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**Christian Fuchs**

Faculty of Media, Arts and Design

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# Karl Marx and the Study of Media and Culture Today

By Christian Fuchs

## Abstract

The task of this paper discusses the role of Marx in analysing media, communication and culture today. An analysis of three contemporary Cultural Studies works – Lawrence Grossberg's monograph *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, John Hartley's monograph *Digital Futures for Cultural and Media Studies* and Paul Smith's edited volume *The Renewal of Cultural Studies* – shows that there is an agreement that the economy needs to be taken more into account by Cultural Studies, but disagreement on which approach should be taken and what the role of Karl Marx's works shall be. The paper argues that Marx's labour theory of value is especially important for critically analysing the media, culture and communication. Labour is still a blind spot of the study of culture and the media, although this situation is slowly improving. It is maintained that the turn away from Marx in Cultural and Media Studies was a profound mistake that should be reverted. Only an engagement with Marx can make Cultural and Media Studies topical, politically relevant, practical and critical, in the current times of global crisis and resurgent critique.

**Keywords:** Karl Marx, Marxist theory, culture, media, capitalism.

## Introduction

- \* 'Marx makes a comeback' (*Svenska Dagbladet*, Oct 17, 2008)
- \* 'Crunch resurrects Marx' (*The Independent*, Oct 17, 2008)
- \* 'Crisis allows us to reconsider left-wing ideas' (*The Irish Times*, Oct 18, 2008)
- \* 'Marx exhumed, capitalism buried' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, Oct 23, 2008)
- \* 'Marx Renaissance' (*Korea Times*, Jan 1, 2009)
- \* 'Was Marx Right All Along?' (*The Evening Standard*, March 30, 2009).

These news clippings indicate that with the new global crisis of capitalism, a new interest in Karl Marx's works has emerged. The new world economic crisis that started in 2008 is the most obvious reason for the return of the interest in Marx. This shift is however multidimensional and has multiple causes:

- The new world economic crisis has resulted in an increasing interest in the dynamics and contradictions of capitalism and the notion of crisis.
- Neoliberalism and the precariousness of work and life can best be analysed as phenomena of class, exploitation, and commodification.
- New new social movements (the anti-corporate movement, global justice movement, Occupy movement) have an interest in questions of class.
- The financialization of the economy can be analysed with categories such as the new imperialism or fictitious capital.
- New global wars bring about an interest in the category of imperialism.
- Contemporary revolutions and rebellions (as the Arab spring) give attention to the relevance of revolution, emancipation, and liberation.
- The globalization discourse has been accompanied by discussions about global capitalism.
- The role of mediatization, ICTs, and knowledge work in contemporary capitalism was anticipated by Marx' focus on the General Intellect.
- A whole generation of precariously working university scholars and students has a certain interest in Marxian theory.

Given that the interest in Marx's works and the economic in general has today returned, the question arises which role Marx should play in the analysis of media, communication and culture and which role his works actually do play in such studies. In order to contribute to the discussion of this question, this paper discusses the role of Marx in current works of selected representatives of Cultural Studies and argues for a renewed reading and interpretation of Marx's works in the context of studying the media, communication and culture.

Section 2 contextualises the paper by briefly discussing the role of Marx in Cultural Studies. It lays the grounds for an analysis of the role of Marx in contemporary works in Cultural Studies that is accomplished in section 3 that discusses the role of Marx's theory in three books published by prominent representatives of Cultural Studies: Lawrence Grossberg's *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (section 3.1), John Hartley's *Digital Futures for Cultural and Media Studies* (section 3.2) and the collected volume *The Renewal of Cultural Studies* that features 27

contributions and was edited by Paul Smith (section 3.3). Many approaches in contemporary Cultural Studies agree that the economic has to be taken more into account, although there is no agreement on how this engagement with the economy should look like. The position taken in this paper is that the analysis of media, communication and culture requires a profound engagement with, discussion and interpretation of Karl Marx's works. Therefore, section 4 presents a possible entry point into such a debate, namely the application of Marx's labour theory of value to contemporary media. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

## Karl Marx and Cultural Studies

The works of Karl Marx had an important influence on early Cultural Studies. So for example Raymond Williams argued in one of his earliest books, *Culture & Society: 1780-1950*, that he is 'interested in Marxist theory because socialism and communism are now important' (Williams 1958: 284). Williams argued for and worked on a 'Marxist theory of culture' that recognises 'diversity and complexity', takes [account of continuity within change], allows 'for chance and certain limited autonomies', but takes 'the facts of the economic structure and the consequent social relations as the guiding string on which a culture is woven, and by following which a culture is to be understood' (Williams 1958: 269). 17 years later, Williams confirmed his deep commitment to Marxist thought: he argued that he has 'no real hesitation' to define himself as a historical materialist, if this position means demanding 'the destruction of capitalist society', 'the need to supersede' capitalist society and 'to go beyond' it 'so that a socialist society' is established (Williams 1975: 72). He wrote that Marxism that extends its scope to the totality of culture is 'a movement to which I find myself belonging and to which I am glad to belong' (Williams 1975: 76).

Edward P. Thompson argued for a Marxism that stresses human experience and culture. He defended such Marxism politically against Stalinism (Thompson 1957), theoretically on the left against Althusserian structuralism (Thompson 1978) and against the right-wing reactions against Marx led by thinkers like Leszek Kolakowski (Thompson 1973). Thompson argued that this form of Marxist thinking was present, first, in Marx's 'writings on alienation, commodity fetishism, and reification; and, second, in his notion of man, in history, continuously making over his own nature' (Thompson 1973: 165). The political perspective underlying Thompson's political and theoretical interventions is socialist humanism, a position that 'is humanist because it places once again real men and women at the centre of socialist theory and aspiration, instead of the resounding abstractions – the Party, Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, the Two Camps, the Vanguard of the Working-Class – so dear to Stalinism. It is socialist because it re-affirms the revolutionary perspectives of Communism, faith in the revolutionary potentialities

not only of the Human Race or of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat but of real men and women' (Thompson 1957: 109).

In the 1990s, a controversy between Cultural Studies and Critical Political Economy developed that culminated in an exchange between Nicholas Garnham (1995a, b) and Lawrence Grossberg (1995). The basic points of criticism are summarised in table 1. Garnham (1995a: 64) summarises the criticism of Cultural Studies by saying that the latter refuses 'to think through the implications of its own claim that the forms of subordination and their attendant cultural practices – to which cultural studies gives analytical priority – are grounded within a capitalist mode of production'. The discussion between Garnham and Grossberg is an indication that something fundamentally changed in Cultural Studies since the time Williams and Thompson had written their major works, namely a profound move away from Marx, Marxism and the analysis of culture in the context of class and capitalism.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Nicholas Garnham</b>	<b>Lawrence Grossberg</b>
The basic difference between Cultural Studies and Critical Political Economy	Political Economy sees class as the key to the structure of domination: in capitalism, non-class domination is always related to class domination Cultural Studies sees class and gender, race, etc as independent, it ignores the economy and class.	Political Economy is a form of class/economic reductionism and determinism.  Cultural Studies sees a plurality of articulated differences.
Assessment of classical Cultural Studies works	Williams, Hoggart and Thompson stressed working class culture and the struggle against capitalism	William, Hoggart and Thompson focused on practices, by which people represent themselves and the world
The analysis of production	Cultural Studies gives priority to cultural practices and ignores that they are grounded in the capitalist mode of production	Political Economy equates production with the cultural industries
The analysis of consumption	Cultural Studies focuses on cultural consumption/leisure instead of production/work/institutions	Political Economy ignores studying consumption and everyday life
The analysis of resistance in culture	Cultural Studies sees the interpretation of culture as arbitrary and always resistant, authentic, progressive	Some, but not all work in Cultural Studies celebrates popular culture as resistant. Political Economy sees people as passively manipulated cultural dupes and culture only as commodity and ideological tool. Cultural Studies says that

		institutions cannot control how people interpret culture. Cultural Studies sees consumers as active.
Truth and ethics	Cultural Studies rejects the notion of truth and therefore ethics and the quest for a just society.	Notions like truth and false consciousness are elitist.

Table 1: The controversy between Nicholas Garnham and Lawrence Grossberg

The return of Marx in contemporary academia was preceded by a disappearance of Marx. In 1990, it was announced that Stuart Hall's keynote talk at the conference 'Cultural Studies: Now and in the Future' would have the title 'The Marxist Element in Cultural Studies' (Sparks 1996: 72). The programme finally announced him as talking about 'Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies', which is also the title of the published version of the presentation (Hall 1992/1996). Hall describes in the troubled relationship of his version of Cultural Studies to Marx. He says that was never a moment 'when cultural studies and marxism represented a perfect theoretical fit' because Marx's work has 'great inadequacies': he 'did not talk about [...] culture, ideology, language, the symbolic'. A certain 'reductionism and economism' and 'Eurocentrism' would be 'intrinsic to marxism' (Hall 1992/1996: 265). Therefore 'the encounter between British cultural studies and marxism has first to be understood as the engagement with a problem' (Hall 1992/1996: 265). The 1990s and 2000s were decades of the disappearance of Marx in the humanities and social sciences in general.

Hall generalizes and constructs a homogeneity of British Cultural Studies that never existed. Whereas his own encounter with Marx may always have been troubled and at the time, when he felt more appealed by Marx's works, was mainly an encounter with Althusser's structuralism, other representatives of Cultural Studies, namely Edward P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, were much attracted by Humanist Marxism. Whereas Hall took up Althusser's work, Edward P. Thompson at the same time employed his theoretical and literary skills for writing a bitter satirical critique of Althusser from a Marxist-Humanist standpoint (Thompson 1978) and for writing a defence of Marx and Marxism against Leszek Kolakowski (Thompson 1973), a former Humanist Marxist, who published a book against Marx and Marxism (Kolakowski 2005). So the identification and depth of engagement with Marxism has definitely been different in various strands of Cultural Studies. Stuart Hall gives (against his own epistemology) a quite non-complex, non-contextualized and reductionistic reading of Cultural Studies and Marxism that too much generalizes his own experiences and worldview.

