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Social Net-working: Exploring the Political Economy of the Online Social Network Industry

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Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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SOCIAL NET-WORKING: EXPLORING THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE
ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORK INDUSTRY

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by

Craig <u>Butosi</u>

Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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London, Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the nascent political economy of the online social network industry. Exemplars of online social networking, Facebook and Twitter have been often understood as revolutionary new media tools. My findings show that these social networks are taking on a logic of capitalist production and accumulation, calling into question their perceived revolutionary character. Evidence suggests that user-generated content are now being commodified and exchanged for profit.

A critical discourse analysis of Facebook and Twitter's privacy policy and terms of use reveals that these texts primarily function as work contracts rather than as treatises on privacy protection. Drawing on the work of Karl Marx, this study revisits his theory of value and develops an expanded form of variable capital model to demonstrate how social networkers fit into this new capitalist circuit of accumulation. This extension of the working day is problematic. Policy recommendations are offered in order to negate the commodification of user data.

Of critical importance ... and as the necessary ground for any effective transition, is sustained discussion and demonstration of the inherent transforming processes involved [in media]. The modes of 'naturalization' of these means of communicative production need to be repeatedly analysed and emphasised, for they are indeed so powerful, and new generations are becoming so habituated to them that here as strongly as anywhere, in the modern socio-economic process, the real activities and relations of men are hidden behind a reified form, a reified mode, a 'modern medium'.

– Raymond Williams, *Means of Communication as Means of Production*

To my nagyanya, Vilma Bűtősi,

Nagyon Szépen Köszön

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PREFACE

Shortly after Facebook made its services available to those beyond the walls of

Harvard University, I, like many others, created an account. After months of usage, I

serendipitously inquired into the terms and conditions to which Facebook users either

knowingly or unknowingly agree at the time of registration. I was struck by a particular

clause in an earlier version of their terms of use contract informing users that, while the

latter retain ownership over their user-generated content, they must compulsorily grant

Facebook,

> an irrevocable, perpetual, non-exclusive, transferable, fully paid, worldwide
> license ... to use, copy, publicly perform, publicly display, reformat, translate,
> excerpt ... and distribute such User Content for any purpose ... on or in connection
> with the Site or the promotion thereof, to prepare derivative works of, or
> incorporate into other works, such User Content. (Electronic Frontier Foundation
> 2011)

This passage was startling to me because it seemed to unhinge the notion of ownership

from control in a rather subtle way. It also redefined in a novel manner the relationship

between social media user and social media provider. What was equally surprising was

the lack of awareness amongst social networkers of this particular social arrangement.

These observations, combined with my interest in the political-economic writings of Karl

Marx and his Western-, neo-, post-, and autonomist-Marxist successors led me to

conclude two things: that I am effectively working for Facebook, and that this assertion

requires elucidation beyond the restrictive space of a knee-jerk epiphany. In the space

that is to follow, I attempt to address this conclusion beyond the rather confining space of

spontaneous intuition.

Raymond Williams, who in the 1970s was writing about culture and the political economy of mass communication, argued that means of communication are always means of production (Williams 2010, 56). As paradoxical as this assertion may be, since it seemingly collapses Marx's bifurcation of base (material production) and superstructure (communication) (Hebblewhite 2012), it suggests that communication, being a process of information exchange through which social relations are cemented and maintained, have not only an abstract, immaterial quality to them, evidenced by the use of grammatical rules, speech, syntax, and language, but that the perceived immateriality of communication necessarily relies on a physical, material base which, without it, makes the communicative process quite impossible. Communication relies on media through which content may pass. The physical condition of speech is the larynx, of phonemes the very air we breathe, of machine-readable code the magneto-resistance of the computer hard disk-drive, of thoughts the brain (Arendt 1998, 3), and of daily news all of the above. Communication, as a matter of information exchange, is just as much about form as it is about content. The former always implies the latter and *vice versa*. Williams' thesis begins an interesting and fruitful discussion on communication and its relationship with the complex dialectical interplay between a society's mode of production and its superstructural elements. It is this discussion, among others, that informs what is to follow.

The importance of understanding the form that communication takes is central to a materialist critique of this process. Williams understood means of communication as means of production because he wanted to emphasize first and foremost that communication is a *process*, not a thing, between people, and that this process

presupposes historically determined social relations within which human labour capacity is exercised. That is to say, communication is made possible by the labour of individuals. Communication is thus a potential site of social struggle because the expression of this labour capacity often functions within capitalist relations of production, where exploitation of the kind Marx sought to explain exists, and where the question of power is ever present. Williams' "Means of Communication as Means of Production" is a call not only for scholars to reconsider the relationship between base and superstructure (Hebblewhite 2012), but a call to re-politicize the terrain of human activity not normally seen as immediately, or even fundamentally, political.

Writing nearly forty years ago, it would have been difficult for Williams to foresee with pinpoint precision the historical trajectory that communications systems would take in the years that followed; namely, their expansion from analog to digital form, and, with this change, the development of a "democratized" or many-to-many communications architecture over the earlier one-to-many communicative forms of mass society. The former, of course, has been facilitated by the recent development of the global Internet infrastructure, the World Wide Web, microprocessors, and other digital information-communication technologies (ICTs), making the process of communication and content production among media producers and media consumers highly interactive.

These developments commonly signify a familiar transition from so-called *old media* to *new media*, where the latter are primarily identified in terms of their digital rather than analogue form, and where the rendering of these media is based on the creation and manipulation of numerical data (i.e., computer binary code) (Gane and Beer 2008, 6). Despite Williams' understandable lack of prognostic precision, however, he

would have agreed that repeated analysis and critical inquiry into these new media forms, regardless of their perceived "democratic" character, are still crucial, as they like older mass media communications are developed and function within a market economy frequently at odds with the public interest.

Williams observed that media, such as television and radio, tend to become "naturalized" as they are used. Rather than seeing media as material processes involving (working) relationships between people, they are instead seen as thing-like, objectified, entities that exist extraneous to us without regard for their political or economic significance. Insofar as this is the case, they are taken for granted without a second thought to the ways in which these media are necessarily part of the social relations and social forces of production in capitalist society. Similarly today, the new media have in large part become naturalized, taken for granted, and understood to be simply part and parcel of a world of things with which we interact. The new media today are very much like Williams' reified "modern medium" (Williams 2010, 69). In other words, they are commonly seen as mere technological instruments whose existence is seemingly unrelated to the realms of the political and the economic.

However, because many new media organizations operate according to capitalist production processes, as the present study contends, they are just as political in character as they are useful or instrumental. Their reification, a process that effectively conceals the unequal "relations of men [*sic*]" (Williams 2010, 69), becomes an increasingly effective barrier that works against critical inquiry into their social situatedness as means toward the development of new, alternative modes of communication. The ideological pitfalls of seeing media as (a) purely instrumental (a means to an end); (b) either natural or

technological, but not both (face-to-face communication, speech, and utterances, or simply mechanical or digital devices, respectively); or (c) decidedly abstract rather than concrete in character, (*mass* communication vs. communications) (Williams 2010, 57–60), all serve to obfuscate the complex, necessarily socio-political relationship forged between those who produce and consume media content and the media forms that allow for such creation. These three "ideological blocks" (Williams 2010, 57) lead to the reification of media processes because they play into the erroneous bifurcation between form and content, which are, in fact, a dialectical unity (Babe 2009, 161–174). The consequence, of course, is the development of a perceptual blind spot, which renders invisible the potential injustices, inequalities, and asymmetric social relations formed by capitalist accumulation and production. Such partial perspective distances media technologies from the productive forces and relations upon which they rely and within which they operate. Communicational forms do not simply operate themselves. They rely just as heavily on material production, a process facilitated by people; the converse also holds true. One reason for understanding means of communication as means of production, as Williams does, is to reassert the primacy – and inherently political nature – of the relationship between media, their content production, and their specifically social and subjective character in addition to their individual and objective character.

Indeed, if we accept Williams' thesis that means of communication *are always* means of production (i.e., inextricably linked), then an analysis of new media is necessary. This is especially so if one is critical about capitalist production processes yet amenable to finding alternative, non-exploitative social arrangements. The creation of a more socialized communications array whereby "the means and systems of the most

direct communication [are] under our own direct and general control" (Williams 2010, 69) is thus an important objective towards this realization. This study agrees with Williams; not merely as "a matter of general theory" (Williams 2010, 56), but also as matters of both the public interest and the public good.

The present study is influenced by the political imperatives of Williams' cultural materialism which, in turn, is influenced by the work of Karl Marx. The following will be a critical interrogation of a form of new media as means toward highlighting its subtle and surreptitious characteristics. This is to say, it will work towards fleshing out the contradictions in, and highlighting the problematic nature of, these media – these *social* media. A source of such contradiction lies in the tension between what these media are doing in practice and how they are talked about, as evidenced in both popular and academic discourse. New media industries are well-cloaked in rhetoric that tend to project outwardly their novelty and usefulness (hence, legitimacy) as well as their so-called democratizing (hence, unproblematic) power; yet, what remains hidden from view, relative to the overwhelming acceptance of these media, are their less savoury characteristics, such as privacy abuses for capital gains and relatively exploitative contractual arrangements.

The present study takes as its object of inquiry two ubiquitous social media platforms: Facebook, the world's most popular social networking site, and Twitter, the world's most popular micro-blogging site. Facebook and Twitter were chosen because there has been a noticeable trend over the last several years indicative of an increased convergence and relatedness between them. Online businesses and other websites now include social media buttons that allow users to link directly to both Twitter and

Facebook from other websites, making user interaction with these media often a matter of interdependency. There is another noticeable trend where many businesses are migrating to Facebook in addition to, and sometimes instead of, constructing a dedicated website. Moreover, recent events show that both social media platforms are in the process of converging in other ways: Facebook has announced that their users are now able to update their Twitter feeds directly from within their Facebook profile (Burns 2011).

These exemplary new media forms are seen, from a critical political economic perspective, as fundamentally problematic in their current form. Despite the ways in which popular discourses about these social media are bandied about, extolling the virtues of sharing information, connecting the world, and allowing people to engage with others in novel ways – yes, they do all of these – the fact is that they are embedded in a larger capitalist economy, one that relies upon the extraction of surplus value from a particular class of workers. They create and implicate a new "class in itself" (Marx 1963, 173; Cleaver 1979, 83), who are effectively united by their common exploitation as they engage with these media: social net-workers. The conditions that organize them into such a class are, however, the very preconditions for change. The point then is to move from these objective conditions of exploitation toward a more equitable communications arrangement by insisting that social net-workers become a "class for itself" (Marx 1963, 173); that is, to realize their power as a class and change these objective conditions. It is hopeful that what follows will work towards this end.

The objective of the present study will be flesh out the contradiction between the common sense view of social media, as found in both popular and academic discourses on the subject, and their actually existing form. Admittedly, social media do provide

novel ways to communicate; however, because of their particular historical mode of development since the turn of the decade, it is more difficult to see them as revolutionary as some contend. The introductory comments herein will elucidate the discussion surrounding social media, focusing on Facebook specifically, and how it has primed subsequent discussions on the topic. Additionally, the introduction will provide a snapshot of global social media use in order to emphasize their embeddedness in, and hence their importance to, the global social fabric. The discussion of user data commodification will also begin here.

Section two, a review of the literature on the political economy of social media, will frame the discussion of the economics of social networking, what this paper calls the social media peer-to-provider information flows. This section will work toward three ends: it will critically outline the significant extant research in the area of the political economy of online social networking, and it will identify a research lacuna in this area to situate the current study into the wider debate. Lastly, it will proffer a unique contribution to the developing field of the political economy of online social networking and new media.

Once these objectives are achieved, section three will provide concrete evidence demonstrating empirically, through a critical discourse analysis, the commodification processes of which Facebook and Twitter now rely, and how this enforced yet implicit social arrangement perpetuates a class relation, though in a rather unorthodox manner. This section will show how social net-workers are, rather forcibly, implicated in commodification processes. A close, critical reading of Facebook and Twitter's privacy policy and terms of use contracts – documents that are essential in defining the social

network user and social network provider relationship – will be conducted. It will be argued that both of these documents function together as a new species of work contract in the online digital context. Their primary function, rather than merely protecting user privacy, is to legally (re)produce and to sustain capitalist relations of production, i.e., the commodification of user generated data; an arrangement that works primarily, but not exclusively, in the material interests of capital. As the user accepts the data collection practices of these sites, whether they read the privacy policy or not, the user's registration and subsequent usage of these sites marks the beginning of the production and commodification process.

A significant goal of the present study is to demonstrate how Facebook and Twitter, as exemplary forms of "emancipatory" new media, have been effectively subsumed under capitalist production and accumulation processes. It will be necessary, therefore, to bolster theoretically the conclusions drawn in section three. Section four of this study will be a theoretical inquiry into the work of Marx and some of his contemporaries in order to link the former's observations of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism with the observations made in this study. The aim will be to synthesize Marx's work as it relates to the online digital context in order to anchor the conclusions drawn herein. Familiar concepts such as the commodity, exploitation, relative surplus value, and formal and real subsumption will be discussed in the context of online social networking. These concepts are crucial for a critical understanding of new media. A leading debate in Marxian circles has centred on the theoretical efficacy of Marx's theory of value and his theory of rent as they relate to the current historical moment. This debate will be taken up in the context of online social networking. Is the social practice of online social

networking best understood as productive (does Marx's labour theory of value apply here?) or, is it, as some argue, better explained the global rentier of the general intellect?

Section five of this study will outline a positive critique of online social networking, outlining some policy recommendations that will serve to facilitate the discovery of a more directly controlled and socialized online social networking architecture; one that seeks to overcome the commodification processes common to both Facebook and Twitter. It is hopeful that the governance-centred recommendation proffered will redirect the common sense view of social media towards a broader understanding of the (unequal) relationship we often hold with digital media of this kind.

INTRODUCTION

0.1. Social Media Discourse: Revolution and Democracy

Strands of critical media research have in the past explored the political economic

dimension of new media, positioning interactive, Web 2.0 environments like Facebook

and Twitter as key players in the new online digital economy (Andrejevic 2010; Cohen

2008; Coté and Pybus 2007; Fuchs 2011a; Terranova 2010; Terranova 2000). Yet, some

of this research has not taken as their particular object of inquiry social network privacy

and terms of use policies. Despite this research lacuna, analyses that have contributed to

an elucidation of the processes by which economic benefits are gleaned from these

environments, in particular, from their users, have helped counter some of the more

grandiose, technologically deterministic claims forwarded by media gurus and business

academics who, rather prematurely, proselytize the "revolutionary" potential of new

ICTs.

Discussions of this sort tend to downplay or outright ignore, among other things,

the relatively exploitative nature of these technologies. They celebrate the supposed

victory of collaborative "dot-communism" over capitalist enterprise (Van Dijck and

Nieborg 2009, 856; Smith 2009). The assumption is, in many cases, that as participation

in the creation of content shifts in favour of media consumers, so too does the potential of

emancipation from older forms of economic subservience:

> You can participate in the economy as an equal, co-creating value with your peers
> and favourite companies to meet your very personal needs, to engage in fulfilling
> communities, to change the world or just to have fun! Prosumption comes full
> circle! (Tapscott and Williams 2006, 150)

The work of Alvin Toffler has been influential in priming discussions of the information age, in particular the revolutionary aspects of its media, without due regard for the economic base necessary for their production, distribution, and consumption. His views on what he calls the Third Wave *prosumer* (the electronic-age producer-consumer) are an example of his dubious optimism:

> The Third Wave will therefore produce history's first "trans-market" civilization ...With the basic construction task now virtually complete [i.e., global capital], the enormous energies poured into building the world market system become available for other human purposes. From this fact alone will flow a limitless array of civilizational changes. New religions will be born. Works of art on a hitherto unimagined scale. Fantastic scientific advances. And, above all, wholly new kinds of social and political institutions ... This, at its core, is what the rise of the prosumer is about. (Toffler 1981, 287–288)

This species of celebratory rhetoric and techno-futuristic prognostication is misleading, but has, nonetheless, informed much of the way people think about the new media, including business intellectuals and so-called management gurus like Don Tapscott. It is misleading because prosumption media, such as social network sites, are so often understood as technologies of *revolution*, implying transcendence beyond the centuries old processes of capitalist accumulation and economics, and technologies that are supposedly "threatening to media conglomerates," spaces that "seemingly [deliver] the long-held dream of media radicals for access from below" (McGuigan 2009, 84). Consider, for instance, Mark Zuckerberg's promotional commentary about Facebook:

> That's just something that goes along with being revolutionary .... When we launched Newsfeed, someone made a group Students Against Newsfeed and people started joining it, and this trend was mounting. And every single person's Newsfeed had a story that said 'man, all these people are joining Students Against Newsfeed.' A lot of companies probably would have altered the code to block that from propagating, and we probably could have but we have this focus on openness so we felt like, no, that's not the right thing to do. It's kind of like journalistic integrity. (Kessler 2007)

In yet another example, Tom Smith, writing in the *International Journal of Market Research,* says that the "[shift] towards user-driven technologies such as blogs, social networks and video-sharing platforms ... have enabled a revolution" (2009, 559), but merely goes on to outline the changing ways in which users interact with one another and the Internet. While he is correct that social media is "reorientating the economy" (2009, 560), it is certainly not transcending it, because, as people leave data trails behind them as they engage with these media, there is money to be made (2009, 561).

Most problematic is the use of the term revolution in the context of the Arab Spring. Many have written on the importance of social media in sewing the social seeds of revolution in Egypt and elsewhere, and how such technology has played a key role:

> Social networks have achieved what years of western aid and support to democracy have failed to do; and they have done it in no more than seventeen days! These days have witnessed many trial and error models, but in the final analysis the Egyptian revolution has validated the powerful role of social media in the political arena. Indeed, Egypt is now pregnant with the first successful Facebook revolution. (Radwan 2011)

While it is difficult to argue against the supporting role that social media has played in the events of the Arab Spring, it is important not to underestimate the historical, material conditions that led up to such political upheaval. It is true that much of Egyptian mass media such as television and radio were tightly controlled under Mubarak (Rugh 2011; Kandil 2011, 39), allowing social media to circumvent these channels. However, to overemphasize the role of technology and to frame the latter as revolutionary in a time of social struggle would be to commit to a crude technological determinism, marginalizing the importance of those who actually brought about political change in the first place. Mosco reminds us that the spaces of revolution are not Facebook, YouTube or Twitter,

but rather Tahrir Square, Syntagma Square, Puerta del Sol, Plaça Catalunya, and Zuccotti Park (Fuchs and Mosco 2012, 129).

Interestingly, it has been observed that, "social network sites ... played a role in the preliminary stages [of Egyptian political mobilization] only. Once the snowball started rolling, their value depreciated in favour of more traditional media, such as television and radio" (Kandil 2011, 23). Kandil reminds us that the material force of Christians, Muslims, peasants, and people from all classes in Egypt who rallied together in the millions, striking and protesting against oppression felt by the middle-classes and exploitation in the lower classes, were key to overthrowing Mubarak's regime (Kandil 2011, 23–24).

Douglas and Guback emphasize that there is often a conflation between two distinct understandings of the term revolution: It can refer to "movement around a central axis," a metaphor explaining changes in the communication / information domain, in either superstructure or infrastructure; or, it can mean a rapid change or overthrow of an existing order, its product being a *fundamental* change in the structure of the political-economic-social order (1984, 233–234). The problem with the former definition is obvious. It can, when properly deployed, have the emotive force of the latter, but completely conceal aspects of the *status quo* which remain unchanged, thereby stunting the momentum toward a fundamental revolution of the base and superstructure. Examples that prevent such revolutionary action from proceeding include the continued class ownership of the means of production, of which another class relies for survival; capitalist accumulation strategies; and monopoly and oligopoly capital, which subsume

into an existing economic and political fabric new technologies in order to guarantee

concentration and centralized control over their use (1984, 235).

