Chapter 4

Social Network Exploitation

Mark Andrejevic

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> Herein lies the perversity of social networks: however radical they may be, they will always be data-mined. They are designed to be exploited.
>
> (Ippolita, Lovink, & Rossiter, 2009)

The commercial models that are rapidly invading and colonizing social life online are spilling over into the realm of the workplace proper—and not just for the bored-at-work network. Consider, for example, a recent account of the use of social networking sites like Facebook by job recruiters in the wake of the global financial downturn. After several months of looking for a job, an unemployed engineer profiled by the *New York Times* received a "Jobvite" from a former co-worker who found him through an online recruiting application that trawls sites like Facebook and LinkedIn. Such applications mark a shift in employers' use of social networking sites from surreptitious screening resources to recruiting databases and utilities for viral marketing. To avail themselves of employee social networks, companies piggyback applications supplied by so-called "software-as-service" companies like Appirio onto the social networking sites of employees. Appirio's application, for example, searches the networks and notifies employees "when new jobs open and which of their friends might be a good fit" (Weed, 2009). Aside from generating practical benefits for job seekers and companies, such applications extend workplace monitoring into the online social lives of employees. In this regard, the workplace is catching up with the marketing industry, which has been drawing on the power of interactivity to insert itself into realms of social practice hitherto largely beyond the gaze of market researchers and to convert the information employees generate into what Vincent Mosco (1989) has described as "cybernetic commodities."

If one of the characteristic developments of the interactive era has been the de-differentiation of sites of labor, domesticity, social life, and consumption,

for some categories of workers, it is perhaps not surprising that the monitoring capacity of the workplace is reaching out into the realm of our increasingly digitally mediated social lives. More concretely, if digital technology makes it possible to work outside the office, recent innovations enable the workplace to exploit the productivity of our social lives outside the workplace.

Much has been made of the ambivalent or hybrid status of user-generated content creation as a site of both intrinsic reward and potential exploitation (see, for example, Arvidsson, 2007; Terranova, 2000; Banks & Humphreys, 2008). Thus, for example, Arvidsson argues that, "the post-Fordist production process directly exploits the communitarian dimension of social life" (p. 241). By capturing and channeling user-generated activity for marketing purposes, emerging forms of online commerce subsume the potential diversity of social life to narrower commercial interests. One important dimension of exploitation, for Arvidsson, "consists in making the productive sociality of consumers evolve on the premises of brands; to make it unfold through branded consumer goods in such ways that makes it produce measurable (and hence valu able) forms of attention" (p. 251). By contrast, Banks and Humphreys (2008) argue that online forms of co-creation complicate standard critiques of exploitation. Users clearly enjoy and benefit from online activities even as they generate value for commercial websites. The result, they suggest, might be better understood in terms of mutual benefit than exploitation:

> Rather than being a zero sum game where if companies derive economic benefit it negates social benefit to the users (and hence is couched in terms of exploitation), is this instead an example of a new articulation of a cooperative and non-zero sum game whereby different motivations and value regimes co-exist?
>
> (pp. 412–413)

We are left with a familiar back-and-forth: if people willingly submit to forms of online monitoring, they must be getting something out of it. After all, they have a choice of whether or not to use social networking sites and submit to the forms of commercial monitoring such use entails.

This chapter argues that more work needs to be done to clarify the relationship between willing participation and commercial exploitation. What is needed is an explanation of how a theory of exploitation might apply to the conditions under which user-generated content creates value. Rather than capitulating to the notion that notions of exploitation do not readily apply to the changed conditions of production associated with the provision of "free" or "immaterial" labor, this chapter provides a preliminary attempt to develop a theory of exploitation for the era of commercial social networking.

It is perhaps worth highlighting the workings of the corporate imagination at play in the fields of social networking to make it clear just how these sites are viewed as standing reserves of data for marketing purposes. For example, a press release by Appirio outlines the triple value of employee social networking data as a resource for recruiting, sales, and marketing—all of this without having to pay employees for providing the data. Appirio's marketing application piggybacks on Facebook,

> to increase the size of a company's "virtual account team" by leveraging relationships that employees might already have to approach strategic accounts or build customer relationships. . . . The employee can see if a friend has become a lead, bought a product, attended an event . . . etc. If the employee chooses they can contact their friend through Facebook to make a connection and ultimately help contribute to their company's bottom line (and maybe even their own bonus!).
>
> (*Market Wire*, 2009—note that the only compensation for the employee's "voluntary" participation is a *potential* bonus!)