Vincent Mosco (2009) argues that Hoggart, Williams, Thompson, Willis and Hall et al. (1976) 'maintained a strong commitment to an engaged class analysis' (Mosco 2009: 233), but that later Cultural Studies became 'less than clear about

its commitment to political projects and purposes' (Mosco 2009: 229) and that it is 'hard to make the case that cultural studies has devoted much attention to labor, the activity that occupies most people's waking hours' (Mosco 2009: 214). Colin Sparks describes the relationship between Hallian Cultural Studies and Marxism as 'move towards marxism and move away from marxism' (Sparks 1996: 71). He argues that Stuart Hall's 'slow movement away from any self-identification with marxism' (Sparks 1996: 88) in the 1980s was influenced by the uptake of Ernesto Laclau's approach. The resulting 'distance between cultural studies and marxism' is for Sparks a 'retrograde move' (Sparks 1996: 98). 'Marrying' Marxism and Cultural Studies would remain 'an important and fruitful project' (Sparks 1996: 99). Ernesto Laclau has in a dialogue with Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek admitted that in postmodern approaches it is a common language game to 'transform 'class' into one more link in an enumerative chain [...] 'race, gender, ethnicity, etc. – *and* class' (Butler, Laclau & Žižek 2000: 297) and to put class deliberately as last element in the chain in order to stress its unimportance – Laclau speaks of 'deconstructing classes' (Butler, Laclau & Žižek 2000: 296). Slavoj Žižek has in this context in my opinion correctly said that Postmodernism, Cultural Studies and post-Marxism have by assuming an 'irreducible plurality of struggles' accepted 'capitalism as 'the only game in town'' and have renounced 'any real attempt to overcome the existing capitalist liberal regime' (Butler, Laclau & Žižek 2000: 95). Colin Sparks (1996: 92) holds that the Laclauian move in Cultural Studies was to 'give equal weight to each of the members of the 'holy trinity' of race, class and gender'. According to Laclau himself, the task of his approach was to deliberately ignore and downplay the importance of class in favour of other forms of power.

Given the ambivalent position of Karl Marx in Cultural Studies, the question that arises is what role for Marx and the analysis of capitalism and class Cultural Studies scholars see today and in the future. I will take up this question next.

## Cultural Studies and Karl Marx Today

I have looked at how three recent Cultural Studies books have discussed the relationship of Cultural Studies to Marx and Marxist theory. The books were published in the past three years, so all are relatively recent, and have set themselves the task to reflect on the future of Cultural Studies. This is already indicated in the titles of the three works: *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (Grossberg 2010), *Digital Futures for Cultural and Media Studies* (Hartley 2012) and *The Renewal of Cultural Studies* (Smith 2011b). Grossberg's title choice indicates that the book sets the stage for the future of Cultural Studies. Hartley goes one step further and includes a specific statement on how the future of Cultural Studies should look like in the title: he wants this field to focus on the analysis of digital media. Paul Smith's book title is also oriented on the future of Cultural Studies, but in contrast

to Grossberg and Hartley makes a quite normative statement, namely that something is wrong with Cultural Studies and that it therefore needs to be renewed.

I conducted a book title search covering the years 2010-2013 for the keyword Cultural Studies in the British Library's catalogue (date: February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013). It produced 47 results that have both words in their title and refer to the academic field named Cultural Studies. Many of these books are introductions and have titles like *Introducing Cultural Studies*, *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies*, *Cultural Studies: A Practical Introduction*, or *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture*. So most of these books are oriented on documenting specific aspects of the history of Cultural Studies, whereas only a few are concerned with assessing the current status and the potential futures of Cultural Studies. The three selected books in contrast have exactly the purpose of critically assessing the present and helping to construct the future of Cultural Studies and are therefore suited for further analysis.

The three books have in common that they see a problem in contemporary Cultural Studies and a task for the future. For Grossberg, the problem is that 'too much of the work that takes place under the sign of cultural studies has simply become too lazy' (Grossberg 2010: 2). For Hartley, the problem is that Media and Cultural Studies was founded on and would stick to a broadcasting model of the media that sees 'everyday cultural practices [...] beset on all sides by darker forces that seemed to be exploiting the pleasure-seeking consumer for quite different ends, both political and corporate' (Hartley 2012: 1). For Smith, the problem is that Cultural Studies on the one hand has always had 'this kind of residual desire for some form of political efficacy' (Ross & Smith 2011: 245), but on the other hand by its institutionalisation this desire would have 'turned into something like a phantom limb' (Ross & Smith 2011: 246). So all three books have in common that they perceive a crisis of Cultural Studies and the need to change something in this field of studies. The profound crisis of contemporary society is on the academic level accompanied by a profound crisis of Cultural Studies. This is at least the impression that one gets from reading the books of these authors, who can all be considered to be among the most influential contemporary figures in Cultural Studies.

All three books identify a future task for Cultural Studies. For Grossberg, the task is to 'construct a vision for cultural studies out of its own intellectual and political history' (Grossberg 2010: 3). His book is 'an attempt to set an agenda for cultural studies work in the present and into the future' and to 'produce a cultural studies capable of responding to the contemporary worlds and the struggle constituting them' (*ibid.*). For Hartley, the task is to reform Cultural Studies (Hartley 2012: 2) so that it takes into account digital media and the 'dialogic model of communication' (*ibid.*). The task for Paul Smith's collected volume is to 'help define a new kind of identity for cultural studies' (Smith 2011a: 2) and to give answers to the question: 'What can and should cultural studies be doing right

now?’ (Smith 2011a: 3). These tasks vary in the way they want to transform Cultural Studies, but have in common that in the situation of the crisis of Cultural Studies they want to contribute to its reconstruction.

I will here discuss the books in chronological order of publication and therefore start with Lawrence Grossberg.

### **Lawrence Grossberg: Cultural Studies in the Future Tense**

Grossberg (2010: 16) argues that Cultural Studies focuses on complexity by refusing ‘to reduce the complexity of reality to any single plane or domain of existence’, It would be ‘decidedly antireductionist’ (Grossberg 2010: 17), contextual and opposed to universalism and completeness (Grossberg 2010: 17). ‘Radical contextualism is the heart of cultural studies’ (Grossberg 2010: 20). This contextuality is expressed in the use of Stuart Hall’s concept of articulation, the ‘transformative practice or work of making, unmaking, and remaking relations and contexts, of establishing new relations out of old relations or non-relations’ (Grossberg 2010: 21). It focuses on ‘discovering the heterogeneity, the differences, the fractures, in the wholes’ (Grossberg 2010: 22). Power has ‘multiple axes and dimensions that cannot be reduced to one another’ (Grossberg 2010: 29). ‘Contexts are always in relations to other contexts, producing complex sets of multidimensional relations and connections’ (Grossberg 2010: 31). The ‘commitment to complexity, contingency, contestation, and multiplicity’ is ‘a hallmark of cultural studies’ (Grossberg 2010: 54).

Grossberg sees an important role for economics in Cultural Studies today. He argues that Cultural Studies should ‘take on and take up economic questions without falling back into forms of reductionism and essentialism’ (Grossberg 2010: 101), which logically implies that previously there was a neglect and ignorance of economic questions. Grossberg (2010: 105) argues that Cultural Studies ‘does need to take questions of economics more seriously’. He says that it should do so in a way ‘which would not reproduce the reductionism of many forms of political economy’ (Grossberg 2010: 105). Looking back on the debate between Cultural Studies and Marxist Political Economy of the Media, he says that Cultural Studies opposes ‘economic and class reductionism’ and refuses ‘to believe that the economy could define the bottom line of every account of social realities’ (Grossberg 2010: 105). Paul Smith argues in this context from within the Cultural Studies field that the claim by certain Cultural Studies scholars that Marxism is ‘reductive’ and ‘economically determinist’ (Smith 2006: 337) is a rhetoric used ‘to eschew the economic’. The result would be an ‘anarchist or nihilistic stance in relation to the object’ (Smith 2006: 338). As a result, Cultural Studies would have followed ‘numerous dead ends and crises’ and would have been held back from ‘realizing its best intellectual and political aspirations’ (Smith 2006: 339).

Grossberg’s own approach of reconciling economics and Cultural Studies starts with a discussion of Marx’s labour theory of value (Grossberg 2010: 151-165). He

argues for ‘a radically contextual theory of value and, hence, a radically contextual reading of Marx’s labor theory of value’ (Grossberg 2010: 156). Grossberg aims at decentring the value concept from the labour concept and therefore interprets it in its broader meaning as representation, desire, measure of a degree of singularity, and what is good and desirable (Grossberg 2010: 158f). He suggests a ‘general theory of value’ (Grossberg 2010: 159) that is based on the assumption of a ‘multiplicity, dispersion, and contingency of values’ (Grossberg 2010: 122) and a ‘general theory of value’ (Grossberg 2010: 159). Value would involve the production of all types of surplus so that ‘the real’ is ‘always greater than, in excess of, the actual’ (Grossberg 2010: 160). The contemporary crisis would be constituted by manifold ‘crises of commensuration’ (Grossberg 2010: 160), the inability to measure/value various differences, which would have resulted in religious, political, economic, intellectual, and financial fundamentalisms (Grossberg 2010: 167f) that demand ‘the extermination of the other’ (Grossberg 2010: 168). The financial crisis would have been caused ‘by the existence of an enormous set of financial (“toxic”) assets that cannot be commensurated – that is to say, their value cannot be calculated’ (Grossberg 2010: 167), but it would just form one of many simultaneous crises of commensuration.