What is important to remember is that the relations *to* production are not the same

as the relations *of* production (Douglas and Guback 1984, 239). It is a mistake to

understand any new technological development as reflective of a revolutionary change in

the economic base. Capital's "mode of development" (Castells 2007, 179) must be

separated from that of its mode of production. The former, which could be interpreted

here as informational-technological movement around the central axis of capitalism, often

takes place within the purview of the latter. The so-called information revolution, sparked

by the work of post-industrial society theorists Alan Touraine and Daniel Bell, does not

replace the mode of production, but instead, as some have argued, speed it up (D. Harvey

1989), pointing only to changes in the mode of development. This problematic mirrors

Gramsci's observation that a challenge in identifying any social transformation lies in

acknowledging the dialectical tension between revolution and restoration (1971, 109–

114): When is a revolution a revolution, a restoration a restoration? More importantly,

when does restoration mask itself as a revolution, and revolution as restoration?

But the distinction between capital's mode of development and its mode of

production is little acknowledged in popular and academic discourse on social media, and

are often conflated. The focus on information-processing since the 1960s has often been

interpreted as a fundamental revolution in the political-economic-social order, when, in

fact, there is abundant evidence to suggest the restorative qualities that these technologies

have on social relations. For example, McChesney demonstrates persuasively that, when

comparing economic productivity before and after information-technology investment

from the 1990s and early 2000s, "[IT] accounted for at most 6 percent of [US] GDP"
(2008, 293), suggesting that only a quarter of total economic growth since 1995 can be
attributed to this sector together with telecommunications (2008, 293). Moreover, only
0.07 percent of a 1.33 percentage-point in the annual average rate of productivity growth
in Unites States can be attributed to the use of computer technology and software
(McChesney 2008, 296; Gordon 2000). So, despite the tendency of many to interpret
information-processing as a trigger stimulating rapid and sustained economic growth
across all sectors of the wider economy – and, hence, a concomitant sea-change in
economic configuration – the facts suggest that what has taken place is, from an
economic perspective, simply more of the same.

Comor observes that a dominant view of the promise of new media technology
has been that "if more people are engaged in 'immaterial labor' and 'knowledge-based'
occupations surely ... corporations and states will ... lose control of established levers of
power" (2010, 315). What is absent from this dominant viewpoint is that, assuming this is
the case, individuals who have subverted these established levers of power are also those
who have the potential to become the very levers of power they despise – media
conglomerates and corporations. Van Dijck and Nieborg's observations of the rhetoric of
Web 2.0 discourses, found in such works as Christopher Locke's *A Cluetrain Manifesto:
The End of Business as Usual*, Tapscott and Williams' *Wikinomics: How Mass
Collaboration Changes Everything*, and Leadbeater's *We-Think: Why Mass Creativity Is
the Next Big Thing*, are exemplary of this line of thought*:*

> Ever since the early stages of the Internet, manifestos have announced the
> beginning of a new era in which the countercultural ideals of communalism,
> collaboration and creative sharing were prophesied to prevail over purely
> consumerist values; the resulting discourse yielded an odd combination of grass

roots values of commonality and hardcore capitalist values. (Van Dijck and Nieborg 2009, 858)

That something can be revolutionary yet reproduce capitalist forms of production and accumulation, such as commodification and surplus value extraction, is counterintuitive. For as Werner Bonefeld writes, "the social reproduction of capital and [abstract] labour … acquires its livelihood in and through the negation of communism, a negation that the commodity-form presents .... This negation rests on the reproduction of human social practice in the mode of being denied; that is, as a commodified activity (Bonefeld 2002, 79). Every instantiation of a regime of commodification is, invoking Althusser, to reproduce the relations of (capitalist) production (2001a, 85–90), and to thus contradict the very grassroots and revolutionary spirit upon which discussions of the so-called New Economy, the Third Wave, the prosumer society, the post-industrial society, etc., are predicated. This is partly due to one particular trait that they all share which, though commonly overlooked in these discourses, share affinities with earlier historical periods that we have supposedly transcended: namely, a regime of commodification, and as a result, exploitation, surplus-value generation, the perpetuation of the class relation, and a loss of control over the production process.

The promise of new media's interactivity is not a sufficient condition for a fundamental revolution in society, but it is a necessary one. Though, it may be true that the new media do allow for a more "interactive" (Andrejevic 2007a) and potentially subversive mode of communication, one should not discount the larger economic structures within which these novel forms of communication operate. Increased access to a technology does not necessarily translate into a qualitative change in one's social position. Such thinking neglects the social processes within which these technologies

function. Indeed, "if, at the surface level, Facebook hearkens back to the pre-mass-society role of social networks as sources of news and information, it is hard to forget that it does so for distinctly commercial purposes" (Andrejevic 2010, 280).

What can be concluded from these observations is that there is a noticeable disparity between the way in which new media is talked about in both academic and popular discourse and what these media are doing in practice. Because of this incongruity, it is necessary to move beyond social network mission statement promises and *About*-page guarantees of free expression that work to harness people's desires to connect with others and share information. This in order to locate and isolate the new processes of information commodification so that it may ultimately be resisted.

Moreover, it becomes necessary to move beyond research tending towards a strictly socio-cultural analysis of social networking, often failing to account for the imposition of the commodity-form upon user activity. Danah boyd and Nicole Ellison's work on the cultural aspects of social networks, which have little to say on the subjects of power, media ownership, information privacy, the economics of participatory culture, and the pragmatic approaches to privacy in the legal field, are exemplary of this uncritical[1] line of inquiry, all of which have been cited widely and often (boyd, 2011; Grimmelmann, 2009; McCullagh, 2008; Solove, 2008; Strahilevitz, 2004).

In more Marxian terms, any discussion of social media that centres solely on their use-value characteristics (connectivity, maintenance of one's social capital, keeping people connected, novel strategies of marketing and advertising, creation of networked

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[1] By uncritical I do not mean research that is anti-intellectual, of poor quality, or without rigour; rather, I mean that these lines of inquiry are too narrow in scope, are overly pragmatic in intent, or fail to take into account the economic factors and processes of commodification that have equal influence on the new social relations created within these communications environments.

publics, privacy, prosumption, etc.) concomitantly conceals the processes by which they have the capacity to realize the exchange-value of user activity. On this point section four will expand on the commodity-form as understood by Marx in order to demonstrate the contradictory nature of the commodity, and, from this, the contradictory nature that individuals, depending on their social position, as either worker or capitalist, embody; namely, as those who are either interested in the use-value of a thing or its exchange-value.

It is in Facebook and Twitter's privacy policy and terms of use documents that we can see the use-value/exchange-value dynamic at play: there is a noticeable foregrounding of the use-value of both the service and of one's interest or capacity to engage with it. Simultaneously, there is a near-complete backgrounding (by way of euphemism and deflection) of the potential exchangeability of a user's free labour products provided by their continued participation in these online environments. Indeed, if the new digital economy is predicated on the desire for people to participate in the creation of culture, then it is also in capital's interest to encourage people to participate (Lazzarato 1996, 134–137). This is why a critique of the political economy of online social networking is necessary.

0.2. Facebook and Twitter: Mapping the Global Social Graph

A recent report from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on the Internet Economy shows that half of all OECD Internet users use some form of online social network service; and, in 2010, sixty-percent of the United States' population was engaged in online social networking activity (OECD 2011, 15). In Canada, the Internet penetration rate is high, with 79.2 percent of the total

population being connected to the Internet, with nearly 49 percent of them using

Facebook (Internet World Stats 2011a). This proportion translates into approximately

16.6 million Canadian Facebook users (Internet World Stats 2011b). In the United States,

there are 245 million Internet users, and 48.4 percent of them have a Facebook account

(Internet World Stats 2011b). This latter proportion represents approximately 151.4

million Americans. The global penetration rate of Facebook alone, that is, the number of

people who have a Facebook account worldwide, is 10.3 percent – slightly under one

billion people (Facebook 2011; Internet World Stats 2011c). Figure one below, though

excluding Canada, illustrates social media global usage among other OECD countries.

Statistics on Twitter's global penetration are limited; however, Alexa, a popular

online web-analytics service, ranks the micro-blogging site as the ninth most visited

website in the world, having a reach of 10 percent of the world's Internet-connected

population (Sherfesee et al. 2011a). Facebook comes in as the second most visited

website in the world, followed by Google in first place (Sherfesee et al. 2011b).
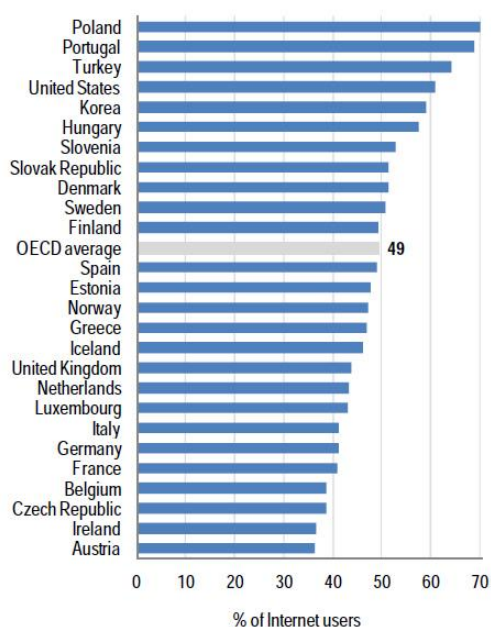
Figure 1 - Online Social Network Usage of OECD Internet Users by Country, 2010. Data by OECD 2011, 15.

As of March, 2011, *Business Insider* reports that Twitter contains approximately

119 million active accounts (defined as any account with more than one other account

linked to it) and 175 million accounts have been created since the service went live in

2006 (Carlson 2011). It is no surprise, then, that 94 percent of businesses with 10 or more

employees are also connected to the Internet (OECD 2011, 8). Clearly, there are, and

have been for over a decade, online markets to corner, and online social networks are

crucial for providing the necessary consumer data to feed market intelligence.

0.3. Facebook and Twitter: New Media Commodities in the New Economy

It is no secret that Mark Zuckerberg, CEO and founder of Facebook, believes that

the age of privacy is over. The term privacy, commonly understood here in terms of the

degree to which one has control over the distribution of their personal data, is a concept

left ill-defined and underdeveloped in social media discourse, thus rendering the term

rather vague. This vague and seemingly contradictory usage, however, is precisely how

Zuckerberg deploys the term. It allows him to assert that privacy is somehow no longer a

"social norm" (Johnson 2010). In an age of social networking and the proliferation of

ICTs, to be private seems to commit oneself to a romantic yearning for a bygone era. This

understanding of privacy-as-outmoded is very often criticized in terms of evidence that

demonstrates to the contrary the willingness of people to share information with others so

openly, to communicate, and to be public; these actions are misleadingly understood as

the opposite of being private. The rather reductive and simplistic dichotomy between

private and public, as is assumed above, has its roots in liberal-pluralist assumptions of

the relationship between the individual and society (Bennett 2008), which at times are not

at all very useful, especially in online contexts (Strahilevitz 2004).

Of course, it is no secret why Zuckerberg would treat privacy in this way and in such an anachronistic manner. By summarily positing the role of privacy as an outmoded protection against the abuse of others, by those who would otherwise want to connect and socialize with people, Zuckerberg can promote the use-values to be gleaned from his billion-dollar enterprise while at the same time concealing from view the very privacy rights upon which corporations, like Facebook, rely. Up until its recent initial public offering (Raice, Das, and Letzing 2012), Facebook was considered a private company and, as such, did not have to reveal its assets, revenues, salaries, and operating expenses to the public if it chose not to. The latter would only come about when a privately held company either chooses to "go public" or must, because of federal securities legislation, offer stock to those who are not already private investors of the company. Gane and Beer remind us that since 2007 Facebook began to generate revenues by developing advertising informed by user activities and preferences, thus rendering seemingly mundane data economically valuable (2008, 48).

Privacy's definition, at least in the confines of public discourse, must remain ambiguous in order for companies like Facebook and Twitter to benefit from corporate privacy protections afforded by law on the one hand, and, on the other, form a view of privacy, which strategically posits some of its (problematic) assumptions, that weakens another's right to privacy in order to valorize their online activity. It is not difficult to see that these social networking sites have a direct economic interest in monetizing user activity. In order to do this, however, Zuckerberg and perhaps others in his position must first articulate a view of privacy that works in the company's interest. If data are to be the new valuable commodity, then privacy must be relativized and rendered ambiguous in the

sense of a double-standard, which protects companies yet exposes consumers to privacy abuses by them for profitable gain.

The recent work of David Kirkpatrick has shed important light on Facebook's turn to targeted advertising and their commodification of user data as processes of revenue generation. His work also highlights the key figures responsible for Facebook's user-based accumulation strategies. One of these key figures was Cheryl Sandberg, former Google vice-president for global online sales and operations. In 2008, she was hired by Zuckerberg as Facebook's Chief Operations Officer (COO) (Auletta 2011; D. Kirkpatrick 2010, 251–252, 254). Prior to her time at Google, Sandberg also served as chief of staff to Larry Summers, secretary of the Treasury in the Clinton administration from 1999 to 2001 (D. Kirkpatrick 2010, 253). Summers, adhering to a decidedly neoliberal economic persuasion, was partly responsible for the 2008 economic crisis, as he was directly involved with the deregulation and subsequent consolidation of US financial markets, which would eventually lead to the illegality of regulating financial derivatives leading to millions of housing foreclosures across the United States (Ferguson 2010). The relationship between Sandberg and Summers is strong: "Sandberg went to Harvard, where she majored in economics and took Lawrence Summers's class in Public Sector Economics .... She also served as a research assistant to Summers when, in 1991, he served as the World Bank's chief economist (Auletta 2011), making Sandberg a protégé to one of the United States' most important political-economic elites.

Prior to Sandberg's role as Facebook's COO, the company developed a number of monetization strategies, all of which were subsequently supplanted by a new strategy for reasons of inefficiency, profitability, and decreased intrusiveness. Sandberg and

company's "engagements ads" were seen as less intrusive than previous forms of advertising such as banner ads. These ads are messages from an advertiser sent to users' homepages which invites the latter "to do something [directly] on the page," (D. Kirkpatrick 2010, 260) such as comment on a video. This with the express purpose of connecting marketers to their consumers (D. Kirkpatrick 2010, 261), thus forging new business relationships among them. What Sandberg and her colleagues were concerned with at this juncture were (a) generating revenue to keep the company afloat; (b) collecting and archiving "organic information that *people* are producing on the site" (D. Kirkpatrick 2010, 261, emphasis mine); and (c) creating advertising processes that were integrated seamlessly into the Facebook experience, minimizing the disruptive nature of advertising on the site while maintaining a stable flow of income.

Interestingly, there is little to no discussion from either Kirkpatrick or Facebook as to how users, who are essential to this advertising strategy, factor into this particular monetization process, beyond the assumption that they will participate and give consent to this arrangement. It would seem that Sandberg, et al. were not interested in knowing in any great detail how users felt about this new accumulation strategy. They quite simply could not afford to take the chance that some may find this new arrangement problematic, as Sandberg's "biggest worry ... was financial" (Auletta 2011).

Kirkpatrick observes that this new advertising strategy, which is primarily driven by the monetization of user data, took place when Zuckerberg was out of the country (D. Kirkpatrick 2010, 257, 260), suggesting that he played an indirect role in adopting Sandberg's project. Others report too that Zuckerberg was "ultimately forced by circumstances" to adopt this strategy (D. Kirkpatrick 2010, 258). It would be somewhat

contradictory to conclude, however, that he could not have been "motivated by money" (M. Harvey 2008), when it is clear that generating revenue was a necessary and immediate condition of the business's success. Moreover, despite Zuckerberg's vehement claims to the contrary, money was, and is, the primary organizing principle of the enterprise, especially if one considers the fact that "Facebook needed the money," as they quickly burned through the $375 million it had raised years ago from Microsoft and others (D. Kirkpatrick 2010, 256). If speculation about Facebook and Zuckerberg's worth are correct, $83 billion and $13.5 billion respectively (Forbes 2011; Levy 2011; Weir et al. 2011), it is hard to believe that the company was never motivated by the accumulation of profit – it *had* to be. Moreover, Facebook's ad revenue in 2010 alone was reported to be nearly two billion dollars (Horn 2011). It seems that capital's coercive laws of competition have made themselves known to Zuckerberg and company early on, working against his idealist vision to make the world more connected so that everyone could be "financially rewarded" (M. Harvey 2008).

We can see other examples of this user-centred accumulation strategy. A number of online companies that are specifically in the business of selling creative user-generated content (CUGC) – that is, "content that is voluntarily developed by an individual or a consortium and distributed through online platforms" (Trosow et al. 2010, 10) – are gaining popularity in the online marketing and advertising world. Infochimps, an online data marketplace, has as their business description the following:

> Whether you are building artificial intelligence, creating an app that finds coffee shops, or even researching what car to buy next, you inevitably have to start by finding data. People toil for hours on end collecting, formatting and sorting data in formats that are somewhat useful for these tasks. It is the opposite of fun .... Accessing valuable data shouldn't be so difficult, especially if it's data someone

else has used before. Infochimps is a place to find, sell and share data with others. (Bansal et al. 2011)

One of their main datasets for purchase and/or download comes from Twitter, the popular micro-blogging site currently valued at $4 billion (Parr 2011). One can download for free tweets about cheese or can purchase the conversation metrics of 35 million users for one one thousand dollars. The data to be consumed from these online menus clearly suggest that social network CUGC are treated like information commodities, to be bought and sold in the marketplace as if they were discrete, material objects.

Gnip is another data marketplace that aggregates social media data into a single API, or application program interface. This service is particularly important for Twitter because in November 2010, Gnip became the first authorized reseller of Twitter data (Valeski et al. 2011a). Their business description is as follows:

> Gnip provides social media data to businesses that build realtime social media integrations into their business and consumer applications. Receiving your social data from Gnip enables easy integration of massive quantities of realtime social data into your product, legally and reliably. Many of the largest social media monitoring companies in the world rely on Gnip to provide them with data from Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and dozens more sources. Whether you want keyword-specific data, username-specific data, or a full or partial firehose stream of data, Gnip can be your social media data provider. (Valeski et al. 2011b)

Since 2008, Gnip has offered access to Twitter's data streams and dozens of other social media feeds. It was reported in November, 2010, the same time that they became an authorized dealer of Twitter information, that the company began selling tweets to Gnip for $360,000 per year (M. Kirkpatrick 2010). Other data sources offered by Gnip include YouTube, Facebook, Delicious, Google Plus, Myspace, Tumblr, and Wordpress.

In 2005, News Corporation, currently chaired by Rupert Murdoch, purchased Myspace for $580 million, beating out Viacom as a bidder. Myspace as a social media

environment and brand was less important in Newscorps' decision to buy it than the aggregate data generated by its users, informing its owners about the cultural tastes and activities of users (Coté and Pybus 2007).

Datasift is another company involved in the retailing of social media user-generated content. Like Infochimps, their model is essentially "a platform to help companies manage social media and capitalise on the insights to be found within the data" (Halstead et al. 2012). Further, Datasift "loves helping organizations get a better understanding of how social media data can be used to achieve business objectives." (Halstead et al. 2012).

Pricing options for access to these data, of which Facebook and Twitter are but two sources among many, is based on what they call Data Processing Units or DPUs. The more data companies require on any given topic, the greater the expenditure of DPUs, and, as a result, the more costly the access to that data. Presumably this is due in part to the increased volume of data requested by these companies and, subsequently, the more computational effort needed to fulfill the request. Datasift offers the potential buyer access packages ranging from three-thousand dollars per month up to fifteen thousand dollars a month, with options to purchase credit before committing to a package as well as licensing options to access real-time feeds on a batch-cost basis (e.g., ten cents per one thousand tweets).

Similar to Gnip and Infochimps, Datasift's access costs are partially determined by the content itself. In other words, the price varies according to the complexity of the actual information requested, among other factors. Datasift has on their webpage sample streams that the public may test free of charge. These streams are classified into three

categories: low, medium, and high. The cost associated with each stream along with the number of DPUs needed for each tier runs equally from low to high, but so too does the information complexity of the search. An example of a low stream, which uses fewer DPUs in the process, is a search query on "Starbucks," whereas an example of a high stream, using a greater number of DPUs in the process, is a search query on "Presidential Elections." Though beyond the scope of the current study, the question as to how the semantic complexity of these queries – and the data granularity of the source datasets – factor into the access cost remain somewhat unclear at this point; however, these observations warrant further inquiry elsewhere.