But there is more: the same data that can provide leads for potential hires and clients serve treble duty by providing data for targeted marketing appeals: "Based on a search of keywords in friend profiles, the application makes recommendations of friends who might be interested in the offer, which users can then choose to take action on" (*Market Wire*, 2009). The application links data from the social networks of individual employees with a proprietary consumer relationship marketing database in order "to track leads, make follow-up offers, and report on campaign success to see how their viral campaigns stack up to other marketing programs" (*Market Wire*, 2009).

It is not hard to imagine marketers slapping their foreheads as the proverbial light bulb snaps on: all the work that the Internet generation has been doing to assemble extended social networks of hundreds or even thousands of Facebook "friends" can be harnessed not just by Facebook, but also by employers. The scenario outlined by Appirio is a fascinating if disturbing one: potential employees with large online social networks might be viewed as preferable hires because of the resources for viral marketing they bring to their company. Indeed, an extended social network might come to function not just as a form of online social capital, but also as online economic capital: an information asset that the digital worker must cultivate to be viable in the twenty-first-century workforce. It is all too easy to envision the proliferation of self-help books that provide instruction in how to cultivate extended networks of "high-quality" online friends in order to maximize one's potential value in the workplace. Within the context of the commercial deployment of social networking, the very notion of what constitutes a "quality" friendship becomes colonized by the promise of economic return-on-investment. The dystopian scenario envisioned by the capitalization of social networks is one of rationalized instrumentalism: the permeation of social networks by the quantifying logic of exchange value. It is a prospect foreshadowed by, for example, the title of an investment note on social networking put out by Lehman Brothers: "How Much are Your Friends Worth?" (the *Independent*, 2007)—and by the Facebook application "Friends for Sale," which invites participants to "Buy people and make them your pets! Make money as a shrewd pet investor or as a hot commodity" (Facebook, 2009a).

The Logic of Separation

The plan outlined by Appirio (and other startups developing strategies for "monetizing" the tremendous amounts of data generated by commercial social networking sites and, most recently, Twitter feeds), the details of employees' social lives along with the observations and opinions they share with one another are treated as *free* resources, readily available to employers for the purposes of recruiting, marketing, and sales. The cursory qualification by Appirio that employees can supply access to their networks "if they so choose" comes across as an empty gesture: what choice will they really have? Their online social resources are treated as one more capacity of labor. Withholding such resources might come to seem as strange as withholding other aspects of one's labor: like signing up for a job and then refusing to devote one's full mental or physical effort to the assigned tasks. In the information era, members of the digital working class have something else to sell as part of their labor power: their social networks, at least insofar as these are recorded and stored on commercial platforms like Facebook or otherwise available online.

As in the case of labor power, however, the "freely agreed upon" transaction that governs the use of this information will be shaped by existing power relations and structures of ownership. Or, to put it in somewhat different terms, submission to forms of commercial surveillance becomes one of the conditions of employment, just as submission to monitoring becomes, over time, a built-in condition of the wage–labor contract and, indeed, one of the reasons for the development and structure of group workplaces. If one of the expectations of wage–labor is the willing submission to workplace surveillance, applications like Appirio's entail normalizing the expansion of management's monitoring gaze to encompass not just workplace activities, but also the structure and details of employees' social lives. We might think of this expansion of reach as the contemporary appropriation of newly exploitable productive resources: a contemporary process of virtual enclosure of the commons of social life.

It is tempting to describe this act of appropriation as an act of expropriation—a contemporary form of "primitive accumulation" of resources: what Hesmondhalgh (2008), following David Harvey, has described in a slightly different context as, "the commodification of culture as accumulation by dispossession" (p. 107). Such a formulation, however, does not quite do justice to the type of appropriation envisioned by Appirio and similar applications, for they do not deprive employees of the productive use, at least for certain purposes, of their social network resources. Social networks as information resources are, in the sense described by economists, "non-rival" in use: employers can put them to work without depriving employees of them.

A more precise and accurate formulation is outlined by Massimo De Angelis (2001), who describes the forms of ongoing "primitive" accumulation necessary to capitalism's reproduction in terms of *separation*. The exploitation of new markets, in other words, entails the separation of resources from those who rely upon them. This process of separation facilitates the establishment of property rights that structure or restructure the terms of access to productive resources. As De Angelis (2001) puts it, "the characteristic extra-economic process of separation between people and means of production is a continuous and inherent process of capitalist production" (p. 4). Such "extra-economic" forms of separation include the pre-market establishment of property rights exemplified by the forcible seizure of assets, for example, or the structuring of legal regimes that assign rights to new forms of economic resources. When drug companies claim patent rights over traditional medicines, they are engaging in an enclosure of the commons analogous to the seizure and privatization of agricultural land. In both instances, the privatization process helps to secure control over access to productive resources. In turn, the separation of producers from the means of production contributes to the reproduction of ongoing forms of separation. As Marx put it, "Once this *separation* is given, the production process can only produce it anew, reproduce it, and reproduce it on an expanded scale" (2009, p. 6). Thus, land enclosure, for example, undergirds the alienation of workers from control over their own labor, which must be sold in exchange for access to the means of production.