The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE, now called Research Excellence Framework: REF) is an assessment of research conducted in the United Kingdom that aims at producing ‘quality profiles for each submission of research activity’ (<http://www.rae.ac.uk/>). It tries to measure the quality of research and to thereby compare and rank higher education institutions and departments. The results have implications for budget allocation. In the 2008 RAE, 45% of the submissions of Middlesex University in the ‘unit of assessment’ area of philosophy were classified as 3\* (internationally excellent) and 20% as 4\* (world-leading), which makes a total of 65% of excellent (4\* + 3\*) research. 7 institutions received better, 8 the same (including the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford) and 26 worse results. According to this assessment, philosophy at Middlesex University was very good. In April 2010, Middlesex University announced that it would close all Philosophy programmes and to terminate further recruitments in this area for ‘simply financial’ reasons and ‘based on the fact that the University believes that it may be able to generate more revenue if it shifts its resources to other subjects’<sup>1</sup>. The announcement was followed by protests, an occupation, the suspension of staff members and students, many protest letters to the university’s administration, signed by leading intellectual as e.g. Étienne Balibar, Judith Butler, David Harvey, Martha Nussbaum or Jacques Rancière, and the institutional relocation of the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy from Middlesex University to Kingston University. In 2012, no courses and research in the area of philosophy were indicated on Middlesex University’s website (see <http://www.mdx.ac.uk>; accessed on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012) – philosophy had formally ceased to exist at the

university. In 2011, Philosophy at London Metropolitan University and the University of Greenwich was facing similar debates as at Middlesex University.

Modern universities are based on an enlightenment ideal – they accumulate systematic knowledge that aims at advancing the status of human knowledge about the world as well as society. In this accumulation, universities compete with each other. Capitalist industry and governments apply the accumulated scientific knowledge, whereas the workforce and management in the modern economy apply the accumulated educational skills created by higher education. The Nobel Prize, established in 1895, is characteristic for the modern competitive assessment of knowledge and universities in the areas of chemistry, economics, literature, medicine, peace and physics. Modern universities are inherently shaped by an economic logic of accumulation, competition and ranking. At the same time, the university has also been a locus and space for the formation of counterculture, critical ideas, and political protests that question the very logic of accumulation and resulting inequalities in society at large. An important step in the institutionalization of quality assessment was the establishment of the Science Citation Index in 1960 that is today owned by a commercial publishing company – Thomson Reuters. The index originated in the natural sciences, but was later extended to cover the humanities (Arts and Humanities Index) and the Social Sciences (Social Sciences Citation Index). Nation-wide research assessments (such as the RAE) and global university rankings are more recent developments. The first RAE was conducted in 1986 under the Thatcher government. The first Times Higher Education World University Ranking was published in 2004. The Academic Ranking of World Universities has been conducted since 2003.

These phenomena are indications that economic logic is one immanent feature of the modern university system and that in neoliberal times, the economization of higher education and research has become an even stronger feature of universities. The closing of Philosophy at Middlesex University is an indication that fields, programmes, and people engaged in areas that are difficult to subsume under the logic of revenue generation and industry are prone to being dropped. In this example, the contradictions of economization became fully apparent: Although receiving very good results in one form of economization (research assessment), Philosophy at Middlesex University was closed because of another form of economization (monetary revenue): the university management thought that the department does not generate enough monetary revenue.

I have chosen this example because it shows how modern culture in general and contemporary culture in particular is shaped by economic logic. It shows that the central (moral) value of modern society is (economic) value. The ‘radical contextuality’ that Lawrence Grossberg propagates does not allow grasping the particular role that the economic logic of accumulation and money plays in modern society. It advances a peculiar kind of relativism disguised under headlines such as contextuality, multidimensionality, heterogeneity and difference. Modern so-

society definitely is complex in that it is made up of many interacting and interdependent spheres (the economy, politics, everyday life, private life, the public sphere, the media, higher education, health and care, nature, arts, entertainment, sports, etc), but there is a need for a conceptual apparatus that allows analysing the power relations between these spheres. It is unlikely that all spheres and actors in a state, phase or ‘conjunction’ of society have the same power. There are indications that the economic sphere has in capitalism always been the dominant (although not determining) sphere. A ‘radical contextualism’ results in a dualistic relativism that cannot adequately analyse power *relations* and power *distributions* (and as a consequence power struggles) and sees power as independently constituted in multiple spheres. Rejecting such a position does not mean that struggles against capitalism and domination are impossible, but that in modern society all struggles necessarily have an economic dimension that is of particular importance. It is not only important that there are multiple spheres of power, but that these spheres are *related* to each other in variable dimensions that are determined in struggles. Radical contextualism risks conceiving and analysing power as independent containers, not as power relations.

Grossberg propagates the equal importance of all societal spheres, which results in a concept of multiple values that dissolves Marxian theory into a ‘general theory of value’ and classifies all attempts to stress a particular importance and shaping role of the economic – which has in Media and Cultural Studies especially been stressed by Marxist Political Economy – as ‘economic and class reductionism’, economism, capitalocentrism, essentialism, etc. Grossberg calls for respecting ‘each other as allies’ (Grossberg 2010: 201), but at the same time continues to uphold old prejudices against Marxist Political Economy that were most fiercely expressed in the debate between him and Nicholas Garnham, in which he concluded that he ‘must decline the invitation to reconcile’ Cultural Studies and the Political Economy of Culture and the Media because ‘we don’t need a divorce because we were never married’ (Grossberg 1995: 80; see also: Garnham 1995a, b).

Grossberg calls for giving more attention to the economy in Cultural Studies. He does so himself by engaging with economics, including Marx’s labour theory of value that he introduces and dismisses with the argument that the value concept needs to be broadened in order to avoid economic reductionism and to conceive, based on Marx’s dialectic, the economy as contradictory. So he sets up a Marxist camouflage argument (the importance of contradictions) in order to dismiss Marx and the labour theory of value and instead use a relativist approach on cultural economy. Toby Miller argues in this context that Grossberg caricatures the political economy approach and asks him to ‘rethink the anti-Marxism’ because it is the ‘wrong target’ (Miller 2011: 322).

## John Hartley: Digital Futures for Cultural and Media Studies

A recent book by John Hartley represents another prominent approach that advances the idea of connecting Cultural Studies to economics. Hartley describes the emergence of a ‘dialogical model of communication’ (Hartley 2012: 2), in which ‘everyone is a producer’ (Hartley 2012: 3) and discusses the implications of this model for Media and Cultural Studies. His general argument is that with the rise of online platforms that support social networking and user-generated content production and diffusion, journalism, the public sphere, universities, the mass media, citizenship, the archive and other institutions have become more democratic because ‘people have more say in producing as well as consuming’ (Hartley 2012: 14). These developments would be advanced by the emergence of ‘consumer entrepreneurship’ (Hartley 2012: 25), social network markets (Hartley 2012: 48) and microprediction (Hartley 2012: 52).

Hartley shares with Grossberg the assessment that Cultural Studies is in crisis. It would have lost steam and adventurousness and would have gotten lost in ‘infinitely extensible micro-level’ analyses that do not ‘pay enough attention to the macro level’ (Hartley 2012: 28). Like Grossberg, Hartley ascertains that Cultural Studies ‘has not enjoyed a sustained dialogue with economics’ and has ‘remained aloof from the turbulent changes *within* economics’ (Hartley 2012: 35).

Hartley acknowledges that Marxist Political Economy has given attention to the economics of culture (he mentions Chomsky, Garnham, Miller, Schiller; Hartley 2012, 35), but claims that this approach ‘was too challenging, knowing what was wrong in advance’ (Hartley 2012: 46) and assumes ‘single-cause determinations of entire systems’ (Hartley 2012: 55).

Hartley’s version of introducing economics into Cultural Studies is called ‘Cultural Science 2.0’ and wants to achieve this aim by using evolutionary economics. It stresses that value in the cultural industries today emerges dynamically from the co-creativity of citizens and users in social networks. Hartley metaphorically uses the language of evolutionary systems-, complexity- and self-organization-theory, but fails to systematically apply concepts of this theory approach (such as control parameters, critical values, fluctuations, feedback loops, circular causality, non-linearity, bifurcation, autopoiesis, order out of chaos, emergence, openness, symmetry breaking, synergism, unpredictability, etc) to the Internet (for a different approach that is critical in intention see: Fuchs 2008). Hartley also does not seriously engage with the fact that thinkers like Friedrich August Hayek (the concept of spontaneous order) and Niklas Luhmann (the concepts of functional differentiation and self-reference) have used the language of self-organization and complexity for ideologically legitimizing neo-liberalism (see Fuchs 2008: chapters 2 and 3). Hartley (2012: 57) only briefly asks if his approach is ‘stalking horses for neo-liberalism’. He has a negative answer to this question, grounded in the fact that also Adbusters magazine once referred positively to evolutionary economics. Just

like with one of Hartley's (2005) earlier works, one gets the impression that *Digital Futures for Cultural and Media Studies* is 'a Powerpoint presentation by a management consultant' that has the goal 'to nourish the entrepreneurial self' (McGuigan 2006: 373).

Hartley says that cultural analysis has been shaped on the one hand by an approach that is "critical" in the Williams/Hall tradition and a romantic approach represented by the 'Fiske/Hartley' tradition that propagates 'as widely as possible the emancipationist potential of participatory media' (Hartley 2012: 182). The opposition of critical and romantic logically implies that Hartley considers his own approach as being uncritical. Consequently, he propagates staying in the romantic tradition and that Cultural Studies turns 'from "critique" as a method to *evolution* as a methodological goal' (Hartley 2012: 183). The focus on evolution shall according to Hartley substitute a focus on critical studies. He argues for what one could term Uncritical Evolutionary Cultural Studies.

Hartley's bottom line is that the Internet is a self-organizing network, in which 'everyone is networked with everyone else' (Hartley 2012: 196) and that this system constitutes a new source of democracy and dialogic communication. He does not take into account the simple counter-argument that not everybody has access to this 'democratic self-organizing network': 32.7% of the world population and only 13.5% of all Africans had access to the Internet in August 2012 (data source: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>, accessed on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012). Nor does he take into account the argument that on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube etc some, especially large companies, established political actors and celebrities, are 'more equal' than others, have more views, clicks, friends, connections, etc., which reflects the actual power inequalities of society (for a detailed form of this argument, see: Fuchs 2011: chapter 7; Fuchs 2014b).