There is indeed strong evidence to suggest that users' online activity is a form of productive (profitable) work, as evidenced by social network sites' legally binding terms of use and privacy policies. These documents implicitly treat one's online data as economically valuable (*cf.* section 3.2). What is clear from this is that social networking in the twenty-first century is as political a social practice as it is a cultural one. This is partly because users are, in a manner of speaking, voluntarily forced to accept the conditions of what is arguably their own exploitation (if they are to acquire the social capital from participating in these environments) – there is no opt-out privacy control. Consider the following clause in Twitter's terms of use policy: "Such additional uses by Twitter ... may be made with no compensation paid to you with respect to the Content that you submit, post, transmit or otherwise make available through the Services" (Twitter 2011a). Yet the very data that is produced by social media users are being monetized elsewhere and, consequently, so too are the financial rewards. What this

means is the socialization of risk (the weakening of privacy), the outsourcing of labour, and the privatization (concentration) of the social wealth.

What the above observations point to, among other things, is that online social networking is and has been for over a decade embedding itself into the fabric of the wider global economy, especially as more of these companies behave increasingly like capitalist firms, i.e., the profit motive as central organizing principle, initial public offerings, production of commodities, etc. As such, it is necessary to increasingly see these spaces as subjects of *political economic* inquiry, and to entertain questions centring on labour, commodification, value, ideology, and class. The next section will review some of the extant literature already addressing these concerns and which have been germinal in the ongoing conversations over digital labour and the political economy of new media. It will contextualize and situate the current study into these larger discussions whilst emphasizing why it is important to not only analyze but to develop and deploy theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches that may most productively contribute to a critical political economic analysis of online social networking.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. The Political Economy of Online Social Networks

Extant research on the political economy of online social networks suggests that they now serve a fundamental role in the so-called information economy. There is an increasing economic significance to these organizations as more of them adopt monetization strategies that hinge on the participation of users and the creation of user-generated content. Given the relative newness of the online social network phenomenon, the scarcity of research that explores them from a critical political economic perspective is high compared to the more prolific, administrative research that tends to focus solely on the cultural dynamics, or user-to-user interactions, of these networks. While research focusing on what this study calls peer-to-peer information flows is important in understanding and mapping the terrain of online communication generally, it considers in far less detail the peer-to-provider information flows of these online environments.

Research of the first kind (peer-to-peer) is often though not exclusively found in the administrative communications research paradigm, which tends to deploy quantitative methodologies and tools from the social sciences such as statistical analyses and questionnaires that measure the internal and external validity of both the research design and its resultant conclusions, how variables relate to one another, etc. Media uses and gratifications research, for example, has been concerned with identifying the factors that go into one's decision to engage with various media, such as television and the Internet, and the qualities that make them enjoyable (Katz, Haas, and Gurevitch 1973; LaRose 2010; Papacharissi and Rubin 2000; Rubin 1984; Ruggiero 2000). However, inasmuch as this kind of research is useful – especially for media companies and corporations – it also

demonstrates the rather apolitical nature of this scientifically-oriented research paradigm. There is little to no consideration of the economic, moral, and/or political implications of user interaction with media of various kinds, only a description, usually through factor analysis, of why people use them. The scope of this research is therefore rather narrow from a political economic point of view, but such research can be useful in understanding larger social patterns of Internet usage, and how this usage marks changing patterns of communication.

Research on the cultural dynamics of online social networks is also found in the cultural studies paradigm, a field exploring themes like network culture, identity, subjectivity, publicity, and branding (Papacharissi 2011), all of which feed into other lines of inquiry, not the least of which being political economic analyses. One of the most highly cited and widely known scholars in this area has been danah boyd, Senior Researcher at Microsoft Research (boyd and Ellison 2008; boyd 2011). She and her research colleagues have been key contributors in the areas of publicity on the Internet, teen culture, privacy, identity, and online user interaction. What is noticeably and commonly absent from their work, however, is an analysis of the social networks themselves and how users are positioned within them. Of their work, there is little to no consideration of how these networks operate, the role that surveillance plays, how social network sites collect data and why, the legal framework within which they work, or an analysis of user activity as the basis for profit generation.

Beer has noted that, "by focusing solely upon the user, which is what boyd and Ellison's [research suggests], we are overlooking ... the capitalist organisations, the marketing and advertising rhetoric, the construction of these phenomena in various

rhetorical agendas ... and the role, access and conduct of third parties" (2008, 523). In short, boyd and company have little to say on the subjects of power, media ownership, information privacy, and the economics of participatory culture, placing them squarely in the peer-to-peer information flows research paradigm. Though it is clear that much of the time cultural studies and political economy share their respective disciplinary biases, the disciplinary boundaries of the former are still quite present. Beer's identification of these research lacunae are important steps in steering the social media conversation toward a less explored but arguably more important generalized line of inquiry, one which takes into account the social totality (*cf.* section two).

The focus of this section will be on those areas of the political economy of social networking that have contributed most significantly to its conceptual contours and discoursal directions. Though this area has much room for development, and that there is without doubt more to be said, there have been a number of significant contributions and germinal debates in this area that have influenced the current study. These contributions have mostly centred on surveillance, digital labour, class, commodification, privacy abuses, and legal rights issues as they relate to the digital, online context. They have been concerned with not only elaborating on these themes, but demonstrating how each of them are not so much isolated phenomena as intricately connected: how surveillance feeds into the economic imperatives of online media owners, how this surveillance challenges and, in some cases, erodes individual privacy, how commodification is a product not only of one's labour, but also of the surveillance capacity embodied in online media, etc.

What follows therefore is a critical review of the literature on the political economy of social media, more particularly, the political economy of online social networking, which, to the authors knowledge, is not nearly as prolific an area of inquiry as the more meso- and macro-level analyses of social media generally. Because the current study takes as its object of study social networking, as a particular form of social media, the contributions included in this review are meant to situate the current study in the context of critical social networking research and to highlight those contributions that have influenced the direction of critical political economic media studies research.

Despite the research gaps identified above, investigations that have centred on the political economy of social networking do exist, but are few in number relative to the plethora of studies that focus on peer-to-peer dynamics in these environments. Studies that do exist are heterogeneous in approach, focus, and theoretical orientation. The general conclusion is that, despite the limited quantity, the majority of research in this area lacks a thorough historical analysis of both Facebook and Twitter; in particular, the events leading up to their decision to commodify user content. Even fewer studies, beyond the legal literature, have focused with a critical eye on the importance of the privacy policy and terms of use document, which are essential to these capitalist firms in their pursuit for profitable gains. On this point, section three and four will clarify the relationship between user-generated content commodification and the privacy policy and terms of use.

Coté and Pybus engage in an analysis of Myspace and the events surrounding Newscorp's purchase of their dataset (2007). They persuasively demonstrate the reasons why more than a half-billion dollars was spent acquiring it. They conclude that the

aggregate dataset generated by Myspace users was an economically valuable resource of consumer-demographic data, informing marketers of the tastes and desires of hundreds of millions of potential consumers, perhaps the first instance of the social media audience commodity. The authors propose a new framework in which to understand social network user activity. Drawing from Maurizio Lazzarato's influential, yet highly contested, concept of immaterial labour (1996), Coté and Pybus develop the concept of *immaterial labour 2.0*. This concept combines Lazzarato's definition of immaterial labour (those who produce the cultural and informational aspects of commodities) with what Terranova calls "free labour," the latter being unremunerated labour in online environments, such as building websites, programming, reading, participation in mailing lists, etc. (2000, 33). Here, free labour is the "2.0" aspect of the concept. Though the authors draw heavily from autonomist-Marxist thought, their piece primarily centres on social networking user subjectivity bolstered by a historico-structural analysis of the Myspace network. As such, they focus on notions of subjectivity, Foucauldian concepts of biopower and biopolitics, and Deleuze's notion of becoming. Coté and Pybus' piece is informative as it sheds light on the wider problematic of online social networks – namely, their monetization strategies based on the free labour of their users. It also provides strong evidence to support the idea that online social networks are quite willing to enter into market relations without much regard for users' opinions on the matter.

Though their piece offers an informative re-interpretation of labour in online environments, invoking Dallas Smythe's concept of the audience commodity (Smythe 1981), it does not focus on the structural components of other, more popular online social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. Further, there is no discussion about the role that

social network privacy policies or terms of use documents play in the information

commodification process. Their use of Marx's work on the commodity and other

categories drawn from classical economics are also lacking. Thus, their research is

considerably narrow in scope and it sufficiently diverges in focus from the present study.

Nicole S. Cohen addresses the surveillance potential embedded in online social

networking infrastructures, from the placement of cookies which track online behaviour

to Facebook's reliance on the surveilling of others for success (through reading one's

profile, linking to them, searching for others, "Liking" something, etc.) (2008). Her work

persuasively "outlines a political-economy of Facebook in an attempt to draw attention to

the underlying economic relations that structure the website, and the way in which [it] fits

into larger patterns of contemporary capitalism" (2008, 5). Cohen argues that Facebook's

entire model is centred on what she calls the "valorization of surveillance," or, the prime

organizational and structural principle of Facebook, irrespective of whether such

surveillant activity is carried out between peers or between users and Facebook. This is to

say that what allows for the monetization of user-generated data are precisely the

unavoidable surveillance capacities of Facebook, and, indeed, the entire Internet client-

database model of computer data exchange and communication.

Cohen's research comes much closer to the objectives of this project than Coté

and Pybus' work in that the former focuses specifically on how the work of Facebook

users produces value through the site's containment and channelling of what Marx called

the general intellect (very loosely interpreted here as user-generated content). This

collective intelligence, according to Cohen and others, is what fuels the Web 2.0

economy in general and Facebook in particular. This is done by essentially privatizing

that which is held in common – relationships, culture, sociality, the ability to communicate, language, and the like. Without the active participation of individuals, the success of sites like Facebook would fail, and the circulation of online informational capital would cease, causing a crisis.

Drawing from the work of Coté and Pybus, Cohen invokes Terranova's notion of free labour as a process through which the general intellect is brought into existence. Here she succeeds in emphasizing the economy's shift towards relying on free labour and how this shift actually coincides with a rise in layoffs in the media industries (Cohen 2008, 9) – a kind of consumer outsourcing of labour. She argues that the active role of the user represents a move away from the passive role once played by those who produce / are the mass society audience commodity. This move way from user passivity (consumption) signals a shift tending towards recognition of the active role of the media consumer in determining the success or failure of these websites. These "subjects of communication" (Lazzarato 1996, 135) are what perpetuates the process of valorization, or profit-generation, in the online economy.

Apart from briefly engaging in a discussion on the general intellect, she does not go into any considerable detail with the work of Marx, his ontology of the commodity, surplus value, or how the organic composition of capital, i.e., the relationship between constant capital (an organization's tools and machinery) and variable capital (the wage paid to workers) is changed under contemporary capitalist processes. It is useful to bring Marx into any discussion of these concepts, something that Cohen fails to do. Section four of this study will engage in such a discussion and will attempt to link the work of Marx with that of the current historical moment as regards online social networking.

In a similar vein to Cohen, and her emphasis on the active role of media subjects, Marc Andrejevic has contributed much to research on the digital economy, one that he calls the "interactive economy" (2004; 2007a; 2009a; 2010). This new paradigm, echoing the active consumer argument forwarded by Cohen above, emphasizes a process of "interactivity" (Andrejevic 2007a, 5–8) between producers of media and consumers of media as integral to its success. An example of this interaction can be found in the reality television show *Big Brother* and its official website. *Big Brother* fans will consume this show by watching it online or on television, but they will also contribute to the show's progress by participating on online forums, which are owned by the production companies who then engage in discussions with fans about the show's characters, the weekly challenges to which contestants submit themselves, and other aspects of the show deemed relevant. The interactivity between television consumer and television producer turns the former into the latter, the latter into the former. The show's outcome becomes contingent not only on the media production staff, but equally on the fans of the show.

Andrejevic's work gets closer to not only an updated version of Smythe's audience commodity, but to Alvin Toffler's notion of the *prosumer* (Toffler 1981), both of which are constituted by and constitutive of the interactive nature of new media social relations. The concept of the prosumer is an important one because it significantly alters the notion of a class of workers, augmenting their role from mere producers of things separated from the creative process to a class that is directly involved in it, once the purview of a corporation's upper echelon. The fusing of both production and consumption has a number of consequences. Perhaps the most obvious consequence is that, if individuals beyond the employ of production companies are more and more

involved with the production of media, then they necessarily take on a new labouring subjectivity that directly implicates them in economic relations of production, and, potentially, exploitation.

Further, a contradiction emerges: as media owners attempt to expand this interactivity to audiences who are technically beyond their direct and immediate control, they risk losing control over the production process even though their role as owners and producers imply control and ownership. The move toward productive inclusion is at once a loss of control while remaining in control. Andrejevic's focus on interactivity is an important trajectory, because it highlights the ways in which media users, either willingly or unwillingly, become implicated in working relationships with media corporations that give little to no remuneration to these workers. It further challenges older assumptions of the relationship between media consumer and media producer, challenging scholars and researchers to reconsider many of the theoretical models and assumptions used to understand the larger media ecology.

Prosumption suggests that the cycle of production and consumption become fused at the point of the individual and they therefore become inseparable as they engage with these prosumption media. This being characteristic of post-Fordist capitalism and its emphasis on customization and just-in-time production techniques, which all depend on large quantities of information from consumers (D. Harvey 1989). Keeping in mind that Marx was writing in a time of industrial capitalism, a period largely understood to be a society of passive producers, Andrejevic's work also reflects the work of Paolo Virno (2004) who, in his book *A Grammar of the Multitude,* addresses questions pertaining to

the new ontology of workers under the post-Fordist paradigm, a period marked by the

hyper-interactivity and media prosumption of users.

Though Andrejevic highlights some of the ways in which a Marxist understanding

of labour is problematized in networked environments, much of his work is primarily

focused on reality television, and, like Cohen's work, the surveillance mechanisms of

these new media that are harnessed by capital to render the work of online users

productive. His work on the political economy of YouTube is most intriguing (2009b);

however, though commonly understood as a new media platform, YouTube strays

somewhat from the structural dynamics of Facebook and Twitter and how users interact

in these environments. It is not a social network in the same way as Facebook and

Twitter, but is similar to them in that it is a platform of prosumption. His recent work,

however, calls for a critical understanding of exploitation and alienation in the online

economy, social media included (Andrejevic 2010). One of his presuppositions is that the

mode of development of capitalist accumulation of the past twenty to thirty years has

changed significantly and, as such, our understanding of even the most basic categories of

Marxist political economy must change too. His insight here is useful because, of course,

questions of alienation and exploitation remain vital to any Marxist critique of capitalist

society, especially in terms of the now contradictory and inverse relationship that these

two concepts share in the digital context, i.e., how "less alienation creates more

exploitation" (Fisher 2012); but they are also categories applied not without difficulty *vis-à-vis* the new media landscape. Despite Andrejevic's persuasive account of the

persistence of exploitation, privatization, and the enclosure of the digital commons

(2010), his analysis falls short as it too does not draw upon the work of Marx and his

understanding of exploitation and alienation in any great detail. This is by no means a flaw, but merely a yet to be explored trajectory in the ongoing conversation of new media political economy.

As influential as danah boyd's research is in the cultural studies field, which focuses on peer-to-peer informational flows in social media, so Christian Fuchs' research is exemplary of the critical political economy of social media research, which focuses on the peer-to-provider informational flows of these media. His work is perhaps most closely aligned with the current study in approach, assumptions, theoretical orientation, focus, and method. Two particular pieces of research stand out as representative of Fuchs' area of research.

In an article on Web 2.0, prosumption, and surveillance, Fuchs makes an interesting case for the relevance of Marx's understanding of exploitation, value, labour, and the commodity. As well, he demonstrates rather convincingly the way in which these Marxian concepts apply to the current period of informational capitalism (Fuchs 2011a, 294–298). For example, he effectively reinterprets Marx's analysis of the accumulation of capital by taking into consideration informational capital's new organic composition, i.e., the relationship between capital and labour, expressed as fixed capital (machinery, tools, etc.) and variable capital (workers' wages). Marx understood variable capital, from the point of view of the capitalist, as a cost incurred in the process of changing capital's value into labour-power, i.e., the wage given to workers (1977, 1:317). Fuchs augments this formula to include unpaid prosumer labour such that labour power now no longer only involves formally employed workers, but social network users as well (2011a, 297–298; 2011b, 153). Thus, in online prosumption environments, variable capital now consists of

two components that make up the totality of an online social network's labour-power (*cf.* section 4.3).

The augmenting of variable capital into two parts of the same whole demonstrates how capitalist organizations take advantage of user activity online while simultaneously keeping capital investment costs at a minimum, thereby significantly widening their profit margin. This is because v^2 (or the wage of social network users) stays at 0, but is, from the abstract perspective of the capitalist, qualitatively no different than v^1. It is therefore equally as valuable a source of productive labour as formally employed labour. Fuchs' remodelling of capitalist accumulation demonstrates how sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, take advantage of quite literally a knowledge reserve army of labour at no cost to them. Fuchs is perhaps the first to demonstrate the threads that weave together the shared fabric of nineteenth century capitalist accumulation and the new accumulation strategies of the current historical period, thus calling into question the revolutionary frame often deployed when describing any qualitative change in society's mode of production.

A second strength of this particular study is found in Fuchs' linking of the increase in online prosumption labour with that of advertising revenue, thus demonstrating the direct relationship between the two. The more users are engaging in free labour, and the more populated prosumption sites like online social networks get, the greater the advertising revenues generated (Fuchs 2011a, 301). This is because sites with higher participation rates can charge a larger sum to prospective internet marketers for access to these data than sites whose source data is thin and less informative because of lower participation rates and communicative interactivity.

Despite the usefulness of Fuchs' article, there is only the briefest mention of the role that privacy policies play in Web 2.0 environments, and there is no focus on the terms of use documents. As useful as Fuchs' work is, it does not go into a sustained analysis of these documents, which is an important consideration for any political economic analysis of new media. However, Fuchs has elsewhere expanded on the role of the privacy policy and the way in which it frames our understanding of online privacy.

In "An Alternative View of Privacy on Facebook," Fuchs argues against what he calls liberal privacy philosophy, which tends to "mask socio-economic inequality [while concomitantly] protecting capital and the rich from public accountability" (2011b, 140). He argues for a socialist view of privacy which, in contradistinction to the insufficient liberal, bourgeois view, "tries to strengthen the protection of consumers and citizens from corporate surveillance" (Fuchs 2011b, 144). The current discussion about privacy on Facebook is situated within the liberal paradigm where privacy is attributed to "universal positive values"; these values tend not to engage with the negative effects of privacy and the relationship of modern privacy to private property, capital accumulation, and social inequality (Fuchs 2011b, 145).

The liberal view of privacy is embedded within Facebook's privacy policy, and, from Fuchs' perspective, succumbs to a privacy fetishism, or a partial, limited, and potentially dangerous view of privacy that does not treat it as historically contingent, socially constructed, and intimately connected to capitalist accumulation (Fuchs 2011b, 145). Fuchs goes onto to conduct a critical discourse analysis of Facebook's privacy policy, but he concentrates only on its aspects that refer to advertising, unlike the present study which takes into consideration the entirety of Facebook and Twitter's privacy

policy, their historical progression, as well as their terms of use document. Despite adopting the same methodology as this study, the mode of critical discourse analysis Fuchs employs, and his conclusions derived therefrom, diverge from, but in no way contradict, those found in section three. Further, his adoption of what is a highly complex mode of critical discourse analysis, i.e., the socio-cognitive approach to understanding discourse and society, as developed by Teun van Dijk, is not well contextualized into Fuchs' study. It is unclear how van Dijk's model of critical discourse analysis is the optimal one for a political economic analysis of Facebook. Rather, Norman Fairclough's framework, whose dialectical-relational model, is a better frame with which to analyze Fuchs' object of inquiry, and so, it ought to have been considered.

