, in the end impels us to revisit Marx and read his work much more carefully.

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1 In the absence of more precision, perhaps it can be argued that the knowledge expended by media and Internet capitalists – ranging from Rupert Murdoch to Mark Zuckerberg – is not exploited because they are among the few who steer prosumers/knowledge workers. Having hypothesized this, however, I still wonder what distinguishes the knowledge used to steer from the knowledge used to produce or reproduce as, surely,

when the moment of production is conflated with the production process, fundamentally, these become interchangeable. Thanks to Des Freedman for raising this point in a private correspondence.

2 If value-creating and exploitative relationships are *everywhere*, analytically they are *nowhere*. Moreover, in Fuchs, Arvidsson and Colleoni the 'moments' of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption are (correctly) assessed holistically while the ephemeral qualities of digital activities are (incorrectly) assumed to substantiate the authors general failure to treat each as being *also* analytically distinct.

3 Similarly, family news posted on a Facebook page or remarks made using Twitter concerning a new television series – even if these are culled, packaged, and sold to advertisers – are not in themselves forms of labor that produce surplus value, although they certainly are part of the more general production process (just as criminal activities inarguably are forms of labor that yield locks and other security devices which can be produced and subsequently sold as commodities bearing surplus values).

4 To reiterate, corporations and individuals providing commercial services seek profits, of course, but these profits are not necessarily (and often are not primarily) derived from their production of valuable (i.e. surplus value-laden) commodities.