To describe the appropriation of information resources produced by the social networking activity of employees in terms of separation is to interrogate the conditions whereby this information is made accessible to and productive for employers. The rise of online social networking as a commercially supported phenomenon combines new conveniences and affordances (access to email and social networking utilities, for example) with new forms of separation. To the extent that networked forms of sociability rely on privately owned and operated infrastructures like Facebook, they represent the separation of users from the means for producing online sociability. Those who

control the means of online sociability thus have the power to set the terms of access to these resources. These terms include the establishment of certain rights over the information provided by users—rights that tend to be outlined in cursory, often incomprehensible and qualified fashion. Separation (the private control over online resources for sociability) begets separation (the establishment of certain rights of use over information generated by users).

Thus, the various "terms of use" and end-user license agreements posted by social networking sites are, in large part, constructed around the goal of asserting rights over the use, sale, and transfer of information collected online. Facebook's terms of use are explicit in this regard, stipulating that users provide the company with the right "to use, copy, publicly perform, publicly display, reformat, translate, excerpt . . . and distribute such User Content for any purpose, commercial, advertising, or otherwise . . ." (Facebook, 2009c). The sweeping and often vague terms of these agreements, coupled with the stipulation that the terms of use may change at any point in time drives home the point that the companies regard this information as theirs to do with as they see fit. In its privacy policy, Facebook makes a distinction between two types of information provided by users: "personal information you knowingly choose to disclose that is collected by us and Web Site use information collected by us as you interact with our Web Site [and other sites, as stipulated later in the policy]," but it seems apparent that it views *both* categories as proprietary information when used for marketing purposes (Facebook, 2009d). The site, for example, asserts the right to "collect information about you from other sources, such as newspapers, blogs, instant messaging services, and other users of the Facebook service through the operation of the service . . ." (2009d). The other social networking giant, MySpace, offers more opt-out options and a more fully articulated privacy policy, but nevertheless establishes its rights over user-generated information for a broad range of marketing purposes. Thus, it stipulates that it has the right to collect "other Related Data and non-PII [Personally Identifiable Information] including IP address, aggregate user data, and browser type. This data is used to manage and improve the MySpace Services, track usage, and for security purposes" (MySpace, 2008).

The combination of apparently rigorous and detailed privacy controls with vague and open-ended loopholes recurs further down in MySpace's policy: "Profile Information you provide in structured profile fields or questions . . ., information you add to open-ended profile fields and questions . . . and other non-PII and Related Data about you may also be used to customize the online ads you encounter" (MySpace, 2008). As if these terms do not make it clear enough, the privacy policy stipulates that it counts this information among the economic assets it can sell at will:

> if MySpace sells all or part of its business or makes a sale or transfer of all or a material part of its assets . . . MySpace may transfer your PII [and, it seems fair to assume, all "Related Data"] to the party or parties involved in the transaction.
>
> (MySpace, 2008)

The information generated by consumers who are presumably compensated through access to the site comprises a major part of the assets of the site.

The fact that online sociability is facilitated by separating users from the means of socializing and thereby creating an external, storable, and sortable collection of data about their social lives, renders the product of their online activity further alienable. Not only can Facebook use it, for example, to design and implement customized marketing campaigns, but the data can be put to use by the growing range of applications that piggy-back on the Facebook platform. In this case, the term "separation" refers to the fact that a digital intermediary is interposed into relations of sociability. That is to say, forms of socializing that once relied upon other resources, as well as new forms of sociability, are increasingly dependent upon an infrastructure provided by a third party. When we are "separated" from the means of socialization, this does not mean we do not have access to them; rather, we come to rely upon technologies for socialization that separate us from the information upon which our social lives rely. Crucial resources for sociability are no longer in our own hands (at least to the extent that they once were), but are separated from us and stored in servers owned and controlled by, for example, Facebook. Imagine how much of the data upon which current social interactions rely (at least for some groups) would be lost if Facebook were to disappear: millions of photos, posts, messages, pokes, links, and so on would be wiped away: an entire archive upon which a wide range of social connections relied. Many people would lose one of their primary modes of communication with certain "friends." We do not have to go far to figure out *why* people are so willing to use such sites: they provide a ready, convenient, and entertaining way of enriching, extending, and preserving our connections with others. What requires a bit more explanation is how we might discern, in a voluntary and rewarding activity, the traces of exploitation.