Van Dijk's paradigm stresses the importance of the subjective elements of social actors in society and how their cognitive capacities influence theirs and others' worldviews. Van Dijk emphasizes an understanding of cognitive mediation between discourse structures and social structures (Van Dijk 2009, 64; Wodak and Meyer 2009, 14). For van Dijk, there is no one-to-one relationship between a text or discourse and one's experience or interaction with them. Such experience and interaction are mediated through one's cognitive capacities which, in turn, are influenced by a host of shared contextual variables called "social representations" (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 25). These representations of the social world are properties of communicative situations that influence text and talk (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 14).

Though there are a host of reasons that demonstrate the suitability of Fairclough's method to political economic analyses of media over van Dijk's, they are beyond the scope of the current discussion. However, one major reason in support of this assertion

lies in the conceptual assumptions in each critical discourse analysis paradigm. On the one hand, Wodak and Meyer illustrate that van Dijk's concern with cognition places him on the agency end of the structure/agency dialectic, thus emphasizing the active subjectivity of individuals who as such have a direct influence on the outcome of a social event and, based on shared social representations of reality, its discursive component (2009, 20). In other words, van Dijk interprets the reader as an active element in (re)constructing textual meaning, and so the focal relationship is between the individual and text.

Fairclough, on the other hand, is concerned primarily though not exclusively with the objective, structural dimensions of discoursal and textual production, thus emphasizing the objective conditions that allow for and constrain one's interpretation of them and, consequently, social reality. Moreover, "Fairclough focuses upon social conflict in the Marxian tradition and tries to detect its linguistic manifestations in discourses, in specific elements of dominance, difference and resistance" (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 27). Even Fairclough states that theoretical developments led to the "dialectical-relational approach within 'cultural political economy'" (2009, 166).

There is a markedly Marxian bent to Fairclough's model in that it internalizes many of the concepts found in the critical Marxist paradigm, including Hegelian dialectical thought, mediation, class conflict, ideology, and capitalist relations and forces of production, whereas van Dijk, although concerned about social structures and its influences on the individual (2009, 65), is less concerned about the adoption into his socio-cognitive model these formal Marxian concepts. Thus, the Fairclough model of

critical discourse analysis is far more amenable to a critical political economic analysis than van Dijk's model, which is why the former is used in the current study.

Despite Fuchs' lack of contextualizing his chosen methodology, and his lack of historicizing the development of the privacy policy and terms of use documents – the contribution of the present study – his work on Facebook and privacy is an important contribution to political economic research on social networking. It critically negates the liberal assumptions of privacy embedded in Facebook's privacy policy, engages directly with Marx and his work on exploitation, and develops a number of progressive and radical measures by which to follow as first steps toward negating and correcting the asymmetric power relation between social media users and social media providers.

One of the foremost contributors to the question of labour in online environments has been Tiziana Terranova. She has been closely associated with Italian currents of autonomist Marxism (Wright 2002). Her influential work on labour in online environments has led to a number of scholars to include in their analysis Terranova's notion of free labour (2000; 2004; 2010). Originally published as an article, it eventually became a chapter in her book entitled *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*. Here, Terranova observes a fundamental shift in labour relations in and around the 1990s when the Internet became a household ware. She writes: "Free labour ... includes the activity of building websites, modifying software packages, reading and participating in mailing lists, and building virtual spaces [...] I argue that [free] labor is not exclusive to the so-called knowledge workers, but is a passive feature of the postindustrial economy" (2000, 33, 35). Terranova is most important here because she links her analysis of labour to the autonomist concept of the social factory, originally developed by Mario Tronti,

where "the relationship between capitalists [*sic*] production and bourgeois society, between the factory and society, between society and the state, become more and more organic" (Cleaver 1992, 137); that is, the reach of capital seeps into all spheres of life, no longer relegating itself to conventional workplaces like the office or factory.

Though heavily cited in the literature, the concept of free labour and, indeed, much of the work on digital labour from an autonomist Marxist perspective, has been scrutinized. David Hesmondhalgh has been a notable figure in providing a sustained critique against the common pairing of free labour and exploitation (Hesmondhalgh 2010), a pairing that the current study utilizes. He argues that this conceptual framework is incoherent, and he questions the value of understanding any activity carried outside the workplace as labour. He also questions the political value of this view (2010, 267). Here, he echoes Andrejevic's concern about exploitation where the unjust equalization of the qualitative differences among certain exploitative forms of labour occurs. Andrejevic cautions that when arguing for exploitation in online contexts critical analyses often (presumably unintentionally) transposes, through the invocation of exploitation, existing forms of highly exploitative and sometimes brutal labour conditions (factories, sweatshops, etc.) into a realm of relative affluence and prosperity (social networking, creative work, etc.), thereby rendering equal the clearly unequal qualitative, material working conditions between these two realms (Andrejevic 2010, 282–283). Working in a clothing factory in Phnom Penh for ten dollars a month is not the same as adding a friend to Facebook, clearly. To suggest otherwise would be absurd.

Hesmondhalgh provides a persuasive critique against expanding the concept of labour beyond the formal employment relation; however, he underestimates the

importance of the political imperative to seek out and identify the reach of twenty-first century capital so that it can be exposed and ultimately resisted; this tendency has been a particular strength of autonomist Marxist currents. Hesmondhalgh also oversimplifies the notion of exploitation. He does not see exploitation as existing along a line of intensity: if working conditions are not such that Marx had described in *Capital*, as a "hated toil" (Fromm 1961) and as immiserating, then it is not exploitation. This is at best an insufficient reading of Marx (and of what Marx meant by exploitation). Harry Cleaver reminds us that we must always read Marx *politically*; to never prioritize capital's domination over the working class to the detriment of the latter's capacity to resist (1979). In other words, one must always read *Capital* as a weapon against capitalist logic and to remember the capital/labour dialectic in any Marxist analysis. This entails a more open and elastic reading of Marx than Hesmondhalgh allows.

Further, there is no mention in this particular piece by Hesmondhalgh of what Marx actually meant by exploitation, only appeals to secondary sources whose authors interpret the concept abstractly rather than in a concrete and charitable manner. Despite this, Hesmondhalgh does acknowledge that the various disputes over the term have to do with a persistent lack of delimiting, defining, and operationalizing it in one's analysis. Though Marx clearly operationalized it as a mathematical proportion between necessary labour time and surplus labour time, thus rendering all capitalist labour relations exploitative, it may just as well have carried the implication that exploitation as a process is ultimately detrimental to one's health and is, therefore, morally reprehensible. While admittedly this interpretation takes a decidedly orthodox view of exploitation, it is

necessary, lest one risks stretching the conceptual efficacy of exploitation and other Marxian concepts too thin to be of any use.

Exploitation, then, becomes necessary to locate for class struggle. If exploitation, under the conditions of assembly-line production, was located within the disparity between socially necessary labour time and surplus (free) labour, it was because Marx needed to locate it there in order for the working class to begin resisting the estrangement and alienation of their *Gattungswesen*, or species-being (i.e., self-determination of the species). Terranova's analysis of free labour (pure surplus value) is a re-articulation of the labour theory of value which allows one to locate exploitation under the conditions of online prosumption beyond assembly-line factory production. This line of inquiry, as has been shown, has been further developed by Fuchs. Like other work in this review, Terranova does not offer a sustained analysis of social network privacy policies or their terms of use, though her provocative and important attempt at expanding the definition of labour to include forms beyond the walls of the formal employment relation has influenced the current study.

To conclude, it is clear that the literature reviewed herein, as but a sample of the political economy of online social networking research, has demonstrated the economic importance of prosumption media in the twenty-first century. These researchers have touched on issues of labour in the online context, subjectivity, exploitation, interactivity, prosumption, surveillance, and value creation. There is, however, much left to be said. Fuchs' work scratches the surface of a relatively new and nascent area of inquiry, namely, critical analyses of the privacy policies and terms of use documents of Facebook, Twitter, and perhaps other online social networks. The current study will make a unique

contribution to the field by extending Fuchs' analysis. Drawing from many of the concepts reviewed in this section, such as free labour, exploitation, value, and the social factory, it will also stress, as a necessary component of critical political economic research, the importance of appealing to the work of Marx, whose work has unfortunately been neglected in much of the literature. Lastly, the current study will also provide an historical analysis of the privacy policies and terms of use documents, demonstrating how they have changed over time concurrent with the managerial changes of both Facebook and Twitter, which have led to their reorientation as organizations driven by the profit motive. The key element of success for these websites, in terms of their current monetization strategy, lies buried within these documents.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL POLITICAL ECONOMY OF
COMMUNICATION: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

This study takes an integrative approach to social research. It combines elements of critical discourse analysis with the theoretical and conceptual foundations of critical political economy of communication in order to analyze the dynamics of online social networking. Though the former can be seen as a method and the latter a theoretical position, these modes of inquiry internalize what could be called a methodological dialectic: they are programs that combine theory *and* method, each constituted by and constitutive of the other.

For instance, critical political economy, though certainly theoretically oriented, deploys dialectical thinking as a form of critical inquiry in order to flesh out the contradictions in established knowledge formations, to expose these epistemes' underlying value assumptions, and to upset their ontological and epistemological certainties in the face of the changing dynamics of social processes. This is most evident in the pages of Marx and his ongoing critical argument against the assumptions of classical political economy, and how they come to bear on his own moral-philosophical analysis of society. Another method of critical political economy is its tendency towards historical analyses of the social totality. This method is meant to reintroduce the temporal component back into areas of social reality that have been hypostatized by other modes of inquiry. Often times the historical approach is deployed as a corrective to the more empirical and positivistic methodological applications to social processes commonly borrowed from the natural sciences, which tend to isolate variables and abstract away from the context in which they are found. Historical analysis emphasizes the importance

of continuity and context, and promotes a diachronic rather than a synchronic understanding of society, which positions the latter not as a static abstraction, but as a relatively stable, yet dynamic set of mutually constitutive processes. To abstract away from the context of these processes is to risk missing out on a more complex understanding and explanation of particular social phenomena.

Likewise, critical discourse analysis, as the name implies, is a method of social inquiry that internalizes various theoretical concepts that partially determine its approach to knowledge. For instance, all critical discourse analytic methods focus on to a greater or lesser extent both the form and content of communication – texts and meaning, respectively – and how these relate to larger social formations and social processes. However, they differ in the motives that compel researchers towards analysing discourse, which, in turn, affects the method by which such analyses are conducted. Wodak and Meyer present six of the more influential modes of critical discourse analysis, each slightly different in intent and register. These modes range from agency-centred discourse analytic techniques (the socio-cognitive approach developed by Teun van Dijk) to structure-centred techniques (the dialectical-relational model developed by Norman Fairclough).

This study understands theory (critical political economy of communication) and method (critical discourse analysis) as dialectically constitutive. This is to say, theory and method are inseparable from one another, as they mutually inform and internalize the tendencies of the other. One cannot have a method without adhering to certain ontological and epistemological assumptions and propositions; likewise, one cannot theorize without some way of determining first the horizons of their object of inquiry.

Method informs theory and theory informs method. This constitutive unraveling is itself

an ongoing historical process driven not only by such dialectical interplay, but by the

historical content in which the researcher and theory-methodology used are found. Since

the relationship between discourse and political economic analyses of society may not be

immediately clear, the challenge of this chapter, therefore, will be to demonstrate this

relationship, and how the one may come to bear on the other in order to bolster the

theoretical and methodological efficacy of each.

Moreover, these paradigms are seen as complimentary and commensurate modes

of social inquiry, as they both share common epistemological, ontological, and

methodological assumptions. As will be shown, critical discourse analysis, often focusing

on the concrete, micro level of analysis (policy analysis, textual criticism, etc.) can feed

back into the wider focus of critical political economy of communication, often focused

on the abstract, macro level of analysis (the economy, law, governance, culture, etc.), and

vice versa. Norman Fairclough's paradigm is perhaps most explicit in drawing this

connection between macro- and micro-analysis, that is, between structure and text, thus

making it most amenable to critical political economic analysis of communication.

On the one hand, notwithstanding legal analysis, political economy has sometimes

failed to account for, at the concrete level, the power relations embedded within language

and documents, which can serve the interests of one class at the expense of another class.

This is primarily because it has often taken as its unit of analysis institutions, individuals,

and markets without due regard to the documents these actors produce, which are, quite

simply, one form of media through which power – as the fundamental kernel of political

economic analyses – gets communicated, enacted, and enforced. In short, power is coded

not only in what Althusser called Repressive State Apparatuses, i.e., the threat of violence (2001b), but in language and texts, i.e., moral and legal codes, beliefs, etc. Textual production is often motivated by power and, in turn, power is embodied in the text produced; therefore, understanding the behaviour of language and texts (as technologies of power and influence) are equally important in any political economic analysis of social processes, since the latter is interested in understanding power under the rubric of the "social totality" (Mosco 2009, 28–31).

On the other hand, traditional methods of discourse analysis have often been charged with failing to account for the ways in which societal power structures are enacted in discourse, and how the former not only partially determine how language is deployed and used but how it plays an active role in sustaining unequal relations of power among classes in society, whether on the ideological or material level. Insofar as this is the case, deploying both critical discourse analysis and critical political economic analysis can serve as a powerful critique of the *status quo*.

In order to demonstrate the commensurability of critical discourse analysis and critical political economy of communication, it will be necessary to map out how these *prima facie* disparate modes of inquiry can come to bear on each other. What follows is an elucidation on what is meant by political economy, how it can, and has been, extended to the field of communication, and finally, how these particular paradigms relate to and have influenced Norman Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis.

2.1. Political Economy

Derived from the ancient Greek words *oikos,* meaning household, and *nomos* meaning law, economics, Mosco reminds us, originally referred to household

management (1996, 24); but the use of the term *political economy* widened after its definition – coined by an early mercantilist by the name of Montchrétien – caught the attention of James Stueart, an early classical political economist (Deane and Kuper 1988, 296). Montchrétien wrote that economics was, "the science of wealth acquisition common to both the state and the family," hence the adjective *political* (Deane and Kuper 1988, 296; Mosco 1996, 24).

Of the various definitions that shape the contours of political economy, most have centred on questions of power, the distribution of wealth across society, and the latter's constitutive social relations. For instance, it has been said that political economy is "the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources" (Mosco 2009, 24). Political economy "concentrates on a specific set of social relations organized around power, or the ability to control others, processes, and things, even in the face of resistance" (Mosco 1996, 25). Further, "political economists look to a host of factors, particularly law and social relations, to explain market outcomes" (Babe 2011, 53). Reflective of its ambitious disposition, political economy makes use of theoretical principles, practical policies, scientific proofs, and political advocacies in an effort to explain social phenomenon, combining elements of science, art, and philosophy (Deane and Kuper 1988, 296).

In its attempt to address all of the above, political economy has over time developed a number of variegated approaches; it is by no means a unified, homogenous research program. Two critical currents have developed, both positioned against the classical and neoclassical paradigm, otherwise known as mainstream economics: the radical critique and the conservative critique (Mosco 1996, 39–47). Within each, there

exist a number of different "schools" which further variegates the field, from

neoconservative public choice theory and the rational expectations school on the right to

the more socialist institutional, Marxist, feminist, and environmentalist approaches to the

left (Mosco 2009, 50–63).

Despite these differences, however, Mosco identifies four common-thread

features of political economy (1996, 27–38), features that not so much delimit as shape

the rather amorphous and dynamic contours of this heterogeneous field: (1) it gives

priority to *social change and historical transformation* with an eye towards examining

short term patterns of growth and contraction as well as long-term fundamental changes.

This necessarily entails a historical, diachronic approach to understanding society; (2) it

is rooted in an analysis of the *social totality* in that it should "span the range of problems

that tend to be situated in the compartments of several academic disciplines" (Mosco

1996, 29). This necessitates an interdisciplinary approach, not the least of which entails

an understanding of the relationship between the political and the economic, drawing

from disciplines such as philosophy, social science, economics, cultural studies, art, and

history; (3) *Moral philosophy* is the third component of political economy. It is used to

refer to "social values (wants about wants) and to conceptions of appropriate social

practices" (Mosco 1996, 34). This necessitates a view to not only describing how the

world may be at any given time, but proffering an explication of how it ought to be

different, if need be. Political economy considers normative thinking as means toward

correcting perceived injustices; (4) *Praxis* refers to "human activity and specifically to

free and creative activity by which people produce and change the world and themselves"

(Mosco 1996, 37). Praxis, Mosco writes, guides a theory of knowledge to view knowing

as the ongoing product of theory and practice. In short, true knowledge can come only from thought and action, not merely one or the other (1996, 38).

These four features or presuppositions of political economy combine to form a powerful research programme, one focused on analyzing issues from a variety of perspectives with an appreciation of the complexity of social processes and sensitivity towards the just attainment of human needs, rights, and wants. Again, however, there is no consensus on how this may be achieved, leaving the field of political economy active and dynamic. It is clear that political economy is an ambitious research programme, as evidenced by the rather general and all-encompassing definitions provided herein. Because of this, it is necessary to move from the general to the specific in order to demonstrate the relationship between political economy of communication and critical discourse analysis.

2.2. Political Economy – Classical and Critical

The classical paradigm, writes Mosco, was grounded in Enlightenment values: rationality and empiricism (1996, 39). As such, it sought to "extend the principles of Galilean and Newtonian mechanics to the world of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century capitalism" (Mosco 1996, 39). It eventually followed, in the form of neoclassical economics, "a reductionist trajectory of identifying economic 'laws' or formulae to explain the relationship between individuals and markets, in isolation from broader historical and socio-political contexts" (Barrett 1995, 186). This meant that there was very little room left for a consideration of morality, human needs beyond what the market provided, and human relations beyond that of commodity exchange relations, which is to say, nothing more than a view towards things rather than people (Babe 2011, 45). The

contributions of classical political economy have been many, but it has been met with substantial critique because of the reductionist trajectory it took, not the least of such resistance emanating from the work of Marx.

Whereas classical political economy sees capitalism as *the* established social order, and as such confronts it *a priori* and without question as to its historical contingency, it focuses on explaining it through the use of scientific proofs expressed in mathematical language (Mosco 2009). Critical political economy, however, questions the immutability of this established social order (Deane and Kuper 1988, 296), and attempts to upset many of the ontological and conceptual assumptions of both classical political economy and its progeny, neoclassical economics; most notably are the assertion that capitalism is a natural process, and is, therefore, immutable; the high level of abstraction at which classical political economy and neoclassical economics operate; their hypostatization of social processes (structures over relationships); their reification of markets (Babe 2011, 45); and, from a Marxian perspective, their failure to include history, labour, and class into their analysis of society (i.e., the moral component). Perhaps one of the more significant contributions of Marx, in the face of the massive historical injustices and unrest sparked by the shift from agriculture to industrial capitalism, has been his attempt to reintegrate back into political economic analysis questions of equality, democracy, labour, and class, and, in so doing, resurrect the humanistic, moral-philosophical component that once characterized political economy.

Critical political economy, or Marxist political economy, can be defined as "the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources" (Mosco 2009, 24), whilst

emphasizing the "limitations, contradictions, and problems of the capitalist economy" (Fuchs 2011a, 289). Not only is it concerned with the dynamics of capitalist accumulation, it is also concerned with demonstrating the inherently political nature of this particular mode of production (i.e., the social totality). This is largely achieved by emphasizing that "value in commodity exchange is grounded on exploitation of production" (Deane and Kuper 1988, 246) where one class, by historical consequence, forces another to sell their labour so that the latter may survive. Those who do not own the means of production but only their labour are coerced into their own exploitation.