Hartley (2012: 56) mentions that social network markets may have hubs and be dominated by elites, but this analysis is not systematically connected to power inequalities in society. It rather seems that Hartley assumes that such markets are nonetheless a realm of democracy because many have communicative tools available that can, if they are lucky and hard working, enable them to become part of this elite, at least for a short time. This logic is at the heart of neo-liberalism's stress on performance, individualism and personal responsibility for success, failures and downfall.

Hartley shows no sympathy with the outcasts and exploits of the social media age, people like Tian Yu, a Foxconn worker, who in 2010 at the age of 17 attempted suicide by jumping from a building because he could no longer stand the bad working conditions in the factory that produces among other gadgets iPods and iPads, and as a result is now paralyzed from the waist down, or the children, who as slaves extract 'conflict minerals' such as cassiterite, wolframite, coltan, gold, tungsten, tantalum or tin in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo that are used as raw materials for the production of ICTs. Such stories are not only

missing in Hartley's account of contemporary digital media, he rather speaks the language and conveys the same messages as business manifestos that claim that there is an emergence of 'a new economic democracy' (Tapscott & Williams 2007: 15) in times of high socio-economic inequality and youth unemployment and thereby represent the interests of the owners of the likes of Facebook and Google.

Paul Smith has edited a collected volume that also discusses, among other things, the relationship of Cultural Studies and economics.

### **Paul Smith: The Renewal of Cultural Studies**

*The Renewal of Cultural Studies* is a collection edited by Paul Smith (2011b) that features 27 contributions. Most of the contributors share with Grossberg and Hartley the conviction that the economic needs to be taken serious by Cultural Studies and has in the past too often been neglected. But there is a profound difference between this volume and the books by Grossberg and Hartley, namely the relationship to Marx and Critical Political Economy. Smith holds that 'British cultural studies is a narrative of ever-increasing suspicion of Marxist thinking' (Smith 2011a: 5). Cultural Studies has 'an extreme desire not to be seen as Marxist' (Ross & Smith 2011: 252). The result would have been an 'increasing irrelevance of cultural studies' practice' (Couldry 2011: 10). Paul Smith argues that Cultural Studies has become politically irrelevant and is therefore like a 'phantom limb' (Ross & Smith 2011: 246). In the introduction, Smith (2011a) asks the question what Cultural Studies should be doing right now. An answer that he suggests and that many of the contributors in the volume share is that 'an increased attention to political economy is a sine qua non for a revived cultural studies' (Smith 2011a: 6).

Almost all the authors in Smith's collected volume share the insight that Cultural Studies has ignored labour and the economic and has to take it seriously. So for example Andrew Ross says: 'Whether or not this is a reductive narrative, it's clear that labor, work, and the politics of the workplace have been constantly neglected' in Cultural Studies (Ross & Smith 2011: 252). Nick Couldry supports this view:

After three decades of neoliberal discourse and a particular version of globalization based on inequality, exclusion, and market fundamentalism, the issue of labor foregrounded by [Andrew] Ross is clearly central. It is difficult to imagine any meaningful 'project' of cultural studies – understood politically and socially – that does not address the broader questions of how people experience the economy and society in which they work (or seek work), perhaps vote, and certainly consume (Couldry 2011: 10f).

Vincent Mosco (2011a: 230) argues that 'labor remains the blind spot of communication and cultural studies' and that therefore 'labor needs to be placed high on the agenda or projects for the renewal of cultural studies'. S. Charusheela (2011:

177) says that it ‘is a perennial claim that cultural studies does not pay enough attention to economy’.

Given this analysis, many contributors in Smith’s (2011) volume hold that Cultural Studies should explicitly re-orient itself as Marxist Cultural Studies that works based on Marxist theory, the analysis of labour and class and Critical Political Economy. So for example, Max Gulias (2011) argues that Cultural Studies needs a Marxist methodology, which would require ‘to revisit Marxist labor theory’, but much ‘non-Marxist cultural studies’ would stay preoccupied with the sign systems constituted by consumer-spectators and disregard the labour of humans in capitalism (Gulias 2011: 149). Randy Martin (2011) argues that financialization is a key topic for renewing Cultural Studies and grounding it in Marxism. Marcus Breen says that in the era of neoliberalism and capitalist crisis, for Cultural Studies ‘the time has come to reassert the primacy of political economy, by rearticulating economy with culture instead of pretending that some sort of indeterminacy will magically give cultural studies credibility’ (Breen 2011: 208).

The impression that one gets from the books by Grossberg, Hartley and Smith is that paradoxically the crisis of capitalism is accompanied by a crisis of Cultural Studies. At the same time, there are indications for a renewal of Marxism in one strand of Cultural Studies. The implication is that the time is ripe for taking Marx serious, reading Marx, using Marx for thinking about media, communication, and culture, to introduce Marx and Marxism to students, and especially to institutionalize Marx and Marxist studies in the courses about media, communication and culture taught at universities as well as in the research conducted and the projects applied for and funded. It is time to no longer introduce students to small excerpts from Marx and Engels as (alleged) examples of economic reductionism, but to rather read together with them full works of Marx and Engels, such as *Capital*, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, *Grundrisse*, *The German Ideology*, *The Communist Manifesto*, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, *The Holy Family*, *The Class Struggle in France*, *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, *The Civil War in France*, *Dialectics of Nature*, the articles published in *Rheinische Zeitung*, etc. Marx is too often seen and treated as the outside and outsider of the study of media, communication and culture. It is time that he takes central stage, which requires resources, institutions, positions – and therefore the struggle to change academia.

Smith’s (2011b) book shows that besides the class/labour-relativist approach of Grossberg and the celebratory approach of Hartley, there is also a true interest in Marx and the notions of class and labour in Cultural Studies. Speaking about Cultural Studies, Toby Miller (2010: 99) notes that although labour ‘is central to humanity’, it is overall ‘largely absent from our field’. He argues that in the cultural industries, a cognitariat has emerged that has ‘high levels of educational attainment, and great facility with cultural technologies and genres’ and is facing conditions of ‘flexible production and ideologies of “freedom”’ (Miller 2010: 98). He

therefore suggests the equation: culture + labour = precariat. Andrew Ross (2008, 2009) in a similar vein stresses the role of precarious labour in the cultural industries. Creativity would for many come ‘at a heavy sacrificial cost – longer hours in pursuit of the satisfying finish, price discounts in return for aesthetic recognition, self-exploitation in response to the gift of autonomy, and dispensability in exchange for flexibility’ (Ross 2008: 34). Employees in the IT industry would often describe their workplaces as ‘high-tech sweatshops’ (Ross 2008: 43, for related work see for example: Gill, 2002, 2006; Maxwell 2001, Maxwell & Miller 2005/2006, ). Such engagement with labour and class within Cultural Studies complements the concern within the Political Economy of the Media and Communication with issues relating to class, exploitation, value and labour in the context of the media, culture and communication that have been strongly inspired by Karl Marx’s works (see for example: Huws 2003; McKercher & Mosco 2006, 2007; Mosco & McKercher 2008; Burston, Dyer-Witheford & Hearn 2010; Mosco, McKercher & Huws 2010; Mosco 2011b; Fuchs & Mosco 2012).

The problem of Cultural Studies is, as Robert Babe says, that its ‘poststructuralist turn [...] instigated the separation’ (Babe 2009: 9) from economics. A reintegration requires first and foremost ‘setting aside poststructuralist cultural studies’ (Babe 2009: 196) and seriously engaging with Marx and Marxism. Engaging with Marx for understanding the media and culture requires an engagement with the concepts of labour and value.

## Media, Communication and Marx’s Labour Theory of Value

Media contents and media technologies do not come out of nowhere. They are objectifications of the labour of human beings working under certain conditions. Neither these human beings nor their working conditions are generally visible to media users. There is a certain difference in media content production because journalists’ names and faces are most of the time known to the public, whereas the work of camera operators, cutters, designers, paper workers, etc. rather remains invisible. There is another significant difference in user-generated online content where the conditions of production are known to oneself and can be communicated to others. Nonetheless, the production of media content and technologies is a complex process that involves a lot of different forms of work that are to a certain degree not immediately visible and are hidden inside of things and artefacts.

Why are labour, capitalism and class important topics? The recent global crisis of capitalism has shown that class relations, precarious labour and unemployment are important aspects of contemporary capitalism. The gaps between the rich and the poor, between wage levels and profits and between the hours worked by those who have jobs and the number of unemployed people have vastly increased in the past decades in many countries. The unemployment rate of young people aged less than 25 years was 22.9% in the 27 EU countries in 2012 with particularly

high rates of around 50% in Greece and Spain (data source: Eurostat). At the same time, the average working hours per week are well above 40 hours for those who have full-time jobs (data source: Eurostat). Being a highly skilled knowledge worker with university education does not necessarily solve the problem: In the third quarter of 2012, 19% of EU citizens aged less than 25 who have attended a university were unemployed (data source: Eurostat). The unemployment rate of this sector of society was 53.2% in Greece and 39.5% in Spain (data source: Eurostat). The crisis of capitalism has to do with the deepening of class inequality. From 1995 to 2011, the wage share, i.e. the share of the wage sum in the gross domestic product, decreased from 74.3% in 1975 to 66.3% in 2014 (data source: AMECO – Annual Macro-Economic Database). This is an indication that wages have been relatively falling, which has resulted in rising profits. The economy matters and is an important context for studying media, communication, culture and digital media.

Nicholas Garnham argued in 1990 that ‘the bibliography on the producers of culture is scandalously empty’ (Garnham 1990: 12) and that there is a focus on the analysis of media barons and their companies. Ten years later, he saw this problem as persisting: ‘The problem of media producers has been neglected in recent media and cultural studies – indeed in social theory generally – because of the general linguistic turn and the supposed death of the author that has accompanied it. If the author does not exist or has no intentional power, why study her or him?’ (Garnham 2000a: 84). Again ten years later, Vincent Mosco (2011: 230) argued that ‘labour remains the blind spot of communication and cultural studies’ and that therefore ‘labour needs to be placed high on the agenda or projects for the renewal of cultural studies’. A particular problem of contemporary Media and Communication Studies is the strong focus on the capital-side of the creative and cultural economy and the neglect of the labour side.