The result of the form of separation facilitated by Facebook is not the dispossession of users, but rather the alienability of the product of their online social activity: the fact that the fruits of this activity can become a resource whose uses range far beyond their control. Companies like Appirio seek to exploit this productivity when they develop applications that put the social resources of employees to work in ways that exceed the knowledge and control of those who created them. We might then note the parallels between

the productive capacity of the work of online social networking and that of workplace labor: both rely for their exercise upon privately owned and controlled infrastructures (in the case of social networking sites, we might call these the means for the production of sociability). In both cases, access to these resources entails surrendering control over the product of collective activity to those who own the resources. It is important also to stress the differences between the two forms of value production. In the case of online social networks, control over the productive activity itself (as opposed to some of the product of this activity) is not (yet?) surrendered to those who own the means of sociability. That is to say, neither Facebook nor employers who avail themselves of applications like Appirio claim the right to dictate what employees do in their online social networks. In the case of Appirio, however, it is not hard to imagine how the imperatives of employers might come to colonize or shape social networking activities, especially if compensation is tied to the value they generate.

Another crucial difference between the productivity of online social networking and that of workplace labor is that the appropriation of products functions differently: employees do not lose their social networks just because their employers put the data they generate to work. Finally, unlike workplace labor, social networking is not directly tied to one's livelihood. Significantly, however, the scenario envisioned by Appirio directly links the two: one's social network becomes analogous in important respects to one's laboring capacities. That is to say, it becomes a productive resource, like one's education, skill set, training, and so on, that employers gain control over in order to generate value.

Exploiting Free Labor

Because activities like online social networking have the capacity to generate value, they fit into the broader categories of what has been described as "affective" and "immaterial" labor: not the manufacture of material products, but rather the production of networks of sociability, taste, and communication. Lazzarato describes immaterial labor as the "activity that produces the 'cultural content' of the commodity," noting that it "involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as 'work'—in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion" (1996, p. 137). Such labor corresponds to what Michael Hardt (also following Lazzarato) describes as an "affective" form of immaterial labor: "the production and manipulation of affects," which "requires (virtual or actual) human contact and proximity" (1999, p. 93).

In each case, the form of labor in question tends to be "free": both unpaid (outside of established labor markets) and freely given, endowed with a sense of autonomy. The free and spontaneous production of community, sociality, and shared contexts and understandings remains both autonomous in principle from capital and captured in practice by it. As Hardt (1999) puts it, "in those networks of culture and communication, collective subjectivities are produced and sociality is produced—even if those subjectivities and that sociality are directly exploitable by capital" (p. 93). In her discussion of the "free labor" provided by chat-room moderators in exchange for access to online services, Terranova (2000) suggests that such productive activities can, in some contexts, be described as both voluntary and subject to exploitation: "Free labor is the moment where this knowledgeable consumption of culture is translated into productive activities that are pleasurably embraced and at the same time often shamelessly exploited" (p. 37).

There is nothing particularly new about the fact that individual consumers add value to cultural and material products. Why then describe such forms of work (a term which can be used to designate any activity that requires expenditure of effort) as *labor* (work that generates value)? Precisely because of the ways in which commercial digital media *capture* the details of activity that once eluded systematic forms of value extraction in order to turn them into information commodities. Writing before the explosive growth of commercial social networking sites, Terranova (2000) draws on the work of the Italian autonomists to describe this process as the creation of a "social factory," wherein, "work processes have shifted from the factory to society, thereby setting in motion a truly complex machine" (p. 36). Certainly not all work practices have migrated out of the factory—but the term captures the way in which the productive capacity of the "factory" has extended out into society at large. The social factory puts our pleasures, our communications, our sociability to work, capturing them in order to extract value from them. Terranova describes such forms of online labor as "Simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited" (p. 36).

If we concede that activity which generates value for others can be described as labor, it is yet another step to make the case regarding why, as such, it might also be considered a form of exploitation. After all, the standard critique of exploitation relies on an account of coercion—even if this coercion is embedded in the social relations that structure the "freely" agreed upon labor contract. If, with Hardt (1999) and Terranova (2000), we are going to assert that the potential exists for the *exploitation* of so-called immaterial or free labor, we face the necessity of coming up with an understanding of the term that is adequate to the work being performed and the value extracted from it. In the face of contemporary critiques of attempts to mobilize the

notion of exploitation, perhaps the first task is to define what exploitation is *not*. The mere fact that someone benefits from the efforts of another does not, in itself, constitute exploitation. In an online context, for example, the fact that others may benefit by having access to an open-source program or to the product of the collective contributions of others cannot be construed as prima-facie evidence of exploitation. The shared benefits of collaboration and the non-market benefits that economists describe as externalities are not indicators of exploitation.