Mosco reminds us that political economy is much more interested in examining the social whole, or the totality of social relations, that make up economic, political, social, and cultural areas of life (2009, 3–4). The fundamental flaw with economics, as a nomothetic discipline, is that it artificially isolates the political and the moral from the processes of resource production, distribution, and exchange when, in fact, such a split is neither possible nor helpful in fully grasping social processes in order to improve upon them. The latter, unfortunately, being limited to market functionality and the fulfilment of human wants without sensitivity towards environmental and other concerns. Its tendency towards analysis of the general laws of production, distribution, and circulation of goods has led to a number of blind spots in the discipline, rendering invisible the social inequalities produced by these processes, reducing issues of power and inequality to that of market deficiency or failure, and explaining social change only incrementally (Mosco 1996, 48, 49, 56, 63). Ruggles' summation of this critique vividly captures the spirit of political economy as a moral, practical mode of inquiry:

> To point to the general normative thinness of positive economics is nothing new.
> It is far from intuitively evident that in the real world, all are made better-off by

the operations of the marketplace, that there are no losers, no victims, no one who needs an extra helping hand, in laissez-faire market societies. Mainstream economists, however, think of their idealized model of a complete set of perfectly competitive markets only as a theoretical standard toward which the pursuit of social welfare ... should be directed, as a template to which measures to correct for market failure can be designed. (2005, 37)

Marxian political economy has contributed greatly to the analysis of labour, and its relation to the social totality, well beyond the more limited bourgeois interpretations of labour as a mere factor of production; something that merely exists as an incurred cost of production, as dead labour rather living labour in Marxian terms.

This study, concerned with labour, class, and the production of value in the digital context, squarely situates itself within the paradigm of Marxist or critical political economy. It attempts to map new circuits of accumulation, and how this circuit partially determines and cements new social relations on the Internet. Moreover, it goes beyond description to advocate and include into its analysis policy recommendations in order to address the perceived asymmetries of the economic social relationship established between social network producer and social network provider. In the spirit of interdisciplinarity and with a view toward the social totality, focusing on the question of power as it is embedded in the texts of Facebook and Twitter's privacy policy and terms of use will emphasize how language and contract law factor into cementing this new economic relationship. This study is also situated within the paradigm of communication research, focusing on a particular medium through which communication takes place. The next section will draw the connection between (Marxist) political economy and communication.

2.3. Critical Political Economy of Communication

With Mosco's definition of political economy in mind – that it is the study of the

social/power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and

consumption of resources – one can see how amenable this definition is to the

communication paradigm, as the latter relies on the very material substrate of which

political economy is most concerned:

> From this vantage point the products of communication, such as newspapers,
> books, videos, films, and audiences, are the primary resources .... This
> formulation ... calls attention to fundamental forces and processes at work in the
> marketplace. It emphasizes the institutional circuit of communication that links,
> for example, a chain of primary producers to wholesalers, retailers, and
> consumers, whose purchases, rentals, and attention are fed back into the new
> processes of production. (Mosco 2009, 25)

There is another interesting perspective on how political economic analysis can come to

bear on communication. While satisfying its fundamental presuppositions, Babe argues

that the virtue of using political economy over other modes of inquiry, as an explanatory

and prescriptive paradigm, is that it pays considerable attention to not just the material,

but also to the symbolic (2011, 44). This includes both an analysis of market transactions

and the directly observable, *and* an analysis of belief systems, knowledge, myth, custom,

and ideology, which all contribute to the economic exchange of goods (Babe 2011, 53).

Not only do communications contribute to the exchange of economic goods, they

themselves are economic goods to be exchanged. As Babe suggests above, the beliefs,

knowledge, myths, and customs of people manifest themselves in the form of various

media containers that circulate throughout society. This study focuses on the media

containing the consumption patterns, likes, dislikes, and beliefs of audiences as they are

embedded in the social network information commodity: what Dallas Smythe has called the "audience commodity" (1981).

Political economy goes well beyond neoclassical economics and administrative communication research, the latter denoting research carried out in the service of some administrative agency of public or private character (Babe 2011, 55), precisely because it is critical; it stresses understanding the social totality, not necessarily one or a handful of particular variables. It is this presupposition that bridges political economy with that of communication. Since the latter is a process partially determined by market forces, it is implicated in the social totality constitutive of and constituted by economic, social, cultural, and political forces. A question arises out of the above observation: if communication is part of the purview of political economic analysis, then what is its focus? One answer is that it concentrates on the production, distribution, and exchange of communication resources and commodities with an eye towards the actors involved in these processes. This means that it centres on questions of media ownership and control (private interests, owners of the means of communicative production and dissemination) , processes of consolidation (monopoly), diversification (investment), commercialization (commodification), internationalization (accumulation), the workings of the profit motive (competition), and the consequences of media content and practices (production, consumption, meaning making) (Barrett 1995, 186).

Because this study is situated at the intersection of political economy, class, power, discourse, and communication, it is appropriate to extend the definition of critical political economy to that of critical political economy of communication. Mosco defines the latter as a "social process of exchange whose outcome is the measure or mark of a

social relationship" (2009, 67). This definition, as wide as it is, allows for the extension

of the production, exchange, and circulation of economic resources to that of the

production, exchange, and circulation of informational resources used in the process of

meaning making. These can include objects such as books, radio, television, audiences,

and other information commodities. This definition implies that the outcomes of

communication and media production, i.e., meaning and informational commodities,

often are produced, exchanged, and circulate like economic resources. The political

economy of communication, recognizing that media industries operate according to

market logic and, therefore, with a profit motive, takes the view that media outlets do not

simply reflect reality or transmit information, but actively contribute to constructing

social reality according to particular power interests. To the extent that this is the case,

the media industries are, therefore, political sites of struggle that internalize and

perpetuate particular ideologies as well as the ever-present asymmetric social relations

common to capitalist societies in order to serve certain interests over others. And to the

extent that these informational resources behave like economic resources, it is necessary

to widen the understanding of the relationship between economy (resources) and culture

(meaning) as mutually constitutive, rather than the former causally determining the latter

(Marx 1970, 20–21):

> It is important to resist seeing the political economic as the realm of structure, institution, and material activity while communication occupies culture, meaning, and subjectivity. Both political economy and communication are mutually constituted out of social and cultural practices. Both refer to processes of exchange which differ, but which are also multiply determined by shared social and cultural practices. (Mosco 2009, 68)

As Babe has argued, the bridge between economics and communication is political

economy (2011, 43). Both essentially do political economy in the sense that they focus on

areas of social reality that are the marks of the wider social totality, albeit in varying scope, depth, and focus. What political economy does, in its all-encompassing disposition, is to meld the symbolic (communication) and the material (communications) together. Both are linked by the questions of power and influence. Just as the political economist focuses on the control over production, so the communications political economist focuses on the control over cultural production (Babe 2011, 53–55). The questions of control and power are not limited to Institutions and Markets; rather, they extend to all actors that constitute and are constituted by these institutions and markets. A consideration of the linguistic component of social relations is necessary precisely because communication, as language in motion, is essential to the workings of power, control, and influence.

2.4. CPE of Communication and Critical Discourse Analysis

There is affinity between Mosco and Babe's understanding of the mutually constitutive relationship between culture and economy and Norman Fairclough's understanding of how discourse behaves in class society: in each case, culture and economy are constitutive of and constituted by one another. Since economic systems are fundamentally communicative, questions of power are unavoidable, despite the assumptions of mainstream economics and administrative communication research (Babe 2011, 20, 33–34). To communicate is to exert influence, the latter often being the realization of power, and power being central to political economic analysis. One cannot divorce questions of power and influence when understanding communication.

Combining critical political economy of communication with critical discourse analysis allows researchers to develop a more robust and granular analysis of social

phenomena, more so than if they merely deployed one mode over the other. In the context of this study, critical discourse analysis will be a method of analysis deployed at the concrete, molar level of the social (Facebook and Twitter's privacy policy and terms of use documents). It can be viewed as one entry point of many into the wider analysis of society. Critical political economy of communication, often deployed at the abstract or macro level of the social (capitalist society, the legal system, media industries, etc.) will inform the conclusions of the discourse analysis conducted and provide clues into the developing social relations between social network user and social network provider as well as the linguistic formations common to capitalist flows of power.

2.4.1. Articulating the Bridge: The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, Political Economy, and Critical Discourse Analysis

The link between political economy and discourse analysis does not start with Norman Fairclough. The lineage of his research program, seeking to "meld the material with the symbolic" (Babe 2011, 44), can be traced back to an intellectual current of 1960s British cultural studies. The theories and praxis of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham marked a significant change in trajectory in what was understood as cultural studies, and, indeed, Marxist inquiry, at that time. What we see in Fairclough's work are the intellectual leitmotifs found in the intellectual ensemble of the CCCS, particularly in the work of Stuart Hall. Thus, the bridge that connects discourse and political economy can be clarified with a brief consideration of what the CCCS sought in their analysis of culture and society, and the tools they used to work towards these ends.

The work of E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams, and Richard Hoggart marked an important detour in direction of twentieth-century British cultural analysis. The CCCS

initially began, in the 1960s, as an "interdisciplinary endeavour," which "attacked the narrowness of the way English literature was being taught in Great Britain" (Schulman 1993, 1). In particular, Hoggart, Thompson, and Williams exposed and critiqued the perceived cultural elitism found in the work of literary figures such as F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot (Schulman 1993, 2). One of the CCCS's aims was to "affirm working class culture against onslaughts of mass culture produced by the culture industries" (Kellner 2009, 1). Later, it would eventually blossom into a "project that would continue their critique of modern culture, [seeking] forms of resistance to capitalist modernization" (2009, 2). Stuart Hall, who became acting director of the CCCS in 1969 (Gorman 1985, 197), was inspired by Hoggart, Williams, and Thompson's work, but he had his doubts regarding their class-centred epistemology (Gorman 1985, 198). This doubt propelled Hall toward a slightly different theoretical and practical trajectory, which would later be picked up by Fairclough and his work on capitalism, neoliberalism, and discourse. This will be touched on later in this section.

In their expanding and enduring mandate to critique modern culture, the CCCS, as envisioned by Hoggart, Thompson, and Williams, internalized and sought to transcend the cultural pessimism, theoreticism, and negativity of the Frankfurt School by insisting on the capacity and the ability of the working class to resist hegemonic forms of culture and meaning while simultaneously carrying on the former's critical tradition (Kellner 2009). Later, as seen in Hall's work and the Centre's exposure to new ideas imported from Europe, the CCCS also worked towards a renewed consideration and expansion of Marxian theory, a critical interrogation of the relationship between base and superstructure, and, most importantly, the politics of signification, ideology, and the role

of language in culture and society. Thus, the CCCS could be viewed as one of the first

systematic and coordinated attempts to address a persistent lacuna in Western Marxism –

a theorization of the superstructure of comparable complexity to extant theories of the

economic base.

This renewed consideration and gradual broadening of Marxist praxis was

facilitated by the proliferation of previously unavailable Marxist-inspired texts in and

around the time the CCCS was founded (Schulman 1993, 5). Key texts that contributed to

the CCCS's "neo-Marxist" approach to social inquiry included Marx's *Grundrisse*,

Althusser's structural Marxism, and Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (Schulman

1993, 5). These texts were used, in part, to challenge the established orthodoxies of the

Old Left, especially the latter's tendency towards an economic reductionism that reduced

other non-economic aspects of society to mere epiphenomena or effects determined by

the base. The established Left also lacked a robust theory of the superstructure, and how

it related to larger political and economic structures. Gorman reminds us that the Old

Left's failure was its rigid adherence to an "orthodox dialectical materialism [being] true

only when preserving and expanding upon the power of Communist Party officials. Its

reductionist materialism purposively immobilizes workers and reinforces the Party's

privileged social, political, and economic niches" (1982, 254). This was surely a political

program incommensurate with the CCCS's task to affirm the subjectivity of the British

working class (Gorman 1985, 197) – indeed, anyone who was not a card carrying

member of the Communist Party.

Schulman lists four defining qualities that gave the CCCS its unique intellectual

contour. These features are what differentiated it from the kind of cultural inquiry

conducted prior to its founding (1993, 3). In attempting to affirm working class culture

against 1950s and 1960s British cultural hegemony and, later, to critique capitalist

modernization, the CCCS (1) broke from behaviourist paradigms of previous research

that saw media influence as a direct stimulus-response mechanism, leading to a view of

media as pervasive social and political forces that had subtle, indirect, and imperceptible

influences; (2) challenged the notion that media texts are transparent bearers of meaning,

and worked towards the active, structuring potential of these media *vis-à-vis* social

relations; (3) moved beyond the traditional understanding of audiences as passive

recipients of media messages and towards a consideration of how they are actively

engaged in communicative processes, as decoders and potential resisters of those

messages; and (4) adopted a view of mass media as circulating and cementing dominant

ideological definitions and representations of social life.

What is important to note is that these four presuppositions are also found

throughout Fairclough's theory and method of critical discourse analysis (*cf.* section 2.5).

The very idea of critically interrogating discourse and media texts, as Fairclough does,

presupposes all of the above. Namely, that (1) texts must be understood as being created

in a network of social relations under a wider social totality, (2) texts, as semiotic

representations of social practices produced within a network of power relations,

obfuscate these practices just as much as they clarify them, (3) that textual meaning is

never closed to interpretation (critique) or resistance, but (reasonably) open to them, and,

finally, (4) that they actively internalize ideological forms that work to sustain hegemonic

relations in society, and are, therefore, not only carriers of meaning but of (class) power.

The connection between Fairclough's work and the CCCS can be illustrated by considering their theoretical affinities – Althusser and Gramsci.

It was in the writings of Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci that the CCCS, under the direction of Stuart Hall, found a renewed relevance in Marx; this time, however, with a consideration of language as a crucial locus of inquiry and site of struggle, and how it may feed back into questions originally pertaining to politics and economy. These Marxist thinkers brought to the CCCS the theoretical arsenal required to move away from the debates that occupied much of their thinking at the time – namely, the debates centring on culturalism and structuralism (Hall 1980) – and towards more immediate concerns. Procter notes that the adoption of Antonio Gramsci's work enabled Hall to approach this theoretical antinomy by articulating them together in order to resolve their contradictions, and to expose the inadequacy of each of these paradigms when taken in isolation (2004, 49).

The ongoing assessment and interrogation of the base-superstructure metaphor, most notably taken up by Williams (1977), guided much of the Birmingham school's thinking as well. It led to a focused critique and extended analysis of the relationship between culture (superstructure) and economy (base), a line of inquiry previously implied by the work of Antonio Gramsci and his work on the relation between state and civil society (1971, 210–276). It also provided the conceptual frame in which to expand on the cultural and ideological component of Marx's understanding of the social totality. The importance the CCCS placed on the role of ideology and its discoursal manifestations in cementing societal power relations is reflected in its publication *On Ideology,* a series of essays published in one volume in 1977 (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies,

University of Birmingham 1980). Contained within these pages is Stuart Hall and others' critical reading of Gramsci's concepts of *hegemony* and *common sense*, as well as Althusser's *interpellation* and *Ideological State Apparatuses* (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham 1980). These two intellectual currents were essential to the Hallian-inflected version of the CCCS – and to Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis paradigm – as their work represented one of the first substantial endeavours into the nature of the superstructure, which went well beyond Marx's scarce assessment of it in his writing. The adoption of Althusser and Gramsci – and Marxism generally – prevented the legacy of the CCCS from remaining a "residue of interest in analyzing (British) popular culture and [led to] a greater understanding of the politics of representation" (Schulman 1993, 8). It went beyond a mere descriptive disposition to take on a critical one, especially with Hall's attempt to articulate a more open Marxism, one "without guarantees" (1996, 44), which was amenable to questions concerning language and power.

Althusser viewed ideology as the "representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 2001a, 109). For Althusser, there is a substantial difference between actually existing reality and an individual's lived experience of that reality; there is no one-to-one correspondence between them. Instead, the relationship between the real and an individual's experience of it is always mediated, not the least of which through language and power. Another important component to Althusser's theory is that ideology, working to interpellate people into subjects of ideology, has a material substrate. Reality is expressed through Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), or distinct and specialized institutions like churches and schools

(Althusser 2001a, 96). Though linked with Repressive State Apparatuses and State Power, such as the politico-legal apparatus, police, army, and courts, all of which function through repression and force, ISAs predominantly function through ideology, world views that "reproduce the relations of production" (Althusser 2001a, 97–98). The result is that these seemingly disparate apparatuses are unified in that they operate beneath a ruling ideology (read: hegemony) and interpellate individuals into subjects (Althusser 2001a, 117), rendering them mere effects of structural power.

Althusser's view of ideology is much more pervasive and diffuse than Marx's definition – that the ruling ideas of a society are those of the ruling class (1998, 67) – such that it penetrates, permeates, and is inscribed in the very institutions with which individuals interact and to which they are subjected. In so far as this is the case, the work of ideology is not easily recognizable and is, therefore, difficult to resist; more so than if it were merely a set of propositional and epistemological claims expounded from on high by a recognizable, homogenous elite. If the latter were the case, then being able to recognize ideology in order step outside of it (Althusser 2001a, 118) would be less daunting a task. The idea of ideology as *structured representations* manifested in and produced by Ideological State Apparatuses means that sites of (political) struggle are no longer confined to the domain of politics, since these apparatuses are also located in the private sphere and elsewhere; struggle thus exists in all social relations (Gramsci 1971, 326), not just political ones. Ideology for Althusser was not simply a top-down decree of the beliefs, values, and truth-claims of an identifiable class of rulers, something that the awakening of a class consciousness could readily shed. It was, for him "subtle, indirect, and imperceptible" (Schulman 1993, 3).

The problem, however, is that his totalizing view of the ideological effects on individuals occludes the valorization of the latter's capacity to resist hegemonic processes and ideological forms – something that the CCCS and Stuart Hall were adamant on emphasizing. If all experiences are effects of structural power, then there can be no resistance, as the latter would merely be valorized by the former, i.e., resistance being reduced to an unauthentic product of ideology. Althusser's totalizing theory effectively destroys (or ignores) subjectivity under the weight of structural power. This is where he departs from Gramsci, as the latter understands ideology or "conceptions of the world" as operating within a nexus of struggle rather than as a boot descending on the faces of the masses:

> Critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political "hegemonies" and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality. Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force ... is the first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness. (1971, 333)

Further, as Hall and others point out, though the connection between Althusser and Gramsci is strong in that the former was influenced by the latter (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham 1980, 64), Althusser appropriated Gramsci's nuanced theory of the social totality in a way that universalized, and thereby, flattened it into an undifferentiated and homogenous structural-functionalist complex, whose role is to merely reproduce the relations of production without it taking into account forms of potential struggle. It would be seen by some as not having the theoretical efficacy and granularity found in other social theories. It is well known that the structuralism of Althusser has been criticized as overly deterministic. It is one that does not allow agents to partially determine social processes, resist them, or struggle

against them; nor does it account for the structuring of social practices by agents, say, in the same way that Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration does (1984). This was quite problematic for Hall and other CCCS intellectuals who placed great importance on the theme of resistance. This is one of the reasons Hall adopted a Gramscian framework of analysis in his work. Nevertheless, Althusser's structural Marxism remains an important influence for both the CCCS and Fairclough (1999, 23–24) because of its account of ideology as representations. It is this that brings it squarely into the domain of language and power, the objects of inquiry of Fairclough's research.

The adoption of Gramsci's work by Hall and others provided a more nuanced account of the relationship between power and ideology, one which emphasized the spaces and processes through which the meanings of cultural practices and texts come to be fought over: "The concept of hegemony has helped Centre scholars out of the impasse the structuralist Marxism of Althusser created: making notions of agency appear futile in the face of what was theorized to be the inevitable ideological position of the individual by the apparatus of the State and its agencies" (Schulman 1993, 9). Ultimately, the use of Gramsci was vital to a political project that sought to articulate an unexplored area of Marxist theory, and to get beyond the economic reductionism that informed much Marxist praxis up until the 1960s:

> Hegemony theory thus involved both analysis of current forces of domination and the ways that distinctive political forces achieved hegemonic power ... and the delineation of counterhegemonic forces, groups, and ideas that could contest and overthrow the existing hegemony. Hegemony theory thus requires historically specific socio-cultural analysis of particular conjunctures and forces, with cultural studies highlighting how culture serves broader social and political ends. (Kellner 2009, 3)

In effect, the adoption of a Gramscian-inspired Marxism, like Althusser's work, opened the terrain of struggle to all areas of society once considered unimportant by classical Marxists. But Gramsci's work went one step further by carving out a complex description of the *process* of ongoing struggle between social blocs that take place without the latter appealing to violence and repression. Two crucial intellectual advances that facilitated this dialectic of incorporation and resistance (struggle) was (a) a wider view of ideology as not just thematic, but formal, and (b) its connection with discourse and language, the latter two as both carrier and mediator of the social world.