In recent years, the situation has however improved and communication labour has become the subject of a significant number of critical studies. A number of scholars has conducted important work for trying to overcome the labour blind-spot of Media and Communication Studies. Vincent Mosco and Catherine McKercher have edited a series of collections about communicative labour (McKercher & Mosco 2006, 2007; Mosco, McKercher & Huws 2010) as well as a monograph (Mosco & McKercher 2008). A number of conferences has contributed to the emergence of a discourse on digital labour: ‘Digital Labour: Workers, Authors, Citizens’ (Western University, London, Ontario, Canada, October 16-18, 2009, see <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/digitallabour/>, Burston, Dyer-Witheford & Hearn 2011), ‘The Internet as Playground and Factory’ (New York, New School, November 12-14, 2009, see <http://digitallabor.org/>, Scholz 2013), and ‘The 4<sup>th</sup> ICTs and Society Conference: Critique, Democracy and Philosophy in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Information Society. Towards Critical Theories of Social Media’ (Uppsala University, Sweden, May 2-4, 2012, Fuchs and Sandoval 2014, Fuchs 2012a, b). The

journal *tripleC* has increasingly moved towards publishing Marxist works on digital media and informational capitalism, as the special issue ‘Marx is back – The importance of Marxist theory and research for Critical Communication Studies today’ (Fuchs & Mosco 2012) that featured 30 articles on more than 500 pages. The EU COST Action IS1202 ‘Dynamics of Virtual Work’ (2012-2016, <http://dynamicsofvirtualwork.com/>) points out the need to refocus the study of the creative and cultural economy on issues such as the global division of labour in this industry, the working conditions involved in the global ICT value chain, precarious cultural labour, the problem of ‘free’ digital labour and challenges to theorising digital labour’s value-creation, the challenge of prosumption (productive consumption) and playbour (play labour) for knowledge work, policy perspectives on virtual work (the role of trade unions, watchdog and civil society projects such as MakeITFair, policy problems and challenges for the regulation of virtual work, etc.) and occupational identities in knowledge work.

Examples of studies that have analysed labour in the value chain of media production include the analysis of flexible labour in Silicon Valley (Benner 2002), toxic work places in Silicon Valley’s ICT manufacturing industry (Pellow & Park 2002), value creation in the media industries (Bolin 2011), the unpaid digital labour of users (Fuchs 2010; Burston, Dyer-Witheford & Hearn 2011; Scholz 2013), labour and labour resistance in the ICT manufacturing industry in China (Zhao 2007, 2008, 2010; Qiu 2009; Hong 2011), the proletarianisation of knowledge workers (Huws 2003), software engineering in India (Ilavarasan 2007, 2008; Upadhyay & Vasavi 2008), precarious working conditions in the knowledge industries (Ross 2009), African slave work performed in the extraction of ‘conflict minerals’ needed for ICTs (Nest 2011). In addition, a kind of activist scholarship has developed that fostered by civil society organisations such as China Labor Watch (<http://www.chinalaborwatch.org/>), Finnwatch ([www.finnwatch.org/](http://www.finnwatch.org/)), SACOM – Students & Scholars against Corporate Misbehaviour ([sacom.hk](http://sacom.hk)), SOMO – Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations ([http://somo.nl/](http://somo.nl)), Swedwatch (<http://www.swedwatch.org>) and projects like MakeITFair (<http://makeitfair.org>). This kind of scholarship has e.g. produced empirical research reports on conflict minerals in the ICT industry (Finnwatch 2007; SOMO 2007; Swedwatch 2007; Finnwatch & Swedwatch 2010) and working conditions at Foxconn in the production of iPhones and iPads (SACOM 2010, 2011a, b, 2012).

If labour, class and capitalism matter for studying media, culture and communication, then a theoretical approach is needed that can guide the analysis. The most well-suited approach is in this context Marx’s labour theory of value. But why exactly Marx’s labour theory and not another theory of labour? In Christian philosophy, the existence of alienated labour and class relations was always considered as being God-given. In classical political economy, the idea of the God-given nature of toil and poverty was given up and class relations were conceived

as social relations. This relation was however considered as being necessary for progress, its potential sublation was not seen as a historical potential enabled by the development of the productive forces. Classical political economy ignored to clarify its claim that the current state of the capitalist mode of production is eternal. As a consequence, it saw the form of labour that exists in capitalism and that is characterised by a division of labour, private property and class relations, as eternal and naturalised it thereby. In contrast, Marx was critical of such views. Therefore his approach is a critique of political economy and not only a contribution to political economy. Marx was the first author who described the historical character of work as crucial point for understanding political economy (Marx 1867/1990: 131f). When discussing what work and labour are, Marx offers the most thorough analysis that is available. In encyclopaedias and dictionaries of economics, entries such as labour, labour power, labour process or labour theory are therefore often predominantly associated with Marx and Marxist theory (see e.g. the corresponding entries in Eatwell, Milgate & Newman 1987).

What is the Marxian labour theory of value about? It is a theory that assumes that labour and labour time are crucial factors of capitalism. Abstract human labour is the substance of value; it is a common characteristic of commodities. The value of a commodity is the average labour time that is needed for producing it. Labour time is the measure of value. Value has both a substance and a magnitude and is in these characteristics connected to human labour and labour time. Value is a ‘social system, which is common’ to all commodities, ‘the common factor’ in the exchange relation (Marx 1867/1990: 128). ‘A use-value, or useful article, therefore, has value only because abstract human labour is objectified [*vergegenständlicht*] or materialized in it’ (Marx 1867/1990: 129). The values of commodities are ‘determined by their cost of production, in other words by the labour time required to produce them’ (Marx 1867/1990: 137). The magnitude of value is measured ‘by means of the quantity of the ‘value-forming substance’, the labour, contained in the article. This quantity is measured by its duration, and the labour-time is itself measured on the particular scale of hours, days, etc’ (Marx 1867/1990: 129). To be precise, socially necessary labour is the substance of value: ‘Socially necessary labour-time is the labour-time required to produce any use-value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society. [...] What exclusively determines the magnitude of the value of any article is therefore the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour-time socially necessary for its production’ (Marx 1867/1990: 129). ‘The value of commodities as determined by labour time is only their *average value*’ (Marx 1858/1993: 137). ‘If we consider *commodities as values*, we consider them exclusively under the single aspect of *realized, fixed, or, if you like, crystallized social labour*’ (Marx 1865). Socially necessary labour determines an average commodity value that ‘is to be viewed on

the one hand as the average value of the commodities produced in a particular sphere' (Marx 1894/1991: 279).

Every commodity has an individual value (production time). What counts on the market and in the industry, is however the average production time. On the market in one industry, average labour times needed for producing similar commodities compete with each other. Socially necessary labour time is the average labour time that is needed in the entire economy for producing a commodity based on average skills and an average level of productivity. An individual capital has its own productivity, its workforce has a specific skill level, etc. So the average value of a commodity produced may deviate from the social necessary labour required to produce the commodity on average in the entire industry.

The law of value has to do with the speed of production and the level of productivity: The higher the productivity used to create a commodity, the lower its value: 'In general, the greater the productivity of labour, the less the labour-time required to produce an article, the less the mass of labour crystallized in that article, and the less its value. Inversely, the less the productivity of labour, the greater the labour-time necessary to produce an article, and the greater its value. The value of a commodity, therefore, varies directly as the quantity, and inversely as the productivity, of the labour which finds its realization within the commodity' (Marx 1867/1990: 131).

Workers are forced to enter class relations and to produce profit in order to survive, which enables capital to appropriate surplus. The notion of exploited surplus value is the main concept of Marx's theory, by which he intends to show that capitalism is a class society. 'The theory of surplus value is in consequence immediately the theory of exploitation' (Negri 1991: 74) and, one can add, the theory of class and as a consequence the political demand for a classless society.

Capital is not money, but money that is increased through accumulation, 'money which begets money' (Marx 1867/1990: 256). Marx argued that the value of labour power is the average amount of time that is needed for the production of goods that are necessary for survival (necessary labour time), which in capitalism is paid for by workers with their wages. Surplus labour time is all of labour time that exceeds necessary labour time, remains unpaid, is appropriated for free by capitalists, and transformed into money profit. Surplus value 'is in substance the materialization of unpaid labour-time. The secret of the self-valorization of capital resolves itself into the fact that it has at its disposal a definite quantity of the unpaid labour of other people' (Marx 1867/1990: 672). Surplus value 'costs the worker labour but the capitalist nothing', but 'none the less becomes the legitimate property of the capitalist' (Marx 1867/1990: 672). 'Capital also developed into a coercive relation, and this compels the working class to do more work than would be required by the narrow circle of its own needs. As an agent in producing the activity of others, as an extractor of surplus labour and an exploiter of labour-power, it surpasses all earlier systems of production, which were based on directly

compulsory labour, in its energy and its quality of unbounded and ruthless activity' (Marx 1867/1990: 425).

For Marx, capitalism is based on the permanent theft of unpaid labour from workers by capitalists. This is the reason why he characterizes capital as vampire and werewolf. 'Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks' (Marx 1867/1990: 342). The production of surplus value 'forms the specific content and purpose of capitalist production' (Marx 1867/1990: 411), it is 'the *differentia specifica* of capitalist production', 'the absolute law of this mode of production' (Marx 1867/1990: 769), the 'driving force and the final result of the capitalist process of production' (Marx 1867/1990: 976).

Why do concepts such as labour time and surplus value matter for studying the media? I will try to make an argument on this issue by using several examples.

Muhanga Kawaya, an enslaved miner in North Kivu (Democratic Republic of Congo) who extracts minerals that are needed for the manufacturing of laptops and mobile phones, describes his work in the following way: 'As you crawl through the tiny hole, using your arms and fingers to scratch, there's not enough space to dig properly and you get badly grazed all over. And then, when you do finally come back out with the cassiterite, the soldiers are waiting to grab it at gunpoint. Which means you have nothing to buy food with. So we're always hungry' (Finnwatch 2007: 20).