Exploitation is also not definable solely in terms of subjective sensibility: it is not reducible to whether or not individuals *feel* they are the victims of exploitation. Such feelings may indeed be accurate, and yet they do not define exploitation. That is to say, exploitation may exist in the absence of a subjective sense of victimization. Moreover, this assertion relies not upon the resuscitation of notions of false consciousness, but rather upon a conception of alienation which, according to Holmstrom (1997), lies at the heart of a critical account of exploitation. For Marx, Holmstrom observes, the appropriation of control over workers' labor represents more than a means for capturing surplus value: it simultaneously reproduces the alienation of workers from the product of their labor: "Being congealed labor, the product is in some sense part of the producers. When it is taken away from them, they are thereby diminished, impoverished, denuded" (1997, p. 85). It is a formulation that draws not from the description of exploitation in *Das Kapital*, but from the 1844 manuscripts, where Marx (2009) forcefully elaborates the wages of estranged labor:

> The worker places his life in the object; but now it no longer belongs to him, but to the object. [. . .] What the product of his labor is, he is not. Therefore, the greater this product, the less is he himself.
>
> (p. 27)

It is worth recalling this overtly humanist formulation if only to note how neatly it anticipates the promises of the interactive economy: to return control to producers of their creative activity (that is, to overcome their estrangement from the product of their efforts), to build community (to overcome estrangement from others), and to facilitate our own self-understanding (to overcome estrangement from themselves). If anyone is directly invoking the language of Marx in the current conjuncture, it is not the critical theorists, but the commercial promoters of the interactive revolution. In this regard, we might enlist Holmstrom's formulation to turn the promise of digital empowerment back on itself by exploring the ways in which it fails to overcome the very forms of alienation it promised to remedy.

The promise of interactive participation takes shape against the background of the very alienation that was the object of Marx's critique. One of the preconditions for the promotion of Web 2.0 is thus the invocation of the forms of estrangement associated with the exploitation of waged labor. It is perhaps telling that even on the right of the political spectrum, Marx is invoked to promote the ostensibly revolutionary power of the Internet. Conservative blogger Andrew Sullivan (2002), for example, once claimed that one of the most important things blogs do "is—to invoke Marx—seize the means of production. It's hard to underestimate what a huge deal this is." In a similar vein, Futurist William Wriston triumphantly proclaimed that "the force of microelectronics will blow apart all monopolies hierarchies, pyramids, and power grids of established industrial society" (as quoted in Barney, 2000, p. 19).

Direct references to Marx do not make it into the corporate promotional literature, but promises to overcome alienation, revitalize community, and empower citizen-consumers are recurring themes. Thus, for example, Facebook's company overview simply states: "Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected" (Facebook, 2009b). Likewise, YouTube is "empowering" users "to become the broadcasters of tomorrow" (YouTube, 2009). The promise, in other words, is to overcome the separation that lies at the core of capitalist alienation—the separation enacted by private control over productive resources that compels workers to surrender control over their own activity. The commercial digital solution borrows from the familiar spear-that-heals-the-wound-it-caused logic of advertising: separation can be remedied by further separation.

According to such an account, community and creativity can be fostered by commercial sites that store our data—everything from the details of our social networks to our shared musings, pictures, videos, and music. These can be circulated so easily because they are separated from us, stored and distributed (increasingly) on commercially owned and operated servers and networks, and administered by commercial applications. The conditions of access to this infrastructure for social networking and communication include submission to forms of surveillance, data-mining, and target marketing that support the emerging logic of online commerce: data-driven mass customization and target marketing.

According to the standard market account, the logic at work here is analogous to that of free exchange. Sites like Facebook and Gmail provide users with a service, and in exchange they extract some form of payment. Just as there is a "cost" associated with free-to-air TV, namely submission to marketing appeals, so too there is a cost associated with the services provided by commercial Internet services: submission to monitoring and targeted advertising. If, on this account, the logic of *free* exchange underlies e-commerce—if we willingly submit to the conditions set by commercial websites—then the common-sense notion of exploitation is no longer in play; exploitation entails coercion. The contribution of critical political economy is to discern the ways in which relations of power and hence forms of coercion structure the terms of so-called free exchange. Such a critique is crucial to any analysis of exploitation within the context of so-called "free" labor. The coercion inherent in "free" submission to the forms of monitoring, control, and payment associated with wage labor contracts is relatively straightforward: control over productive resources provides owners with disproportionate power in setting the terms of access to them (especially in conditions when there is a surplus labor force). If they are to provide for themselves, those with nothing to sell but their labor power must do so under terms structured by unequal power relations. In the case of social networking, the situation is different: access to the privately owned means of sociality is not (yet?) inseparable from the ability to earn a livelihood. For the most part, people aren't earning their living by using such resources, so they can go without them and still survive (though one might assume differently to hear some users describe how reliant they have become on their Facebook pages or their mobile phones).