The work of Gramsci and Althusser appropriated by the CCCS and Stuart Hall set the stage for an empirical mapping of the struggle over meaning and, ultimately, the obtainment of what Gramsci referred to as ethico-political power. This is to say, they allowed for the mapping of the processes by which political leadership obtains and maintains power through winning the consent of individuals non-violently. Moreover, for those like Fairclough, a systematic, critical-political research agenda focused on exposing the subtleties of ideological work and its linguistic manifestations in communication could now be developed and theoretically situated. Taken together, Althusser's notions of ideology and interpellation, and Gramsci's notion of hegemony articulate together to provide a sophisticated view of societal power flows. They developed a view of ideology and power that, as mentioned above, challenged traditional behaviourist notions of power, largely because the latter operated empirically and, thereby, had great difficulty understanding power as something not directly observable and measureable (Lukes 2005). Finally, they allowed those like Stuart Hall to elucidate a theory of power that included an appreciation of how dominant ideologies or meanings come to bear on

individuals' world views and how these conceptions may contribute either to a fragmented and incoherent "common sense" (domination) or a structured, self-reflective, and valorizing "good sense" (resistance) (Gramsci 1971, 323–326).

Norman Fairclough internalizes many of the theoretical and methodological underpinnings initially taken on and developed by the CCCS. For instance, his notion of ideology is strikingly similar to that of Althusser's: "Ideologies are *representations* of aspects of the world which are shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining, and changing the social relations of power, domination and exploitation" (2003, 9; emphasis added); however, he goes beyond this definition to also emphasize, like Gramsci, the *process* by which ideologies are manifested and perpetuated in society: "The ideological work of texts is connected to what I said earlier about hegemony and universalization. Seeking hegemony is a matter of seeking to universalize particular meanings in the service of achieving and maintaining dominance, and this is ideological work" (2003, 58). Fairclough has noted elsewhere that an advantage of this view of ideology is that" it retains its focus on forms of domination (as opposed to 'neutral' definitions of ideology which cut the concept off from domination ...) while ceasing to be exclusively tied to social class domination" (1999, 27). At the linguistic level, the hegemonic process often manifests itself in texts of all kinds; particularly, as hidden value assertions and epistemic assumptions in clauses, among other linguistic techniques attempting to universalize or naturalize particular meanings in order to render them immutable and "common-sensical" (Gramsci 1971, 323–326).

Moreover, Fairclough sees hegemony not only as a political process conducted by political forces, but also as partly a contention over the claims of their visions and

representations of the world to having universal status (2003, 45). This assertion echoes

the CCCS' notion of the active reader, which is found more fully elaborated in Stuart

Hall's encoding/decoding model of communication (2007): A struggle over meaning can

only occur if recipients of media messages actively engage in the process of decoding

received messages. They cannot be passively subjected to ideological forms and

simultaneously possess the ability to resist those forms. Similarly, Fairclough, in

elaborating on the increased reliance for individuals to construct their identities using

what he calls mediated quasi-interactions (various media types like magazines and the

Internet), they are not

> simply subjected within these [practices], for they intersect with conversational
> discourse. We may say they are 'recontextualised' within conversation ... and this
> implies that they can be appropriated and transformed in diverse and
> unpredictable ways, and undesirable ways from the perspective of those who are
> selling the commodities. It also implies ... a certain colonisation of conversation
> by mediated quasi-interaction (and of lifeworld by systems) (1999, 44–45).

Here Fairclough is operating most explicitly under Hall's encoding/decoding model of

communication (2007) in the sense that the decoding of messages will never reflect

perfectly the sender's original meaning. It is this "lack of fit" (Hall 2007, 480) between

sender and receiver that is one of the preconditions for struggle and resistance against

dominant modes of meaning. Fairclough moves from an Althusserian concept of ideology

right into Gramsci's concept of hegemonic struggle as a process involving ideology,

which includes resistance. This is important for Fairclough's concept of social practices,

which he says are

> habitualised ways, tied to particular times and places, in which people apply
> resources (material or symbolic) to act together in the world. Practices are
> constituted throughout social life - in the specialised domains of the economy and
> politics ... but also in the domain of culture, including everyday life .... The
> advantage of focusing upon practices is that they constitute a point of connection

between abstract structures and their mechanisms, and concrete events - between 'society' and people living their lives. (1999, 21)

Social practices, like teaching, jurisprudence, research, prayer, investing, etc., are what mediate between larger social structures like the legal system and concrete events like acts, statutes, and bylaws, to take but one example (*cf.* figure two below). Practices, however, give the impression that they are events or actions carried out over time, not semiotic representations. So how does language fit in to social practices? These practices, Fairclough writes, are partly discursive: they are talked about, and they are written about. They are also discursively represented through such acts of communication (1999, 37–38). In so far as these practices sustain relations of domination, they are ideological (1999, 37). The ways in which these practices are described can often become sites of struggle that are connected to larger social forces, such as the economy, governance, and the law.

Elsewhere, Fairclough notes that

Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' is helpful in analysing relations of power as domination. Hegemony is relations of domination based upon consent rather than coercion, involving the naturalisation of practices and their social relations as well as relations between practices, as matters of common sense - hence the concept of hegemony emphasises the importance of ideology in achieving and maintaining relations of domination. (1999, 24)

So, in framing ideology within the context of a process of struggle over representation and meaning, critical discourse analysis can be seen as a method that allows researchers to chart the trajectory of a given hegemonic struggle as it may be manifested in semiotic or discoursal forms, i.e., discursively represented. This is precisely the intent of Stuart Hall's work (1999). By situating orders of discourse within a larger context of social practices which are themselves constitutive of and constituted by power relations and hegemonic processes, the complex and highly-mediated dialectical relationship between

superstructural areas of society – as sites of struggle over meaning, values, and beliefs –

and a society's economic base is strengthened thereby. This is because most social

practices come to be discursively represented and/or are themselves discursive. Such a

dialectical view between base and superstructure is in line with Mosco's comments on the

social totality as an important ontological presupposition of political economic analysis.

The writing of both the CCCS and Fairclough suggests that this presupposition guides

their thinking. Both are effectively doing political economy in that they are attempting to

operationalize and articulate a critical praxis that internalizes the social totality by

recognizing the dialectical relationship between politics, culture, and economy, more so

than classical Marxism or early discourse studies.

On this point, we find Fairclough repeatedly insisting on a relational (process-

oriented) and dialectical (critical) approach to understanding the complexity of society. In

this he echoes yet again Gramsci and Althusser in the sense of their attempt to transcend

the vulgar causal determinism that has been associated with Marxist orthodoxy,

> A target for many theorists has been [historical materialism's] tendency towards
> economic reductionism - to see other parts of society as ... epiphenomena.
> Theorists have moved towards the more dialectical views of society which are
> also part of the Marxist tradition, partly in response to changes in capitalism
> which have enhanced the effects of other parts of society on the economy. These
> approaches have produced accounts of the state, of culture and of social
> interaction which are richer than those to be found in classical historical
> materialism, and have attributed greater autonomy to them in the constitution and
> evolution of social formations. The centring of language within reconstructions of
> historical materialism is tied in with this critique of economism in particular;
> versions of classical materialism which centre culture and social interaction
> thereby also centre language. There is in this respect a broad tendency within and
> around Marxism ... which includes also Gramsci [and] Althusser. (1999, 74–75)

Fairclough also sees his project as a transdisciplinary one: "CDA can figure

within properly 'transdisciplinary' (as opposed to merely 'interdisciplinary') research,

involving a dialogue (or 'conversation') between theories in which the logic of one theory

is 'put to work' within another without the latter being reduced to the former" (1999, 2,

75). This is what Stuart Hall referred to as articulation (Procter 2004, 48) – a process that

combines seemingly unrelated parts in order to avoid myopic reductionism or

essentialism. As Kellner has noted, the CCCS was similarly oriented in terms of their

theory and practice (2009, 3). The Birmingham school combined "social theory, cultural

analysis and critique, and politics in a project aimed at a comprehensive criticism of the

present configuration of culture and society" (2009, 3). Though it combined multiple

theoretical orientations, it never sought to reduce their theoretical and practical

polyphony to one particular melody (Procter 2004, 50–51). Articulation is directly taken

up by Fairclough in another way as well. His understanding of social practices suggests

that they do not happen in isolation. They instead are networked:

> Articulation refers to a relationship of 'overdetermination' ... between practices within such a network ... in the sense that each practice is simultaneously determined by others without being reducible to any of them, [and] in the sense that each practice can simultaneously articulate together with many others from multiple social positions and with diverse social effects. This moves us away from the ... determination of classical Marxism. (1999, 23–24)

Further,

> Networks of practices are held in place by social relations of power, and shifting articulations of practices within and across networks are linked to the shifting dynamics of power and struggles over power. In this sense, the 'permanences' we referred to above are an effect of power over networks of practice, and the tensions within events between permanences (boundaries) and flows are struggles over power. These relations of power at the level of networks are relations of domination and include not only capitalist relations ... but also patriarchal gender relations [and] racial and colonial relations, which are diffused across the diverse practices of a society. (1999, 23–24)

The similarities shared between the CCCS and Fairclough's critical discourse

analysis are many. It would not be unreasonable to conclude that based on the above

observations the latter is directly influenced by the former, even though the Birmingham

school of cultural studies and Stuart Hall are rarely explicitly mentioned in Fairclough's

work. They are linked by a common tendency to reflexively internalize and synthesize a

number of intellectual currents to create a richer, historically informed and politically

charged praxis. Just as Hall used Gramsci to transcend the culturalism/structuralism

divide, so too is Fairclough inspired by Hall to achieve similar interdisciplinary

objectives in his theory and method of social inquiry that includes elaboration of a

Marxism without guarantees.

 All of the above points to a yet to be articulated assertion regarding the scope and

contribution of neo-Marxist inquiry: that communication practices matter in any analysis

of society. What one sees with Althusser, Gramsci, the Birmingham school, and

Fairclough's critical discourse analysis is a move towards an analysis of *communicational*

processes, and how they play a decisive role in either maintaining or challenging the

status quo. All social practices, economic or otherwise, are communicational. It is this

that articulates them together, and it is the social totality that gives them expression as

social relations. Even though it has been argued that Marx wrote little on the role of

communication – even using the term interchangeably with transportation, thus – contra

Williams (2010, 56–70) – making it a relation of production rather than a means of

production (Hebblewhite 2012) – what is clear is that communication, and, at times, its

resultant commodities and social relations, are essential to social (i.e., political economic)

analysis.

 So, what the Birmingham school of cultural studies has attempted to do is develop

a novel theory of communication using the lens of a revised and open Marxism. It can be

seen as a project that attempts to meld the material with the symbolic (Babe 2011, 44) to emphasize the dialectical relationship between economic processes (capitalist logic, exploitation, domination, class stratification) and cultural sites of struggle over meanings (read: communication) that either resist or perpetuate, in the current historical conjuncture, these capitalist class relations. This is precisely the concern of critical political economy of communication. Marx reminds us that the realm of the superstructure is where individuals become conscious of conflict and fight it out (Marx 1970, 21). Norman Fairclough's method of critical discourse analysis is a direct descendent of the CCCS paradigm, and through it, the political economy of communication. He internalizes notions of ideology as representations of the real, hegemony and the politics of signification, articulation as the mechanisms involved in hegemonic struggle between the dominant and the marginalized, Marxist structuralism, commodification, dialectics, and class analysis. It is worth noting that his method of critical discourse analysis is also unique in that it is the only one to explicitly operate under a Marxian framework (Wodak and Meyer 2009), giving it the same intellectual and conceptual lineage that defined Hall and the CCCS's style of Marxist cultural analysis. The next section will more fully elaborate on Fairclough's mode of critical discourse analysis. It is hopeful that what will come out of this elaboration are the affinities and common threads linking critical political economy of communication and critical discourse analysis together in order to give more clarity to the above observations.

2.5. The Dialectical-Relational Model of Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis is an effective tool with which to identify and analyze the use of language under capitalism so as to identify the latent meaning, or workings of

power, that lie beneath the manifest elements of texts. The primary tool used to analyze the texts in section three is Norman Fairclough's *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (2003). This comprehensive manual provides the conceptual tools and concepts crucial for a critical analysis of the linguistic components of Facebook and Twitter's privacy policies and terms of use. Secondary texts that provide the ontological and theoretical foundations of Fairclough's style of critical discourse analysis can be found in *Discourse in Late Modernity: Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis* (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is "fundamentally interested in analysing the opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control, as manifested in language .... CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, [and] legitimized ... by language use" (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 10). It is important to note that CDA does not refer or adhere to a single method or a single set of assumptions. Instead, the phrase *critical discourse analysis* is a catchall referring to a multiplicity of approaches to critical textual analysis and social critique, linked only by a common research agenda (Wodak and Meyer 2009). This does not mean, however, that CDA is without methodological rigour. It just means that it will be necessary to outline the particular discourse-analytic framework in which this study is situated.

Influenced heavily by the scholarship of critical linguist Michael Halliday and his work on systemic functional linguistics, as well as the critical realist ontology of Roy Bhaskar (Fairclough 2005), Norman Fairclough offers the dialectical-relational approach to analyzing discourse (2003; 2009). He begins from the assumption that texts and social

practices (such as governing, teaching, educating, interviewing, writing, studying, etc.) are in a dialectical relationship with one another: texts constitute *and are constitutive of* social reality (Fairclough 2003) (*cf.* figure two). This means that, contrary to certain strands of postmodern scholarship as well as radical social constructivism, not all of reality is purely semiotic or phenomenological, but is only partially so. This is important to note, because as Fairclough explains,

> Although we should analyse political institutions or business organizations as partly semiotic, it would be a mistake to treat them as purely semiotic, because then we couldn't ask the key question: what is the relationship between semiotic and other elements [of social reality]? CDA focuses not just upon semiosis [meaning making] as such, but on *the relations between semiotic and other social elements* .... [This relationship] needs to be established through analysis. (Fairclough 2009, 163, emphasis original)

Fairclough's critical realist ontology, as a dialectical middle-ground between radical social constructivism and logical positivism, or, more abstractly, idealism and realism, allows researchers not only to trace the relations between semiotic and non-semiotic aspects of life, but to also trace the degree to which language corresponds or "alludes" (Althusser 2001a, 109–110) to objective events in reality, thus making it a critical-materialist theory of language aligned with the work of Valentin Voloshinov (1973) as well as critical political economy (Mosco 1996, 2) . Language, for Fairclough, remains partially referential to material reality to the extent that it may with relative accuracy refer to some aspect of it. This is not to say, however, that language and discourse operate at high fidelity: "[t]here are no societies whose logic and dynamic, including how semiosis figures within them, are fully transparent to all: all forms in which they appear to people are often partial and in part misleading" (Fairclough 2009, 163–164). Perhaps the most fundamental to remember of Fairclough's ontological commitments is this: "The key

debate here is relativism versus realism .... We argue ... that although epistemic relativism must be accepted – that all discourses are socially constructed relative to the social positions people are in – this does not entail accepting judgmental relativism – that all discourses are equally good" (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 8). Thus, Fairclough negates the Lyotardian judgemental relativism common in more radical post-structuralist discourses by observing the "relative permanences" of structures, practices, and discourses. The relative permanence of things (such as economy, law, dialects, traditions, policies, etc.) is the measure against which epistemological claims are validated or invalidated:

> Critical theoretical practice needs to transcend the unproductive divide between structure and action by developing an epistemology which is a 'constructivist structuralism' ... though with due emphasis on the constitutive function of discourse ... It is structuralist in that it is oriented to relational systems which constitute relative permanences within practices, it is constructivist in that it is concerned to explicate how those systems are produced and transformed in social action. (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 32)

2.5.1. Social Events, Social Practices, and Social Structures

Given the dialectical nature between semiosis (i.e., producing texts, etc.) and other non-linguistic elements of the social process, Fairclough reminds us that we should give context to the texts chosen for textual analysis. The social process (that is, of creating and understanding reality) is separated analytically into three spheres, each signifying a domain of social reality that is dialectically related to other domains. Thus, analysis can take place at three possible levels: *social events* (concrete)*, social structures* (abstract)*,* and *social practices* (mediator between structures and events). We can see from figure two below that there is no straight line or direct causality between structures

and events; meaning making is always mediated by social practices (Fairclough 2003, 23).
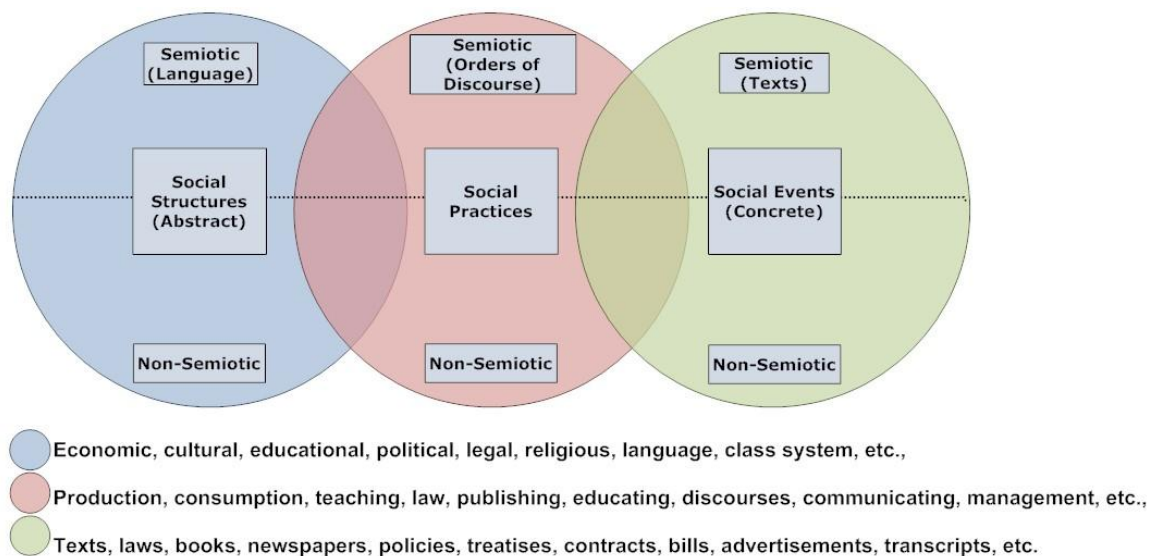
Figure 2 - Norman Fairclough's Ontology of Social Reality

The analysis of online social network policy can begin either at the abstract level (social structures: economic, post-Fordist capitalism, etc.) or at the concrete level (social events: documents, textual analysis, clausal relations, grammatical relations, etc.), as long as the overall analysis "oscillates" between them (Fairclough 2009, 164–165). In other words, the task is to incorporate an analysis of a particular social practice (i.e., social networking as related to capitalist relations of production) with an analysis of the chosen texts, touching upon three possible levels of meaning within them: texts act a certain way (genre analysis), they represent or relate to larger social practices (discourse analysis), and/or they identify actors (style analysis) (Fairclough 2003, chap. 2). The current study is interested in how the selected texts act and in what way they relate to larger social structures. Beyond textuality, however, an extra-textual analysis is necessary. This is

where the critical political economy of communication comes into play. Premised on the assertion that texts are mere semiotic moments within a social process related to other moments of reality, and not simply universal things-in-themselves, CDA is not solely concerned with textuality. It is a project that links text and language to the material processes and agents that produce and inform them. The relationship between texts and social reality is, therefore, dialectical (mutually constitutive) and relational (process-oriented).