A Chinese engineer at Foxconn Shenzhen, where computers and mobile phones that are sold by Western companies are assembled, says: 'We produced the first generation iPad. We were busy throughout a 6-month period and had to work on Sundays. We only had a rest day every 13 days. And there was no overtime premium for weekends. Working for 12 hours a day really made me exhausted' (SACOM 2010, 7). In Silicon Valley, a Cambodian ICT assembler exposed to toxic substances reports: 'I talked to my co-workers who felt the same way [that I did] but they never brought it up, out of fear of losing their job' (Pellow & Park 2002: 139). Foxconn shows the corporate social irresponsibility of capitalist media corporations (Sandoval 2014). 'Apple [...] is more than a 'bad apple'. It is an example of structures of inequality and exploitation that characterize global capitalism' (Sandoval 2013: 344).

Mohan, a Project Manager in the Indian software industry who is in his mid 30s, explains: 'Work takes a priority. [...] The area occupied by family and others keeps reducing' (D'Mello & Sahay 2007: 179). Another software engineer argues: 'Sometimes you start at 8 am and then finish at 10–11 pm, five days a week. And anytime you can be called [...] Also you don't develop any hobbies' (D'Mello & Sahay 2007: 179).

A software engineer at Google describes the working situation at Google: 'Cons – Because of the large amounts of benefits (such as free foods) there seems to be an unsaid rule that employees are expected to work longer hours. Many peo-

ple work more than 8 hours a day and then will be on email or work for a couple hours at home, at night as well (or on the weekends). It may be hard to perform extremely well with a good work/life balance. Advice to Senior Management – Give engineers more freedom to use 20% time to work on cool projects without the stress of having to do 120% work' (data source: glassdoor.com).

The Amazon Mechanical Turk is a 'marketplace for work' that 'gives businesses and developers access to an on-demand, scalable workforce. Workers select from thousands of tasks and work whenever it is convenient' (<https://www.mturk.com/>). Clients can advertise on the platform that they look for certain services for a certain wage, to which those who want to perform them can respond online. If the deal comes about, then the worker performs the task and submits the result to the client online. The work tasks almost exclusively involve informational work A search for speech transcription tasks (conducted on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012) resulted in three tasks that had (if one assumes that it takes on average six hours of work time to transcribe one hour of interview time) an hourly wage of a) US\$4, b) US\$4 and c) US\$3. In contrast, typical professional transcription services (e.g. [www.fingertipstyping.co.uk/prices\\_and\\_turnaround.htm](http://www.fingertipstyping.co.uk/prices_and_turnaround.htm), [http://www.franklin-square.com/transcription\\_per\\_line.htm](http://www.franklin-square.com/transcription_per_line.htm)) charge approximately US\$ 15-25 per hour.

Facebook has asked users to translate its site into other languages without payment. Translation is crowdsourced to users. Javier Olivan, Head of Growth, Engagement, Mobile Adoption at Facebook, sees user-generated platform translation as 'cool' because Facebook's goal is to 'have one day everybody on the planet on Facebook' (MSNBC 2008). 'Valentin Macias, 29, a Californian who teaches English in Seoul, South Korea, has volunteered in the past to translate for the non-profit Internet encyclopaedia Wikipedia but said he won't do it for Facebook. '(Wikipedia is) an altruistic, charitable, information-sharing, donation-supported cause,' Macias told The Associated Press in a Facebook message. 'Facebook is not. Therefore, people should not be tricked into donating their time and energy to a multimillion-dollar company so that the company can make millions more – at least not without some type of compensation' (MSNBC 2008).

These examples outline various forms of labour associated with the ICT industry. They differ in amount to the levels of payment, health risks, physical, ideological and social violence, stress, free time, overtime and the forms of coercion and control the workers are experiencing, but all have in common that human labour power is exploited in a way that monetarily benefits ICT corporations and has negative impacts on the lives, bodies or minds of workers.

Labour time is so crucial for capitalism because labour power is organised as a commodity and therefore every second of labour costs money. This is the reason why capital has the interest to make workers work as long as possible for as little wages as possible and to make them labour as intensive as possible so that the highest possible profit that is the outcome of unpaid labour time can be achieved.

Value in a Marxist approach (Marx's labour theory of value) is the amount of performed labour hours that is needed for the production of a certain commodity. There is an individual labour time for the production of every single commodity that is difficult to measure. What matters economically is therefore the average labour time that is spent during a certain time period (such as one year) for producing a commodity. Average labour values can be calculated for commodity production in one company, a group of companies, an entire industry in a country or internationally. Capital strives to reduce the value of a commodity in order to increase profits. A decrease of the value of a commodity means a speed-up of production, i.e. the same labour time that costs a certain amount of money will suddenly produce a higher number of the same commodity, although the labour costs have not increased, which allows accumulating more profit per time unit.

The outlined examples show the importance of labour time for the ICT industry: Slave mineral workers like Muhanga Kawaya work at gunpoint with the threat of being killed, which makes them work long hours for low or no wages so that a maximum of labour time remains unpaid. The workers at Foxconn are working long hours and unpaid overtime so that Apple and other ICT companies reduce labour costs. Foxconn workers have relatively low wages and work very long hours. Foxconn tries to lengthen the working day in order to increase the sum of hours that is unpaid. Working conditions. ICT assemblers in Silicon Valley, who are predominantly female immigrants, have quite comparable labour conditions and many of them are exposed during many working hours to toxic substances. In the Indian software industry and at Google, software engineers are overworked. They work very long hours and do not have much time for hobbies, relaxing, friends and family. Software developers at Google, in India and in other countries and places are highly stressed because they work in project-based software engineering with high time pressure. Their lifetime tends to become labour time. The Amazon Mechanical Turk is a method of getting work done in the same time as in the case of regular employment by irregular forms of labour that are cheaper. It helps companies to find workers, who work for the time a regular employee would take for a certain task, but for a lower payment. The idea is to crowdsource work over the Internet in order to reduce costs, i.e. to pay less for the same labour time as under regular working conditions. Facebook translation goes one step further and tries to outsource work to users, who are expected to perform the translation without remuneration. The idea is to transform usage time into work time.

The lengthening of working day, unpaid working times, overwork, spare time as labour time, overtime – the examples show that labour time is a crucial aspect of the capitalist ICT industry. Different forms of labour – mining, hardware assemble, software engineering, callcentre work, ewaste labour, etc – come together in the international division of digital labour (Fuchs 2014a): digital labour should best be understood as an umbrella term for all acts of labour conducted in an interconnected but mostly anonymous manner in order to enable the existence

of digital media and digital media usage. This includes forms of labour that are expressions of different modes of the organization of the productive forces (agricultural labour, industrial labour, knowledge labour) and different modes of production (as for example: slavery, feudalism, capitalism, patriarchy, communism). The phenomenon of digital labour shows that capitalism incorporates other modes of production that are sublated in the capitalist mode and that the information economy as a specific mode of the organization of productive forces does not substitute agriculture and industry, but that these modes rather are interconnected in contemporary economies (Fuchs 2014a).

The concept of the international division of digital labour (IDDL) shows that various forms of labour that are characteristic of various stages of capitalism and various modes of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production interact so that different forms of separated and highly exploited forms of double free wage labour, unpaid 'free' labour, feminised and 'housewifised' labour and slave labour form a global network of exploited labour forms that creates value and forms profits of the variety of companies involved in the capitalist ICT industry. The IDDL shows that stages of capitalist development and historical modes of production (such as patriarchal housework, classical slavery, feudalism, capitalism in general, industrial capitalism, informational capitalism) are not simply successive stages of economic development, where one form substitutes an older one, but that they are all dialectically mediated (Fuchs 2014a). The earliest form of private property was constituted in the patriarchal family. The patriarchal mode of production and housework continues to exist in the ICT value chain in the form of feminised and housewifised work of the 'free' online workers of Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter & Co and the highly controlled and exploited work of call centre agents and ICT manufacturers. Classical and feudal forms of slavery, in which workers are not double free, but rather the property of slave owners who physically coerce and almost limitlessly exploit them, persist in the extraction of conflict minerals that form the physical foundation of ICTs. Capitalism is based not only on capital accumulation, but also on double-free wage labour, which means that workers are by the threat of dying of hunger compelled to sell their labour power as commodity to capitalists, which alienates them from the process and the products of capitalist production and installs wage labour as specific form of exploitation of labour. Double-free wage labour takes on several specific forms in the ICT value chain. First, there are wage workers who work under conditions that resemble the early stage of industrial capitalism. These are manufacturing and assemblage workers, who risk their health and lives at work. Their work is no fun at all. They are subject to high levels of control, workplace surveillance and standardised work, which shows that Taylorist and Fordist factory work does not cease to exist, but continues to exist under new conditions in the information society. Also call centre agents are facing a kind of Taylorist work situation, with the difference that their labour is in contrast to ICT manufacturing and assemblage

not primarily physical, but informational in nature in respect to the circumstance that their main activities are talking, convincing with affects, typing, using phone systems and accessing databases. The IDDL also involves relatively new forms of wage labour that are forms of highly paid and highly stressful play work, as represented by the Google worker.

In his underestimated book *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams questions the Marxism's historical tendency to see culture as 'dependent, secondary, 'superstructural': a realm of 'mere' ideas, beliefs, arts, customs, determined by the basic material history' (Williams 1977: 19). He discusses various Marxist concepts that Marxist theories have used for discussing the relationship of the economy and culture: determination, reflection, reproduction, mediation, homology. These approaches would all assume a relationship between the economy and culture with a varying degree of causal determination or mutual causality. But all of them would share the assumption of 'the separation of 'culture' from material social life' (Williams 1977: 19) that Williams (1977: 59) considers to be 'idealist'. The problem of these approaches would be that they are not 'materialist enough' (Williams 1977: 92).

Williams (1977: 78) argues that Marx opposed the '*separation* of 'areas' of thought and activity'. Production would be distinct from 'consumption, distribution, and exchange' as well as from social relations (Williams 1977: 91). Productive forces would be 'all and any of the means of the production and reproduction of real life', including the production of social knowledge and co-operation (Williams 1977: 91). Politics and culture would be realms of material production: ruling classes would produce castles, palaces, churches, prisons, workhouses, schools, weapons, a controlled press, etc (Williams 1977: 93). Therefore there would be a 'material character of the production of a social and political order' and the concept of the superstructure an evasion (Williams 1977: 93).