The standard Marxist critique of exploitation combines the humanist concerns outlined above with an economic critique. The extraction of surplus value is based on the labor commodity—whose value in use differs from its value in exchange. Viewed within the context of market relations, workers are not underpaid for labor *qua* commodity (this is central to Marx's account of exploitation in Volume I of Capital). In the wage–labor exchange, labor receives its accurate market price: the (historically determined) cost of its replacement. However, because its value in use exceeds its exchange value—because labor *produces* value—its economic worth to those who own and control it is greater than its market price. Absent coercion, it would be preferable to control such power rather than to sell it. This account lines up with the Marxist account of alienation outlined by Holmstrom (1997)—one that equates the loss of control over creative activity and collective productive life with a loss of freedom. At the heart of both accounts is the ability to retain control over one's creative activity. As Marx puts it in the 1844 Manuscripts:

> Man makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness. . . . Only because of that is his activity free activity. Estranged labour reverses the relationship so that man, just because he is a conscious being, makes his life activity, his *essential being*, a mere means for his *existence*.
> (2009)

Exploitation does not merely deprive the individual of the full value realized from his or her creative activity, but crucially of the freedom to make this activity an object of will and consciousness. Estrangement occurs when our own activity appears as something turned back against us as "an alien power" over and against oneself (Marx, 2009).

With this somewhat richer conception of exploitation, we might develop a set of criteria for discerning its relevance to "free" online labor. First, exploitation entails some form of coercion—even if this lurks only in the background conditions that structure "free" exchange. Second, exploitation obtains when there is loss of control over one's creative, productive activity—a loss that results in the re-appearance of one's own activity in the form of an alien force turned back upon oneself.

Drawing on this definition of exploitation, we can revisit the example of Appirio's workplace application. Online social networking apparently fits neatly into the category of those freely given activities exercised under neither the compulsion of necessity nor the threat of force. It is worth noting, however, that social networking takes place against the background of forms of estrangement associated with industrial capitalism—the very alienation for which new media promise an antidote, according to the marketing hype. Thus, the offer of a modicum of control over productive resources as well as the promise to resuscitate extended forms of community and to challenge centralized control over collective representations all gain their appeal against the background of the depredations of industrial capitalism. Viewed in this context, the exchange that characterizes interactive sites (willing submission to monitoring and advertising in exchange for access to communication resources) might be understood as a second-order result of capitalist appropriation. The promise is that, thanks to interactive technology, workers can regain some of the control over their own activity that is surrendered in the wage–labor contract. Individuals are offered a modicum of control over the product of their creative activity in exchange for the work they do in building up online community and sociality upon privately controlled network infrastructures. Their free participation is redoubled as a form of productive labor captured by capital. In a self-generating cycle, the offer to overcome estrangement or alienation produces a second-order form of separation: that of users from the data they generate.

The case of Appirio makes the analogy to the workplace more direct. The request by employers to piggyback market research applications onto the social networks built by employees takes place within the power relations that structure submission to workplace conditions more generally. In this instance the appeal to old-school, retro-Marxist accounts of workplace exploitation remains relevant. Workers submit to the forms of monitoring and control exerted by employers precisely because the alternative is to lose their jobs. In the case of Appirio, the same power relations that govern the appropriation of

control over labor are brought to bear upon "autonomous" forms of activity like the creation and maintenance of online social networks.

However, the capture and use of social network information does not entail the capture of control over the productive activity of employees: they are not (yet?) being told *how* to conduct this activity, merely to make the results available for marketing purposes. We might then argue that even if conditions of coercion exist ("accept Appirio's application or face workplace consequences"), estrangement does not. Such is the standard rejoinder to the charge of exploitation in the context of sites like Facebook: people continue to enjoy the benefits of online social networking so why shouldn't Facebook and the applications it runs on its platform benefit as well, since their profits do not detract from the benefits that accrue to users?

But the appropriation of social networking activity, Appirio-style, may result in estrangement after all, not least if it becomes an expected part of what might be described as extra-workplace labor, something to be done on one's own time for the sake of building connections and collecting data for employers. Direct control in the form of explicit orders regarding what to do online can be replaced by indirect forms of governance in the name of maximizing one's marketable assets. Once social networks become part of a worker's assets to employers, they are subject to indirect forms of governance: maximize the productivity of one's network for the company or face workplace consequences.