Critical discourse analysis is seen primarily, though not exclusively, as a qualitative approach to understanding social reality. Wodak and Meyer remind us that (a) because there is no one way of carrying out this kind of research there is no one way of correctly collecting or gathering data either, and (b) CDA places its methodologies in the hermeneutic rather than analytical-deductive tradition (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 27–28). Thus, it strays from the more positivistic or social-scientific content analysis paradigms developed in the past (Krippendorff 2003; Berelson 1971; Holsti 1969). A focus on deep reading, rich description, and theoretical development are central to critical discourse analysis, though this does not preclude any consideration of quantitative methods to improve upon the external validity of the conclusions drawn. In particular, the dialectical-relational model focuses on the relationships between texts and everyday social practices within social structures (Fairclough 2003). One could say that latent meaning is given priority over manifest content, even though such prioritization is also accompanied by the problems and difficulties associated with mapping, decoding, and determining cultural meaning. For this reason, Chouliaraki and Fairclough stress the openness of textual interpretation, that claims made are not universal or closed but

tentative and open, given the dialectical back-and-forth between structures and agents –

what Giddens calls *structuration* (1984) – regarding the processes of meaning making

(Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 46–52).

Despite the tentativeness of critical discourse analysis in terms of its

methodological approach, each critical discourse analytic paradigm has its own approach

to constructing a research project. Wodak and Meyer outline the various methodologies

of critical discourse analysis, including Fairclough's dialectical-relational model (Wodak

and Meyer 2009). One way of approaching a Fairclough-style critical discourse analysis

is outlined below:

Stages	Description	Steps
Stage 1	Focus on a social wrong in its semiotic aspect	a) Select topic b) Construct object of research through theorization
Stage 2	Identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong	a) Analyze dialectical relations between text and social practices b) Select texts according to the object of research c) Analyze texts
Stage 3	Consider whether the social order needs the social wrong	
Stage 4	Identify possible ways past the obstacles	
Source: Fairclough, Norman. 2009. "A Dialectical-relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis in Social Research." In Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis, ed. Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, 162–186. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Sage.		

Table 1 - Conducting a Dialectical-Relational Critical Discourse Analysis

Important to remember, in following these steps, is that it is not a linear process, sequentially proceeding from the first step through to the last. Rather, it is viewed as a recursive process whereby the researcher may revisit steps throughout the analysis in order to reconstruct the object of research (Fairclough 2009, 167) and increase the explanatory power of the study. We can see that this methodology allows the researcher to start his or her inquiry from a social issue involving a linguistic element (stage 1),

proceeding to an extra-textual analysis (Stage 2(a)), moving to textual analysis (stage 2(c)), followed by addressing questions of ideology (stage 3), and ending with a remedy or positive critique of the social wrong (stage 4).

This study follows each stage but in varying degrees of specificity and depth. For instance, stage 1(a) is outlined in the opening sections of the current study, setting up the subsequent textual analysis and theoretical elucidation; stage 1(b) is mentioned in the beginning of this study, but elaborated on in section four. Stage 2 largely takes place in section three, as it presents an analysis of Facebook and Twitter's privacy policy and terms of use documents. Stage 3, although not directly taken up herein, as it lies well beyond the scope of this current study, is acknowledged in the introductory section, specifically on the popular discourses that frame the role of online social networking within the current historical moment. Stage 4 takes place in the concluding section of this study. It outlines a governance-centred policy recommendation in favour of correcting, as this study contends, the asymmetric social relation developing between social network user and social network provider, insofar as Facebook and Twitter are concerned.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: CONSENTING TO THE EXTENSION OF THE WORKING
DAY

The introductory section identified the processes by which Facebook and Twitter valorize the free labour products of its users. The purpose of this section is to criticize the mechanisms by which they legitimize the process of commodification and how they realize what Terranova calls "pure surplus value" (Terranova 2004), that quantity of value realized as profit when the wage paid to workers is effectively zero. The exertion of this power to commodify is the condition that makes possible the valorization process [*verwertung*] (Marx 1977, 1:252, 255), i.e., means by which profit is realized.

The argument of this section is that the privacy policies and terms of use documents of Facebook and Twitter function together as work contracts. Beyond outlining the roles and responsibilities of actors, and establishing a frame of privacy that foregrounds user-to-user connections, these documents also legitimate through contract relations the commodification and subsequent realization of profit from the work of their users. Whether or not one reads these texts before registering, the moment they begin interacting with these sites is the moment that they consent to and enter into a capitalist circuit of accumulation. It is this "take-it-or-leave it" arrangement which emphasizes most clearly Fuchs' recommendation of a more refined and socialist view of privacy that can bring balance back to the relationship between social network user and social network provider. In other words, what is needed is a sense of privacy that does not base itself on universal, ahistorical abstract qualities devoid of historical contingency, but on historically contextualized and economically sensitive definitions that take into account economic inequality.

Consider the following clause in Twitter's terms of use policy: "Such additional uses by Twitter ... may be made with no compensation paid to you with respect to the Content that you submit, post, transmit or otherwise make available through the Services" (Twitter 2011a). This is one of a number of clauses embedded in these documents which point to the new economic social relation forged between user and provider in the Web 2.0 paradigm. What is clear is that social networking in the twenty-first century is as political a social practice as it is a cultural one, partly because users are, in a loose sense, "voluntarily forced" to accept the conditions of their own exploitation, if they are to increase their social capital by participating in these environments; there is no data collection opt-out option available to users, nor is there any effective legal remedy which may yet provide a corrective to this particular working relationship.

3.1. Canadian Contract Law: The Legal Perspective

Though legal jurisprudence has not defined a contract consistently, nor has it appealed to a common source for its definition, what is generally agreed upon is that contracts are an "agreement giving rise to obligations which are enforced or recognized by law" (Peel 2011, 1). The operative terms in this definition are *agreement* and *enforceability*, both of which will be discussed below. In the Canadian context, the law of contract follows common law practice, the latter relying on the guidance of case law decisions rather than top-down legislation in the form of acts or statutes. As such, the law of contracts rely less on objective factors (i.e., statutes, acts, and policies) and more on the laws of precedent (Fridman 2006, 1) and the past decisions of judges (Swan 2006, 1). So, the process of interpreting the enforceability of contracts is not a wholly uniform and streamlined process, but instead proceeds on a case-by-case basis. Thus, there is

considerable difficulty in establishing certain fundamental principles of contract law in

Canada and elsewhere (Swan 2006, 15). Additionally, Swan reminds us of problems

associated with Canadian courts legislating, when necessary, over matters of Internet

contracts, much to the detriment of those who might need protection against ill-crafted,

illegal, or decidedly biased contracts:

> This reluctance reflects the difficulties in enacting legislation to govern a very
> rapidly developing area of commerce, particularly one where, by its very nature,
> there will often be parties in jurisdictions far beyond the reach of any provincial
> legislature or Parliament" (2006, 209)

Indeed, the transnational character of the Internet infrastructure has challenged legal

jurisdictions over matters such as contract law and legislation in online contexts, making

it difficult to protect consumers. The difficulty in decisively establishing contract law

principles, due in part to hindsight common law procedures and the transnational

character of the Internet, leave much to be done in terms of addressing uneven contractual

relations. Despite this known difficulty, there are three doctrines that have been

acknowledged by legal jurisprudence to be central in determining whether or not a

contract is legally binding and, therefore, enforceable: *offer* and *acceptance*, both of

which form agreement, and *consideration*. All three must be established by the

contracting parties before a contract is created and binding.

3.1.1. Offer

An offer is a "complete statement of the terms on which one party is prepared to

deal, made with the intention that it be open for acceptance by the person ... to whom it is

addressed" (Swan 2006, 184). The form in which an offer may present itself is varied, but

so long as all the terms are stated and that the offeror's intentions are clear, i.e., that he or

she offers to contract with another in good faith, the offer will be recognized as sound

(Swan 2006, 184–193; Fridman 2006, 26–27). It is evident that, in contexts where bargaining does not take place, such as in online environments, offer and acceptance are established without much trouble (Swan 2006, 184). This is because so many of these online contracts are on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. Such is the case with sites like Facebook and Twitter; one cannot negotiate the terms of site usage. They may only accept them or refuse them *in toto*. The terms are stated in whole, albeit not prominently, and acceptance is usually obtained as users navigate the site, create an account, etc. This latter point is seen as quite problematic and will be discussed below.

3.1.2. Acceptance

Acceptance is the willingness of one party to enter into contract with another on the terms offered by the latter (Fridman 2006, 45). In cases where there is no express mode of acceptance, the latter is implied from the "nature of the offer" and the "surrounding circumstances" (Fridman 2006, 50). This means that acceptance can also take on a variety of forms, not all of which are equally apparent. With paper contracts, a signature is usually the mode of acceptance; in online agreements, clicking an "I Agree" button, or, more subtly, staying on a webpage can be enough to signify acceptance. Acceptance must be absolute, meaning that in order for it to be realized, the offeree must agree to all terms stated; otherwise, no agreement can be reached, and no contract can be formed (Swan 2006, 197). Acceptance must also be communicated to the offeror in a way that signals to him or her acceptance by the offeree (Fridman 2006, 65). Communicating one's acceptance in the case of Facebook and Twitter can be construed as using the service by registering with it. For instance, "by continuing to access or use the Services ... you agree to be bound by the ... Privacy Policy" (Twitter 2011b); and, "by accessing or

using the Services you agree to be bound by these Terms" (Twitter 2011c). The subtlety

of user interaction as acceptance of terms is problematic. As will be discussed below,

users may not always realize that assent to terms is obtained in this way.

3.1.3. Consideration

Consideration is an exchange between parties such that "each side receives

something from the other" (Fridman 2006, 82). In more formal terms, consideration is

"some right, interest, profit or benefit accruing to the one party or some forbearance,

detriment, loss or responsibility, given, suffered, or undertaken by the other" (Fridman

2006, 83). It is extra guarantee, beyond agreement (offer and acceptance), that establishes

the validity of a contract. One could say that consideration is motivation behind the desire

for parties to contract. Without this exchange between offeror and offeree, there is no

contract, but merely "gratuitous promises" which are not legally enforceable (Fridman

2006, 81). What is exchanged does not always have to be quantified monetarily, but it

must possess some use, value, or benefit (Fridman 2006, 84).

Consideration, in the context of Facebook and Twitter, could be understood in the

following manner. The provider of the service receives user-generated content from their

users; users receive free use and access to the service so that they can connect with others

and link to important streams of information. However, understanding consideration in

this way renders the exchange itself asymmetric. The consideration given to these sites by

users is initially immaterial, but is later transformed into wealth in the commodification

process; the consideration given to users is completely immaterial: free access to a

service without financial remuneration. As problematic as this arrangement is from a

critical political economic perspective, it is quite reasonable and valid from a legal one,

so long as the law recognizes that offer, acceptance, and consideration were established without finding any confounding factors that would nullify the contractual relation.

When we turn to Facebook and Twitter, the terms of contract are stated in whole; the acceptance of the terms, if it is obtained at the point of registration, is clearly communicated to the provider, as the latter obtains a record of account for each registrant; and consideration is up front and clearly understood before users even agree to their terms and conditions. The provider provides a free service to people that is generally recognized as useful and perhaps even necessary, and the provider, in exchange, receives information about users who sign up. That data is collected, stored, and distributed on the provider's terms. The user cannot bargain with these terms, and so can only take it or leave it.

So it would seem that all three doctrines are realized as users sign up for these social networking sites, thus forming a legally binding contract. Of course, when determining enforceability, there are numerous additional factors to take into account beyond offer, acceptance, and consideration. There are other variables that can render a contract void such as one's state of mind, their age, the notion of mistake, etc. However, it is generally agreed that these three doctrines, when found to be validly established, form a legally-binding contract (Fridman 2006; Swan 2006; Peel 2011). The introduction of the Children's Online Protection of Privacy Act in 1998 prevents websites from collecting data about children under thirteen years of age. The introduction of this clause into the terms and privacy policies of most online social networks is evidence of not only compliance with federal law, but in ensuring that these contracts remain binding over time.

Interestingly, case law has shown that the enforceability of a contract online is not affected by whether or not a user reads the terms: "a contract need not be read to be effective; people who accept take the risk that the unread terms may in retrospect prove unwelcome" (Hill v. Gateway 2000, Inc.). In this regard, a contract can be formed without one's knowledge of their entry into one. It would seem that this would work in the interests of the offeror more so than the offeree, especially if the latter were to decide to file a complaint against the former. They would have little recourse in seeking damages on the grounds of the enforceability of the contract.

3.2. Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Perspective

Though the process of commodification begins with one's participation in these environments, it is enforced and legitimated by these legally binding contracts in subtle ways. Further, to the extent that they are contractual, they are also fetish constructs. This is to say their discursive character conceals or mystifies the commodification process through the use of legalese and carefully worded clauses. They draw one's attention away from the process and realization of surplus-value generation and towards discourses that centre on what Christian Fuchs has called liberal or bourgeois notions of privacy (Fuchs 2011b); something primarily a matter of peer-to-peer information flow rather than peer-to-provider information flow – though the latter is present in these documents. It is a notion of privacy that can "mask socio-economic inequality and protect capital and the rich from public accountability" (Fuchs 2011b, 140).

That these documents frame the social network provider as responsible custodians or mediators of data between users would seem to work in the interests of capital and should be construed as a capitalist strategy, reinforcing the protection of Facebook and

Twitter's ability to exploit user labour, rather than as a socialist strategy, which tries to not only advocate for one's choice to opt-in or to opt-out of the commodification of their labour, but to strengthen the protection of consumers and citizens from corporate surveillance (Fuchs 2011b, 144): "Privacy in capitalism can best be characterized as an antagonistic value that is, on the one side, upheld as a universal value for protecting private property, but is at the same time permanently undermined by corporate surveillance into the lives of humans for profit purposes" (Fuchs 2011b, 144).

If the regime of commodification is guaranteed by these texts which, by their legally binding nature, act upon subjects in a way that serves the interests of capital, then it becomes necessary for any critical theory of social networking to understand how these texts are operating. Focusing on the discoursal aspects of "social practices" (Fairclough 2003) (here, social networking) is important, because "the language of mass media is scrutinized as a site of power, of struggle, and also as a site where language is often *apparently* transparent (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 12, emphasis original). That services such as Facebook and Twitter now form a new capitalist circuit of accumulation, an analysis of these new media as novel sites of power and of struggle must now be considered.

The conclusions drawn herein are echoed by Christian Fuchs' critical discourse analysis of Facebook's privacy policy (2011b). There, Fuchs demonstrates the problematic nature of these texts and how they frame privacy in a way that protects the interests of Facebook at the expense of its users. He demonstrates quite persuasively the asymmetric relationship between social media user and social media provider established by these documents. These texts, according to Fuchs, contribute to the continued

commodification of user data (2011b, 150), and this study, in also conducting a critical discourse analysis, but of Facebook *and* Twitter's privacy policy, finds his conclusions persuasive and correct. It also comes to similar conclusions.

Where the current study differs from Fuchs', however, is primarily in the methodology deployed. As mentioned in the review of the literature, Fuchs uses a particular mode of critical discourse analysis that makes its suitability as a research tool unclear with respect to the political economy of capitalism. He uses van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to analyzing discourse. Van Dijk's paradigm stresses the importance of the subjective elements of social actors in society and how their cognitive capacities influence theirs and others' worldviews. Fairclough's model is more sensitive towards a structuration-based approach to the relationship between discourses, actors, and structures, or the balanced consideration of the subjective *and* objective factors that mutually constitute social reality. In this regard, the latter model is seen as more commensurate with the presuppositions and objectives of a critical political economy of communication than is Van Dijk's model.

Secondly, the current study differs in Fuchs' research in terms of scope. Whereas he looks specifically at Facebook's privacy policy at a particular time, this study looks at the privacy policies and terms of use documents of both Facebook and Twitter over time. It considers how not just the privacy policy but also the terms of use have changed over time, and links those changes to larger changes in the political economy of new media, thereby bolstering the conclusions that Fuchs draws. In sum, this study should be viewed as an extension of Fuchs' work in the interests of forwarding a critical interpretation of online social networking.

Assumptions regarding the transparency of language are troubling and complicated when we turn toward social network site privacy policies and terms of use contracts. Consider recent events: Facebook's privacy policy, for example, has been in the past couple of years rewritten in a supposedly clearer manner,[2] conforming to what legal circles refer to as "plain language" (Freedman 2007). The assumption here is that the simpler the language and readability of these documents, the greater the likelihood people will read and understand these policies before using the service in question, thus immunizing social network site providers against any lawful action brought forth by claimants on the grounds of misinterpretation of terms. This assumption is problematic because it does not necessarily follow that an aesthetic change in documentation leads to a change in user behaviour regarding contract comprehension. The efficacy of this strategy is thus limited to the very small percentage of those who tend to read these documents (HarrisDecima 2011, 2–3, 36). Even if we assume that people are aware of what they sign up for, as Moringiello argues, people perceive paper and electronic communications [involving contracts] differently (Moringiello 2005, 1309). A change in a document's text does not necessarily ameliorate the problems associated with social networking exploitation, information use, and the like. The ways in which, say, consent is obtained is markedly different between paper and electronic contracts. Consent in the former is usually indicated by one's written signature in face-to-face circumstances (though not always); consent in the latter, however, is obtained more subtly and implicitly in what has been called "browse-wrap" and "click-wrap" environments. Contracts that

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[2] See, for instance, the historical evolution of Facebook's privacy policies: http://www.tosback.org/policy.php?pid=39

are formed in click- and browse-wrap environments work on obtaining assent to terms of

use in ways that people are not always aware:

> In the electronic context, consent can be given in many different ways. One common method is what is often referred to as the "shrinkwrap" agreement. This neologism refers to an increasingly widespread practice in which consumers accept a series of contractual clauses as soon as they remove the cellophane from a newly purchased software program...This same method has now been adapted to e-contracts with "clickwrap" (which involves clicking on an icon) or "browsewrap" (where there is generally a hyperlink to the terms of the contract at the bottom of a page) contracts. These are similar concepts which have certain differences. These practices have been the subject of much jurisprudential debate, mostly in the United States, which is undeniably relevant to our case. The debate mainly concerns the adequacy of these procedures as means of demonstrating one's will and of allowing the offeree to be properly informed. (Gautrais 2004, 201)

Though part of the problem associated with online social network policy may be located

in the *form* that contracts take, i.e., the machine-user interface, website design, hyperlink

placement, etc., this does not mean that the content of them is any less significant as

moments of ambiguity, subtly, and manipulation. Indeed, that the notion of consent is

problematized in electronic environments is only reinforced by the fact that consent itself

is not a clearly defined concept deployed in these documents. In the case of Facebook's

terms of use, consent is only alluded to in the context of data collection: "We do not give

your content or information to advertisers without your consent" (Facebook, Inc. 2010b).

But what is meant by consent here? Is it written notice, verbal agreement, the creation of

an account, serendipitous surfing on a newly-discovered homepage?

In Twitter's privacy policy, consent is somewhat clearer, indicating that *use* of the

site is a form of consent: "When using any of our Services you consent to the collection,

transfer, manipulation, storage, disclosure and other uses of your information as

described in this Privacy Policy" (Twitter 2010). Again, though this definition is clearer,

it remains virtually unknown to those who do not carefully read the policy in any great detail. The problem with these policies is thus a matter of both form and content.

Though much of the language contained within these documents is now said to be more accessible or transparent than past iterations (Electronic Frontier Foundation 2011), they nonetheless continue to present serious problems with respect to data collection, informed consent (Kerr et al. 2009; Pollach 2005; Gautrais 2004), and surveillance (Fuchs 2011a; Cohen 2008). It is here that critical discourse analysis is key to understanding how these documents are acting, what they are saying, and, most importantly, what they are not saying, since this methodological paradigm is largely concerned with uncovering in a nuanced manner the incongruity between *what is* and *what is said* (Wodak and Meyer 2009, chap. 1). This is a crucial distinction to remember when engaging in an analysis of power and ideology as they are manifested in texts.

This chapter takes as its point of entry the manifest content of Facebook and Twitter's privacy policies with a consideration of their terms of use. The objective is to map the linguistic behaviour of these documents and to show how they facilitate an unequal power relation between user and provider. Therefore, two core research questions guide the textual analysis:

> What dominant linguistic features characterize the privacy policies of Facebook and Twitter? How are these documents acting linguistically, i.e., what are they backgrounding, foregrounding, obfuscating, clarifying, etc.?