In order to illustrate his point that culture is material, Williams mentions a passage from Marx's *Grundrisse*: 'Productive labour is only that which produces capital. Is it not crazy, asks e.g. (or at least something similar) Mr Senior, that the piano maker is a productive worker, but not the piano player, although obviously the piano would be absurd without the piano player? But this is exactly the case. The piano maker reproduces capital; the pianist only exchanges his labour for revenue. But doesn't the pianist produce music and satisfy our musical ear, does he not even to a certain extent produce the latter? He does indeed: his labour produces something; but that does not make it productive labour in the economic sense; no more than the labour of the madman who produces delusions is productive. Labour becomes productive only by producing its own opposite' (Marx 1858/1993: 305). Williams remarks that today, other than in Marx's time, 'the production of music (and not just its instruments) is an important branch of capitalist production' (Williams 1977: 93).

The point that interests me here is not what labour is productive and unproductive, but the question what constitutes the economy and culture. If the two realms are separated, then building the piano is work and part of the economy and playing it is not work, but culture. Marx leaves however no doubt that playing the piano produces a use-value that satisfies human ears and is therefore a form of work. As a consequence, the production of music must just like the production of the piano be an economic activity. Williams (1977: 94) stresses that cultural materialism means to see the material character of art, ideas, aesthetics and ideology and that when considering piano making and piano playing it is important to discover and describe ‘relations between all these practices’ and to not assume ‘that only some of them are material’.

Besides the piano maker and the piano player there is also the composer of music. All three works are needed and necessarily related in order to guarantee the existence of piano music. Fixing one of these three productive activities categorically as culture and excluding the others from it limits the concept of culture and does not see that one cannot exist without the other. Along with this separation come political assessments of the separated entities. A frequent procedure is to include the work of the composer and player and to exclude the work of the piano maker. Cultural elitists then argue that only the composer and player are truly creative, whereas vulgar materialists hold that only the piano maker can be a productive worker because he works with his hands and produces an artifact. Both judgments are isolationist and politically problematic.

In contrast, Raymond Williams (1977: 111) formulates as an important postulate of Cultural Materialism that ‘[c]ultural work and activity are not [...] a superstructure’ because people would use physical resources for leisure, entertainment and art. Combining Williams’ assumptions that cultural work is material and economic and that the physical and ideational activities underlying the existence of culture are interconnected means that culture is a totality that connects all physical and ideational production processes that are connected and required for the existence of culture. Put in simpler terms this means that the piano maker, the composer and the piano player are for Williams all three cultural workers.

Williams (1977: 139) concludes that Cultural Materialism needs to see ‘the complex unity of the elements’ required for the existence of culture: ideas, institutions, formations, distribution, technology, audiences, forms of communication and interpretation, worldviews (138p). A sign system would involve the social relations that produce it, the institutions in which it is formed and its role as a cultural technology (Williams 1977: 140). In order to avoid the ‘real danger of separating human thought, imagination and concepts from ‘men’s material life-process’’ (Williams 1989: 203), one needs like Marx to focus on the ‘totality of human activity’ (Williams 1989: 203) when discussing culture. We ‘have to emphasise cultural practice as from the beginning social and material’ (Williams

1989: 206). The ‘productive forces of ‘mental labour’ have, in themselves, an inescapable material and thus social history’ (William 1989: 211).

In his later works, Williams stressed that it is particularly the emergence of an information economy in which information, communication and audiences are sold as commodities that requires rethinking the separation of the economy and culture and to see culture as material. ‘[I]nformation processes [...] have become a qualitative part of economic organization’ (Williams 1981: 231). ‘Thus a major part of the whole modern labour process must be defined in terms which are not easily theoretically separable from the traditional ‘cultural’ activities. [...] so many more workers are involved in the direct operations and activations of these systems that there are quite new social and social-class complexities’ (Williams 1981: 232).

As information is an important aspect of economic production in information societies, the culture concept cannot be confined to popular culture, entertainment, works of arts and the production of meaning in the consumption of goods, but needs to be extended to the realm of economic production and value creation. The concept of cultural labour is therefore of crucial importance.

In contemporary capitalism, pianos, compositions (via intellectual property rights) and music are all three commodities. So what unites the cultural work of the piano maker, the composer and the musician is that the commodity form mediates their works. Raymond Williams argues that this circumstance requires us to think of culture as material and economic. But he adds that in the first instance all of these practices are material because they produce use-values of different kinds.

Taking the example of music culture and transferring it to digital media, we find correspondences: there are digital media makers who produce hardware, digital media composers who create software, and digital media users who operate software on hardware in a productive manner in order to create content, communications and social relations. Those who reduce digital labour to digital content producers just like those who reduce cultural labour to the production of meaning and ideas separate in an idealistic manner two elements that necessarily belong together. Thinking the elements that enable digital media to exist together requires a common category: the international division of digital labour (IDDL) (Fuchs 2014a).

The global collective ICT worker consists of many different workers: unpaid digital labour, a highly paid and highly stressed knowledge worker aristocracy, knowledge workers in developing countries, Taylorist call centre wage workers, Taylorist hardware assemblers and manufacturers, slave mine workers. This shows that ‘double free’ wage labour in the ICT industry and, as Marcel van der Linden and Karl Heinz Roth (2009) argue, in general is ‘no longer the strategic and privileged part of the global working class and that slaves, contract workers, (pseudo-) self-employment and others are equally important for theorising capitalism’ (van der Linden & Roth 2009, 24; translation from German).

Certain scholars argue that the rise of a ‘knowledge society’ or ‘cognitive capitalism’ as well as of ‘social media’ has resulted in an outdatedness and non-applicability of the labour theory of value to contemporary capitalism. Virno (2003: 100) says that the law of value is ‘shattered and refuted by capitalist development itself’. Hardt and Negri (2004: 145) argue that the ‘temporal unity of labor as the basic measure of value today makes no sense’. Vercellone (2010: 90) writes that ‘cognitive capitalism’ has resulted in the ‘crisis of the law of value’ and ‘a crisis of measurement that destabilizes the very sense of the fundamental categories of the political economy; labor, capital and obviously, value’. The rise of knowledge in production, what Marx (1858/1993) termed the General Intellect, would result in the circumstance that labour, particularly knowledge labour ‘can no longer be measured on the basis of labour time directly dedicated to production’ (Vercellone 2007: 30). Abstract labour, ‘measured in a unit of time’ would no longer be ‘the tool allowing for the control over the labor and simultaneously favouring the growth of social productivity’ (Vercellone 2010: 90). Creativity and knowledge would today form ‘the main source of value’ (Vercellone 2010: 105).

The assumption of many Autonomist Marxists that the law of value no longer applies today is not feasible because this law is a foundation of the existence of capitalism and because the assumption is based on a false interpretation of a passage from Marx’s *Grundrisse* (see e.g. Vercellone 2007: 29f), in which Marx says that ‘labour time ceases and must cease to be’ the measure of wealth (Marx 1858/1993: 705). The misinterpretation is precisely that Marx here describes a transformation within capitalism. Instead Marx in the same passage makes clear that he talks about a situation, in which the ‘mass of workers’ has appropriated ‘their own surplus labour’ (Marx 1858/1993: 708). As long as capitalism exists, value is set as standard of production, although the value of commodities tends to historically diminish, which advances capitalism’s crisis-proneness. Harry Cleaver has pointed out that Marx’s passage is based on a framework that results from the circumstance that class struggle ‘explodes the system and founds a new one’ (Cleaver 2000: 92).

In the specific passage in the *Grundrisse*, Marx says: ‘Once they have done so – and *disposable time* thereby ceases to have an *antithetical* existence – then, on one side, necessary labour time will be measured by the needs of the social individual, and, on the other, the development of the power of social production will grow so rapidly that, even though production is now calculated for the wealth of all, *disposable time* will grow for all’ (Marx 1858/1993: 708). Marx talks about a society, in which ‘production based on exchange value breaks down’ (Marx 1858/1993: 705) – a communist society.

In corporate ‘social media’, Facebook and other companies constantly monitor interests, usage behaviour, browsing behaviour, demographic data, user-generated content, social relations, etc. These are individual, affective, social, economic, political, cultural data about users. The more time a user spends on Facebook, the

more data is generated about him/her that is offered as a commodity to advertising clients. Exploitation happens in this commodification and production process, whereas the data commodities are offered for sale to advertising clients after the production/exploitation process. The more time a user spends online, the more data is available about him/her that can potentially be sold and the more advertisements can be presented to him/her. Time therefore plays a crucial role for corporate social media. Users employ social media because they strive to a certain degree for achieving what Bourdieu (1986a, b) terms social capital (the accumulation of social relations), cultural capital (the accumulation of qualification, education, knowledge) and symbolic capital (the accumulation of reputation). The time that users spend on commercial social media platforms for generating social, cultural and symbolic capital is in the process of prosumer commodification transformed into economic capital. Labour time on commercial social media is the conversion of Bourdieuan social, cultural and symbolic capital into Marxian value and economic capital.

Labour that generates content, affects, likes, social relations, networks, etc. is organised in time and space and that Facebook usage time is productive labour time. All hours spent online by users of Facebook, Google, and comparable corporate social media constitute work time, in which data commodities are generated, and potential time for profit realization.

Our discussion thus far shows that the labour theory of value is frequently used as a target of ideological critique that argues that Marx's theory is out of date. Resulting claims are that value has been generalized and pluralized (Grossberg), stems from affects or social networks (Hartley), but is not constituted by labour and measured by labour time. The implications of these approaches are diverse, but they all share the consequence that the immediateness of the radical critique of capitalism and capitalist media is either reduced in importance or altogether rejected.