A further test of exploitation is whether a form of appropriation results in the return of the fruit of one's own labor in the form of an alien force: the fact that one's own online social network activity will—in the scenario envisioned by Appirio and other applications—return in the form of an ongoing barrage of custom-tailored marketing appeals and strategies to influence behavior. Although built from the raw material of our own productive activity and the myriad forms of experimentation and data-mining exercised upon it by marketers, this activity will return to us in ways that make it difficult to discern the traces of our own contributions. The promise of interactivity, channeled through commercial websites, is to enlist the participatory public in the process of marketing to itself. The resulting opacity of representation—the inability to trace our own contributions in the forms of cultural suasion visited upon us by dint of our own activity recapitulates the estrangement that the digital "revolution" promised to overcome. The world envisioned by the operators of the data-mine, the owners of the databases, and the developers of marketing algorithms is one in which ever greater participation by the public will be transformed into increasingly exclusive forms of proprietary knowledge, available to the few for use upon the many.

Conclusion

Appirio is just one example of emerging attempts to put the activity of online social networking to work. Because it is a workplace application, one whose use is requested by employers, it brings into play the power relations that structure "free" submission to workplace requirements. But what about other uses of user-generated data—such as that of Facebook in the absence of Appirio's applications? Is it possible to discern the workings of exploitation without the coercion associated with workplace social relations? There is no external compulsion to use Facebook or other similar applications—such decisions are generally portrayed as a matter of choice, convenience, and personal pleasure. However, conditions of estrangement may still obtain since the commercial character of online social networking sites means that users will still be subject to detailed forms of data-gathering and ongoing controlled experiments in target marketing designed to more effectively influence their behavior without their knowledge. Their own activities will be turned back upon them in complex and opaque forms with the express purpose of channeling and directing their behavior.

In signing up to use such services, however, users arguably knowingly agree to submit to such forms of monitoring and manipulation and there is no law that says they *have to* join sites like Facebook or MySpace. Set aside for the moment the fact that by all accounts only a tiny fraction of users both read and understand the terms of use to which they ostensibly agree. Set aside even the fact that the terms themselves—subject to change at any time *without notice*—can hardly serve as the basis for either "fully informed" consent or enforceable claims on behalf of users. What would it mean to take seriously the notion that access to online communities facilitated by social networking sites comprised a productive resource in the emerging information economy? That is to say, what if we were to describe such sites not just as consumer services or entertaining novelties for the informated class, but as crucial information resources in the network era? This is a perspective that some of the more digitally advanced companies in the information economy are starting to embrace—one in which social networking sites serve, as one employer put it, as "a fundamental communication tool to probably more than half our workforce" (Moscaritolo, 2007). If this sounds absurd, a similar historical progression took place in the use of email, a popular communication-enhancing novelty that developed into an indispensable communication tool for a range of workers in the information-age workplace. It is not hard to imagine a world in which those who eschew networking sites will seem as outdated, hard-to-reach, and perhaps overly protective of their privacy as those who don't have an email account or carry mobile phones. In the social factory, the boundaries

between spheres of labor and leisure, domesticity, and consumption upon which the distinction between consumer choice and workplace coercion relies, become blurred. To the extent that our communicative, educational, and social lives are folded into the social factory and become the resources that we draw upon and sell to employers, access to resources for online networking becomes a crucial component of generating value.

One of the constitutive half-truths about the character of immaterial or affective labor in the digital era is that, as Banks and Humphreys (2008), echoing Sullivan (2002) and De Kerckhove (in Barney, 2000) put it, "the means of knowledge and cultural production are now in the hands of the consumers" (p. 406). The formulation blurs the important line between *access* to the means of online content production and *ownership or control* over these resources. Consumers may own computers and software, but not the networks and vast server farms that make possible the creation and maintenance of online social networks and the forms of content sharing that characterize the emerging online economy.

Thus, any comparison of industrial-era production to information-age creativity needs to take into account not just the fact that productive resources are in the hands of consumers, but also that the means of communication and distribution are *not*. That the privatization of network infrastructures and the commercialization of online applications lies at the core of emerging online business models is obscured by a narrow focus on user-generated content.

This chapter's premise is that the new forms of communication, transaction, consumption, and interaction made possible by digital technologies need to be situated within their larger economic context, namely, the creation of a privately owned and operated commercial media structure. When we explore what people do on Facebook or MySpace and the forms of community such sites enable, we must also keep in mind what gets done with the products of this activity, who controls its use and re-use, who profits from its transformation into commercial commodities and marketing campaigns, as well as who is targeted by these campaigns and to what end. Contrary to conventional wisdom, social networking sites don't publicize community, they *privatize* it. Commercial social networking sites are ostensibly collaborative productions, except when it comes to structuring terms-of-use agreements, and, of course, allocating the profits they generate.