Not all Autonomist Marxists share the assumption that there is an end of the law of value today. Karl Heinz Roth (2005: 60) stresses the large number of unpaid and underpaid workers in the world today. Examples that he mentions are reproductive work in the family, precarious and informal labour, slave workers, prison labour (Roth 2005), temporal work, seasonal workers, migrant workers and precarious self-employment (Roth & van der Linden 2009). Karl Heinz Roth and Marcel van der Linden (2009: 560) say that these workers constitute the global worker (*Weltarbeiterklasse*) that is 'a multiversum of strata and social groups'. Nick Dyer-Witheford (2010: 490) argues that the global worker is a) based on the globalization of capital, b) based on a complex division of labour, c) based on underpaid and unpaid labour (migrants, houseworkers, etc), d) embedded into global communication networks, e) facing precarious conditions, and f) has worldwide effects. Slave workers that are unpaid would also produce value, although their labour power does not have a price for which it is rented to an owner,

but rather is the private property of a slave master (Roth & van der Linden 2009: 581-587). Roth and van der Linden use the example of the slave worker in order to argue that exploitation and value production does not presuppose a wage relationship. They argue for a dynamic labour theory of value (Roth & van der Linden 2009: 590-600) that assumes that all humans who contribute to the production of money profit by entering a relationship with capital, in which the latter controls and owns their personality (slaves), labour power (wage workers), the means of production and subsistence (outsourced contractual labour), the products of labour (unpaid and underpaid labour) or the sphere of reproduction (reproductive labour), are part of the exploited class.

Capital has the inherent interest to maximize profit. For doing this, it will take all means necessary because the single capitalist risks his/her own bankruptcy if s/he cannot accumulate capital as a result of high investment costs, heavy competition, lack of productivity, etc. The wage relation is, as argued above, a crucial element of class struggle. Capital tries to reduce the wage sum as much as possible in order to maximize profits. If possible, capital will therefore remunerate labour power below its own value, i.e. below the socially necessary costs that are required for survival. The transformation of the value into the price of labour power and the difference between the two is, as Cleaver (2000) and Bidet (2009) stress, the result of class struggle. Labour legislation and an organized labour movement can struggle for wages that are higher than the value of labour power. If labour is, however, weak, e.g. because of fascist repression, capital is likely to use any opportunity to reduce wages as much as possible in order to increase profits. Neoliberalism is a form of governmentality that increases profits by decreasing the wage sum with the help of cutting state expenditures for welfare, care and education, privatizing such services, creating precarious wage-relations that are temporary, insecure and underpaid, weakening the power of labour organisations, decreasing or not increasing wages relatively or absolutely, outsourcing labour to low-paid or unpaid forms of production, coercing the unemployed to work without payment or for extremely low wages, etc. It is a form of politics that aims at helping capital to reduce the price of labour power as much as possible, if possible even below the minimum value that is needed for human existence. The creation of multiple forms of precarious and unpaid forms of work is an expression of the class struggle of capital to reduce the costs of labour power. The result is a disjunction of the value and price of labour power. The disjunction between value and price of labour power is accompanied by a disjunction of the value and price of commodities: The financialization of the economy has established stocks and derivatives that have fictitious prices on stock markets that are based on the hope for high future profits and dividends, but are disjointed from the actual labour values and commodity prices. Contemporary capitalism is a disjunction economy, in which values, profits and prices tend to be out of joint so that there is a high crisis-proneness.

Digital media scholars, entrepreneurs, managers, consultants and politicians often celebrate the rise of ‘social media’ like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc. as the rise of a democratic and participatory economy, in which users control the means of communication and intellectual production and consumers can actively and creatively shape the economy. Seen from the view of a dynamical labour theory of value, corporate social media are in contrast forms of the exploitation of unpaid labour: all the time users spend on such platforms is recorded, analysed and creates data commodities that contain personal and usage data and are sold to advertising clients that provide targeted ads to the users. The price of the users’ labour power is zero, they are unpaid, which allows capital to maximize profits by reducing the price of labour power as much below its value as possible.

The multiverse of the global worker does not consist of separate types of work and relations of production, but rather of interdependent production relations that form a whole. Nick Dyer-Witheford (2002, 2010) therefore speaks of the emergence of a global value subject that forms a value chain that is organised by multinational corporations in the form of a global factory. He stresses that the emergence of knowledge work and the global worker does not mean an end of the law of value, but rather an expansion of exploitation and the law of value from the workplace as the ‘traditional locus of exploitation’ (Dyer-Witheford 2002: 8) to the ‘factory planet’ (Dyer-Witheford 2010: 485). The exploitation of user labour on commercial Internet platforms like Facebook and Google is indicative for a phase of capitalism, in which there is an all-ubiquitous factory that is a space of the exploitation of labour. Social media and the mobile Internet make the audience commodity ubiquitous and the factory not limited to your living room and your wage work place – the factory and work place surveillance are also in all in-between spaces. The entire planet is today a capitalist factory. The exploitation of Internet users/prosumers is not isolated, it is part of a larger value chain of computing, in which African slave workers extract raw materials, underpaid workers in developing countries (and Western countries) assemble hardware, underpaid workers in developing countries and highly paid workers in the West engineer software and precariously working service workers (e.g. in call-centres) provide support.

The global value subjects are thus ‘subject to the law of value constituted and constrained by the logics of the world-market’ (Dyer-Witheford 2002: 9). But they also have the potential power to subvert the law of value by refusals to work (protests, strikes, occupations, in the most extreme form, as in the case of Foxconn, suicide, etc.), refusals to consume (stopping to use certain products and the use of non-commercial products) and the creation of alternative forms of valuation/production that transcend monetary values and are non-profit and non-commercial in character (e.g. non-proprietary software/operating systems, non-commercial social networking sites, self-managed alternative IT companies, etc.). Göran Bolin (2010) stresses in this context that economic value is not the only

moral value that can shape the media. Nick Couldry (2010) points out that neoliberalism reduces the possibilities for the expression of voices that constitute an alternative moral value to economic logic. Expressed in another way: The value of capitalism is value, which reduces the status of the human to a voiceless and exploited cog in the machine that although perceiving itself as permanently talking, mostly has a voice and power without real effects. What must be achieved is the sublation of economic value so that (economic) value is no longer the primary (moral) value.

The law of value has not lost its force. It is in full effect everywhere in the world, where exploitation takes place. It has been extended to underpaid and unpaid forms of labour, corporate media presumption being just one of them. Due to technical increases in productivity, the value of commodities tends to historically decrease. At the same time, value is the only source of capital, commodities and profit in capitalism. The contradictions of value have resulted in a disjunction of values, profits and prices that contributes to actual or potential crises, which shows that crises are inherent to capitalism. This in turn makes it feasible to replace capitalism by a commons-based system of existence, in which not value, but creativity, social relations, free time and play are the source of value. Such a society is called communism and is the negation of the negativity of capitalism.

## Conclusion

Graeme Turner (2012: 158) in giving answers to the question ‘What’s become of Cultural Studies?’ argues that this field has lost power as a political project and turned into a ‘genre of academic performance’ that is ‘merely self-serving’. One of my arguments in this paper has been that one of the causes of this circumstance is that Cultural Studies has had a troubled relationship to Karl Marx’s works. Early representatives like Raymond Williams and Edward P. Thompson were strongly influenced by and contributed to Humanist Marxism, whereas Stuart Hall at times was influenced by Structural Marxism and at times moved away from Marxism. There was a significant move away from Marx in Cultural Studies during the past three decades. The analysis of three contemporary Cultural Studies works showed that there is a broad agreement that Cultural Studies needs to engage more with the economic today.

How such an engagement shall look like and how it relates to the works of Karl Marx is contested. John Hartley argues for the replacement of a critical and Marxian approach in Cultural Studies by evolutionary economics. Lawrence Grossberg uses Marx against Marx in order to argue for a radically contextualist interpretation of the value concept and a theory of crisis that is based on a general theory of value. Paul Smith and others make a point for the renewal of a genuine Marxist Cultural Studies. I share the argument made by Smith and think that Marx is the linkage between Cultural Studies and Critical Political Economy that is needed

today. Today one need to take seriously not only how the economic interacts with culture and the media, but that much can be gained from reading, discussing and interpreting the multitude of Karl Marx's original works. I argue for an institutional revolution that buries prejudices against Karl Marx (see Eagleton 2011 for a brilliant invalidation of the 10 most common prejudices against Marx as well as Harvey 2010 and Jameson 2011 for contemporary interpretations of *Capital, Volume 1*) and takes his works and theoretical legacy serious in the study of the media and culture. There is a generation of students and young scholars today, who have been growing up under post-welfarist conditions and know the reality of precarious labour and precarious life. At the same time, this is a world with multi-dimensional global inequalities. Interpreting and changing this world requires thinking about class, crisis, critique and capitalism. For those who in this context are interested to critically study the role of communication, the engagement with the ideas of the thinker who has had the largest intellectual and practical influence on the study of these phenomena, is an absolute necessity. Only an engagement with Marx can make Cultural and Media Studies topical, politically relevant, practical and critical, in the current times of global crisis and resurgent critique. Such an engagement requires not just interested scholars and students (that anyway already exist), but also institutional changes of universities, funding agencies, journals, conferences, academic associations and entire research fields. Academia has experience an administrative and neoliberal turn. Marxism is not just a reaction to these changes, but also offers crucial solutions to the resulting problems.

**Christian Fuchs** is professor at the University of Westminster's Communication and Media Research Institute. His research interests lie in the fields of Critical Theory, Critical Information Society Studies, Critical Internet Research, critical social theory, media & society and the Critical Political Economy of Media, Communication & Society. He is author of numerous publications on these topics. He is editor of *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* (<http://www.triple-c.at>), chair of the European Sociological Association's Research Network 18 – Sociology of Communications and Media Research and co-founder of the ICTs and Society Network. He is author of many works, including the monographs *Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age* (2008), *Foundations of Critical Media and Information Studies* (2011), *OccupyMedia! The Occupy Movement and Social Media in Crisis Capitalism* (2014), *Digital Labour and Karl Marx* (2014), *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (2014). E-mail: [christian.fuchs@uti.at](mailto:christian.fuchs@uti.at)

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://savemdxphil.com/2010/04/28/middlesex-university-announces-the-closure-of-its-top-rated-department-philosophy/>

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