This is not to discount the real forms of satisfaction and communion that users get out of participating in such sites—rather, it is to situate these within the larger economic context whereby value-generating activity is exchanged according to terms structured by those who own and operate the means of their production. The fact that third parties may benefit from the collection and use of our personal information does not in itself constitute exploitation, at least according to the definition proposed by this chapter. Nor does the fact that we may enjoy and benefit from our social networking practices exempt such activities from being subject to exploitation, any more than the fact that some forms of wage labor may be enjoyable and rewarding. The capture and use of user-generated information for commercial purposes—its reconstitution in forms of suasion, manipulation, and control turned back upon those who created it—recapitulates the logic of separation and estrangement.

In the broadest sense, the promise of access to sites of online creativity and sociability takes place against a background already structured by separation (of the great majority of individuals from control over productive resources) and resulting forms of estrangement. Moreover, as the example of Appirio suggests, as interactive technologies facilitate forms of extra-workplace productivity, workplace relations help determine the capture and "monetization" of this activity. The case of Appirio represents the more general logic behind attempts to piggyback on commercial forms of social networking. Facebook markets itself as a platform for a broad range of applications designed to capitalize on the information generated by its members.

Consider, for example, the use of add-on applications (one of which is suggestively named Encompass) by universities to build alumni networks for marketing and fundraising. As one press release put it:

> When looking to engage young alumni, you have to become part of their conversation, and many of those interactions start on Facebook. . . . Using Facebook Connect, Encompass just became more social by allowing member activity, like an event RSVP or a donation, to be published on members' Facebook News Feeds. . . . Facebook Connect is what our market needs to achieve their development and advancement goals.
>
> (*Science Letter*, 2008)

Perhaps access to educational resources will one day be conditional upon sharing information about (and via) one's social networks.

In the end, theoretical approaches to commercial social networking applications that treat them as a site of free choice paradoxically recapitulate the distinction between production and consumption they profess to undermine. If, indeed, such sites are productive ones, if they erode the distinction between consumer and producer, audience and author, user and creator, then they become amenable to critiques of the conditions that structure access to the means of productive resources. The lens of consumer choice then becomes a flawed one for examining the workings of social networking. It ignores the productive aspect of such sites and thus overlooks both the value-generating work done by consumers and the logic of enclosure whereby this value is captured. Second, it naturalizes the process whereby private ownership of productive resources structures the

terms of exchange whereby users exchange their value-generating activity for access to resources for communication, information sharing, and sociability. Third, it backgrounds the forms of coercion that may contribute to willing submission to detailed forms of monitoring. Finally, it concedes that, in the information age, our communal life will be permeated by comprehensive monitoring and tightly targeted advertising while assuming that the natural form community takes in the digital era is one based on privately owned resources. It should be possible, by contrast, to envision forms of online community and sociability that do not entail submission to increasingly detailed forms of monitoring and sophisticated target marketing.

Social networking needn't be constituted as a commercially supported activity. Indeed, the sites lend themselves to the collaborative peer-to-peer logic described by Bauwens (2009), in which use value is produced directly,

> through the free cooperation of producers who have access to distributed capital. . . . Its product is not exchange value for a market, but use-value for a community of users (for example in the sharing of film and music). It is governed by the community of producers (and users) themselves, and not by market allocation or corporate hierarchy.

There is a longstanding history of groups creating not-for-profit modes of sociality in a range of spaces and contexts, and, as Facebook itself demonstrates, people are willing to contribute the necessary work in exchange for the non-monetary and collective benefits they receive. Nor is it the case that users are unwilling or unable to pay the cost of supporting online social networks—indirectly they already do so in the form of the advertising costs passed on to them in the purchase price of the products they consume. Such costs would likely be much lower if they were directly incorporated into user fees for a not-for-profit online infrastructure. The Internet didn't start as a privately owned and commercially operated communication system, and it needn't remain so. However, it is perhaps a symptom of the triumph of market logic that it sounds outlandish even to suggest the possibility of a non-commercial Internet—as if it had always been primarily a privately owned and commercially operated system. Perhaps one way to trouble the seemingly intractable assumption of the naturally commercial basis of new forms of sociability is to highlight alternative forms of production, as Bauwens does, and to highlight the exploitative character of online commerce. The reduction of our notion of community to one structured by marketing interests and built upon the exploitation of user labour represents not a limitation of the technology, but of our conception of community and our grasp of the potential of networked interactivity.

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