It should be made clear that limiting the analysis of these documents to a closed-reading or strict discourse analysis is inadequate if the goal is to critically address the above research questions. Given the ontological and theoretical basis of the particular mode of critical discourse analysis deployed in this chapter (*cf.* section 3.2.1), texts must not be

understood as existing beyond the cultural, historical, social, legal, economic, and political contexts in which they are created, but rather as semiotic moments intimately linked to these larger social structures that constitute social reality. Therefore, it is requisite that the linguistic analysis be extended beyond the text and related to elements of social reality applicable to the current discussion (i.e., social networking and capitalist relations of production). Section four of this study, in conjunction with the current chapter, will attempt to link these texts to the larger economic structure in which they are implicated. It should be borne in mind that as the textual analysis is presented, one should be aware of this meronymic relationship between text and structure.

3.2.1. Facebook and Twitter's Privacy Policies

The two privacy policies varied somewhat in terms of word length, sentence length and construction, detail, font weight, font size, font type, and choice and order of headings (Facebook, Inc., 2010a; Twitter, 2010). The entire corpus came in at 7,278 words: Facebook's privacy policy was the longest at 5,983 words, Twitter's, 1,295 words. The length of Facebook's policy is not surprising, given the privacy backlash from users ever since Facebook's controversial structural changeover in 2009. This changeover made publicly available to an unprecedented degree certain elements of a users' profile data (O'Neill 2010); it was a move tending toward a "disclose everything" position (Oreskovic 2009; Denham 2009) whereby internet users did not have to logon to Facebook to see portions of people's profiles. Facebook's policy is perhaps the most detailed with a plethora of additive and elaborate clauses specifying with a high degree of accuracy the actions taken by Facebook as regards data collection and user responsibility – much more so than Twitter's policy.

3.2.1.1. Modality

Fairclough outlines two species of modality which are important to identify in order to map the actors in texts. The style of a text, indicative of an actor's role or even identity, Fairclough writes, can be realized phonologically, beyond a written text (intonation, stress, rhythm, etc.), and in vocabulary and metaphorical usage. These indicators may give off clues as to one's social class and one's personality (Fairclough 2003, 162). The interest in identifying modality is that it is also indicative of what actors in a text commit to or assert. Fairclough goes on to stress the importance of the contingency of identity on the social structures/practices under which they may operate (Fairclough 2003, 161–162). This last point is important, because without an understanding of the conditions under which actors act or how they are positioned within a text, answering the questions "to what extent do people address each other dialogically (i.e., to what extent is difference tolerated or bracketed), and to what extent is mutuality and symmetry established between social actors?" may be difficult (Fairclough 2003, 162). This relates directly to questions of social class interaction.

Pertinent to the current discussion are *epistemic modality* and *deontic modality*. The first type refers to the degree to which one commits to truths about the world. The second type refers to the degree to which one commits to an action or obligation. Modality is, as it were, a mode of expressing, or identifying with, what *is* or what *is not*, and/or *what is* done or *what is not* done. Fairclough calls these two modalities knowledge exchanges (statements and questions) and activity exchanges (demands and offers), respectively (Fairclough 2003, 166–168). Each exchange exhibits particular grammatical and semantic elements that identify them as such. What was revealing about both privacy

policies was that they all expressed, with a considerably high degree of frequency, *deontic modalities* throughout. Markers of modality include adverbials and phrases such as the following: "may", "can", "might be", "reasonably", "possibly", "strongly", "entirely", "should", and "could". Most interesting was the use of the word "may" (Facebook, n=63; Twitter, n=20).

The word "may" appeared most frequently in the context of Twitter and Facebook's data collection and data sharing activities. In terms of level of commitment to an action, the word "may" functions to obfuscate the frequency at which an action takes place, in this case data collection, dissemination, and "secondary use" (Solove, 2008, chap. 5). As Pollach, in her study of ethics and the readability of e-commerce privacy policies, writes, "the use of *may* in combination with [verbs such as disclose, collect, share, use] makes it impossible for users to judge how often a company engages in these practices. All it tells readers is: "Sometimes we do, sometimes we don't".... This reduces the information value of these propositions" (Pollach 2005, 228). A consequence of what Pollach observes as a *strategic* use of modality in these policies is that the notion of informed consent is problematized – a concept fundamental to contract law (Gautrais 2004, 194; Kerr et al. 2009, 12). Indeed, how can one make a reasonable decision to join an online social network based on the recorded (in)actions of the provider, especially if the user is concerned about privacy at the time of registration?

Black's Law Dictionary defines the word "may" in the following ways:

Commonly used to denote a discretion .... Permissive and empowering and confers an 'area of discretion' .... Should not be construed as imperative unless the intention that it should be so is clear from the context. (2009, 771)

Given the extent to which these policies discuss the conditions under which user-generated content is collected, shared (i.e., sold), and distributed, especially in Facebook's terms of use policy which, interestingly, begins with a high-affinity epistemic assertion that "Your privacy is very important to us [underline added]," (Facebook, Inc. 2010a), but then goes on to outline the conditions of data collection and distribution as it pertains to third parties, it is clear from the context of both policies in fact that we ought to interpret *may* as *always*. In other words, we must construe as imperative the fact that Facebook and Twitter *always* collects, shares, and distributes user-generated content. As evidenced by Kirkpatrick's (2010) work in the previous chapter, as well as data aggregation companies like Gnip, Infochimps, and Datasift, there is strong indication to suggest that these media environments have an ongoing interest in keeping the flow of information steady, so long as there is economic benefit to be gleaned.

It is also clear from the context that these documents are acting legally and are a part of a legalistic discourse evidenced by phrases such as "You may use the Services only if you can form a binding contract with Twitter", "These Terms, the Twitter Rules and our Privacy Policy are the entire and exclusive agreement between Twitter and you" (Twitter 2010); and, "We may disclose information pursuant to subpoenas, court orders, or other requests (including criminal and civil matters) if we have a good faith belief that the response is required by law", etc. (Facebook, Inc. 2010b). Further, each policy included an entry for data collection practices for persons under the age of thirteen, in order to comply with the United States' Federal Trade Commission's COPPA legislation (Children's Online Protection of Privacy Act). Interestingly, each privacy policy did not modalize their sentences here, but asserted their position clearly with the proscriptive

assertion that "We <u>do not knowingly</u> collect personal information from children under 13" (Twitter 2010, emphasis added). The modality of both privacy policies is not accidental but strategic: these documents position social network providers as responsible law abiders with the use of assertive, non-modalized statements and, at the same time, they downplay the frequency of their data collection activities with highly modalized sentences that obfuscate how often they share and collect data. Such obfuscation problematizes the notion of a user's informed consent to use these services. Interestingly, there was synonymy between "consent" and interaction throughout these policies in varying degrees of clarity. This is cause for concern, because without an explicit definition of what consent may mean, users who interact with these sites may interpret it quite differently from the provider (Kerr et al. 2009).

For instance, the problem associated with parties not reading transactional boilerplate contracts (Bakos, Marotta-Wurgler, and Trossen 2009) during such processes has enticed legal circles to consider alternatives that are directed towards reconciling one's online privacy and informed consent with business interests. Hartzog proposes that user interaction on a particular website should be considered "enforceable promises" and that the website interface itself ought to be constructed in such a way that consent is generated as users navigate within them (2011). The problem, of course, is that by linking consent to one's online behaviour or website navigation, the rather subtle and implicit nature of this consent obtainment does not necessarily improve upon one's awareness that, by merely browsing a page, they are actually consenting to a plethora of conditions usually tucked behind a homepage hyperlink labelled *terms* and/or *privacy*. Secondly, one must question how this particular strategy benefits the user. If this strategy is meant to

diversify the means by which consent is obtained, thereby strengthening the legally binding nature of the contract to which it refers, to include actions not normally associated with giving consent (web-browsing over signing a contract), then this is clearly a technique favouring the service provider and not the consumer. The extent to which the latter is informed of the terms of usage under this particular arrangement seems quite limited.

3.2.1.2. Nominalization

Nominalization refers to the objectification or reification of a process: it "involves the loss of certain semantic elements of clauses – both tense ... and modality ... are lost" (Fairclough 2003, 141). Examples include: "collection", "globalization", "nominalization", "mobilization", "information", etc. Rather than universal, static things in and of themselves, they are actually words describing processes involving actors and agents. Billig offers a more nuanced account of nominalization as it has been used in critical discourse analysis. Perhaps the most important parameter in the arsenal of the CDA paradigm, nominalization is essentially the process of turning verbs into nouns: "Choosing noun phrases over verbs and the passive voice over the active voice [is] often ideologically charged" (Billig 2008, 785).

The implication here is that nominalization, although sometimes occurring without the knowledge of the writer, can be consciously and strategically deployed in texts in order to generalise and abstract away from particular events and processes ... with the result of suppressing difference, obfuscating agency, responsibility, and social divisions (Fairclough 2003, 144). Similar to the propositional value of which Pollach wrote regarding the ambiguity of highly modalized sentences, nominalization

problematizes the notion of accountability and responsibility of agents precisely because agency (or action) is reified into things (objects) which, on their own, do not necessarily have an ability to act without requiring a subject or acting body.

The consequences of nominalization become clear when we consider how actors are represented in a text. Nominalization was a frequently occurring phenomenon in these policies; they gave otherwise inanimate things a degree of autonomy and animation that had the effect of backgrounding people actually involved in the maintenance of these sites. For instance, in Twitter alone, seventeen instances of nominalised action occurred. This is significant because they occurred within a much shorter policy in terms of word count than Facebook's, whose longer policy contained fewer instances of nominalization.

Twitter's nominalised language most frequently occurred in the context of data collection, data sharing, and policy amendment, thus placing the technology itself front and centre as doing the acting: "Twitter may keep track", "our servers record", Twitter may use, "these services may collect", third parties...perform functions" etc. (Twitter 2010). What this means is that the actors involved in the creation and maintenance of the service are backgrounded, their roles unclear to the user in the sense of who may be responsible for what activity. Interestingly, nominalization did *not* occur whenever the policy addressed the activity of prospective users who add or otherwise modify their information, foregrounding them as agents explicitly accountable for their own information creation and use: "Most of the information you provide" rather than "the information provided", and, "Your public information is" rather than "public information is", etc.

What this means in terms of agential responsibility is twofold: a deflection away from who is collecting, sharing, and mining data to the technology itself doing these things, thus obfuscating the accountability and responsibility of the site's creators for the acts of data collection and distribution. There is also a simultaneous foregrounding of the responsibility of online social network users who, as agents who (inter)act with the service, are locatable and accountable for information creation and use online. Such foregrounding of user responsibility may also imply that whatever the user does subsequent to reading or not reading the policy justifies the provider's data handling policies, regardless of how they are expressed in these policies.

Imparting a sense of autonomy to a technological thing gives the impression of an unchangeable situation, a 'that's the way it is' scenario. It distances users and leaves them with a feeling of alienation, if not helplessness, in terms of the communicative process such that they would be less likely to feel that they are in a position to change the situation. It is the effective reification of what is, in practice, a process (Lukacs 1971, chap. 1). Thus, at the semantic level of discourse, we find a real abstraction taking place in these texts; that is, what are being described are real, concrete processes (data collection, dissemination, storage, commodification, etc.) without a concrete specificity as to how these processes actually work and the agents involved in making these processes possible. All processes are seemingly described as mediated solely through a technological object.

3.2.1.3. Conversationalization

Commodification is to a significant extent also a linguistic and discursive process (Fairclough 1994). This process is described as conversationalization. It is "a process

which involves the generalization of the communicative function of promotion (of goods, services, institutions or people) into other discursive arenas (Fairclough 1994); it can be understood as a process of "colonization/appropriation" of a particular discursive practice into another such as market discourse (advertising) with, for example, public discourse, as found in politics, public services, and the arts (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 93–94; Fairclough 1994). Essentially, conversationalisation is a de/recontextualization of discursive practice, a move away from high-context language to low-context language, a move toward using language as a means to a specific end in a way that is comprehensible to the greatest number of people. Facebook's policies have gone in this direction (Bosker 2011) and this is most readily apparent in their latest "data use policy" (Facebook, Inc. 2011).

Interestingly, when, in late 2009, Facebook decided to augment users' default privacy settings such that users' networks, gender, pictures, names, likes, friends, wallpaper, photos, and other profile data were made visible to the entirety of the World Wide Web, there was a respective augmentation in the privacy policy as well. More particularly, there was an addition to it. The elaborative clauses and deontic sentential modalization of this addition suggested that it was operating in a promotional register:

> Facebook is designed to make it easy for you to share your information with anyone you want. [ELABORATION] <u>You decide</u> how much information you feel comfortable sharing on Facebook and <u>you control</u> how it is distributed through your privacy settings. <u>You should review</u> the default privacy settings and change them if necessary to reflect your preferences. <u>You should also consider</u> your settings whenever you share information.
> Facebook is not just a website. [ELABORATION] <u>It is also</u> a service for sharing your information on Facebook-enhanced applications and websites. <u>You can control</u> how you share information with those third-party applications and websites through your application settings and <u>you can learn</u> more about how information is shared with them on our About Platform page. <u>You can also limit</u>

how your friends share your information with applications through your privacy settings. (Facebook, Inc. 2009)

It would seem that a fundamental tenet of this passage is that, despite the controversial, unilateral decision by Facebook to extend to the Web additional features of users' profiles, the controlling and managing of profile information is, as it presumably always had been in the past, the onus of the user – irrespective of the changes made by the provider. Further, the above passage reads like a sales pitch, indicating to the consumer all the possibilities to be gleaned from the use of the service, as if the service itself was a product. There is a strong link between control and desirability in this passage, suggesting that so long as Facebook gives informational control to its users (at least in terms of peer-to-peer information flows) then any unilateral decision by Facebook with respect to data handling is warranted.

Another implication is that control is a thing to be valued and is, therefore, to be respected. Value assumptions, says Fairclough, are implicitly connected to larger orders of discourse (Fairclough 2003, 58) and that the notion of *individual* control over one's goods and assets, i.e., control and information, would seem to be in line with a larger libertarian value system in which possessive individualism and the priority of the individual is a guiding principle (Macpherson 1964; Locke 1980). What is less explicit is that in the act of giving someone control the giver must also have a degree of power over the recipient in order that such control is readily distributed in the first place. Thus, any claim to giving one control without an explication of the associated costs is highly suspect.

The passage above is exemplary of a conversationalization process; that is, the augmenting of a legalistic discourse deploying boilerplate legalese to bring into its fold

promotional patterns of language written in "plain language" (Freedman 2007), the kind commonly found in advertising. The efficacy of this process, however, is again limited to those who read privacy and terms of use policies. Further, there is no guarantee that such a shift in discursive convention will persuade those who are unsure about the treatment of their information. The question then becomes: to what extent is this process of conversationalization useful and effective? Does it give an adequate degree of reassurance to users as regards control over their online activity (i.e., control over the means of distribution of the information they create), especially if we consider that the terms of use have not changed but only its aesthetic? The obvious answer is possibly – but not necessarily. Despite the difficulty associated with determining the efficacy of persuasive techniques in media, conversationalization is, nonetheless, a useful index by which to measure the level of penetrability of market discourses in spaces where such discourses would normally be *in absentia*. What we can conclude from the preceding is that the overall aesthetic of the privacy policies of both Facebook and Twitter follow what Fairclough calls a "logic of appearances" (Fairclough 2003, 94).

3.2.1.4. Logic of Appearances

The semantic relations between sentences and clauses as well as the grammatical relations within clauses point to the disparity between the manifest elements of a text (the words and sentences used) and the overall logic of the message. A document is said to contain a logic of appearances when the overall message is descriptive rather than explanatory. Key markers of descriptive texts are conjunctions and phrases such as "and", "also", "such as", "moreover", "for example", etc. When we turn to Facebook's privacy

policy, we can see that much of its content elaborates and adds information after some instance of a statement or demand. For instance,

> We keep track of some of the actions you take on Facebook [STATEMENT], <u>such as</u> {adding connections} (including joining a group or adding a friend), {creating a photo album}, {sending a gift}, {poking another user}, {indicating you "like" a post, attending an event}, or {connecting with an application}. In some cases you are <u>also</u> taking an action when you provide information or content to us. <u>For example</u>, if you share a video, <u>in addition</u> to storing the actual content you uploaded, we might log the fact that you shared it. (Facebook, Inc. 2010c)

Though this paragraph is elaborative (it does not make explicit use of the conjunction "and"), it does not explain *why* Facebook keeps track of the actions users take – arguably, a much more interesting and important question to ask. Note as well the modalization "might" in the last sentence, again obfuscating the frequency at which user data is captured and stored.

Turning to the grammatical relations within clauses, certain indicators that give clues as to whether a document is explanatory or descriptive is based largely on the semantic relations between sentences (whether they are causal, additive, elaborative, etc.). If a clause is explanatory, its grammatical relations would be predominantly *hypotactic* meaning that one clause is subordinate to another and usually joined with the conjunction "because". Usually, the marker "because" indicates an attempt to explain, though not always. However, in both privacy policies, the grammatical relations are *paratactic,* or equivalent, because the semantic relations are mostly elaborative and additive throughout. Clauses are joined laterally with markers such as "such as", "also", and "in addition":

> When you create or reconfigure a Twitter account, you provide some personal information, [ADDITIVE] <u>such as</u> your name, username, password, and email address. Some of this information, [ADDITIVE] <u>for example</u>, your name <u>and</u> username, is listed publicly on our Services, [ADDITIVE] <u>including</u> on your

profile page and in search results. Some Services, [ADDITIVE] <u>such as</u> search, public user profiles <u>and</u> viewing lists, do not require registration. (Twitter 2010)

And in Facebook's privacy policy:

When you sign up for Facebook you provide us with your name, email, gender, <u>and</u> birth date. During the registration process we give you the opportunity to connect with your friends, schools, <u>and</u> employers. [ADDITIVE] You will <u>also</u> be able to add a picture of yourself. [ELABORATIVE] In some cases we may ask for additional information for security reasons <u>or</u> to provide specific services to you. Once you register you can provide other information about yourself by connecting with, [ADDITIVE] <u>for example</u>, your current city, hometown, family, relationships, networks, activities, interests, <u>and</u> places. [ELABORATIVE] You can <u>also</u> provide personal information about yourself, <u>such as</u> your political and religious views. (Facebook, Inc. 2010b)

Based on both the semantic and grammatical relations dominant within these documents, it is clear from the analysis that these documents contain a logic of appearances, documents that are predominantly descriptive and operate at a level of abstraction (through its use of nominalization) such that it problematizes a user's ability to determine with any degree of concreteness the agents involved in maintaining social network processes. That these policies, acting as both legal contracts as well as adverts, contain a predominantly descriptive rather than explanatory character renders null and void any inquiry into why data is being collected beyond the obvious and limited justifications to "improve the quality of advertisements" (Facebook, Inc. 2010b), "help improve our service" (Twitter 2010), and to share information (Facebook, Inc. 2010b; Twitter 2010). Though one cannot expect these documents to function as elucidations on how these social networks operate, it should be made clear by them who are doing the collecting, why (beyond operational justifications), and the extent to which user data is collected, stored, disseminated, and otherwise made available to others. If user control is valued, then it behoves both Facebook and Twitter to make the necessary information available to

its users so that they may be adequately informed as to what they are agreeing to (and

what they are giving up) at the time of registration.

3.2.1.5. Legitimation (Authorization)

There are several processes through which an agent or institution may legitimize

the claims they make or the activities that they carry out: authorization, rationalization,

moral evaluation, and mythopoesis (establishing authority by way of a narrative or story)

(Fairclough 2003, 98). It is interesting to note that, of the policies analyzed, the only one

to explicitly appeal to an external authority as a validation of their actions was Facebook.

Twitter made no *explicit* appeal to any external regulating body in order to establish

credibility in their data handling practices. In fact, the opening section of Facebook's

policy attempts to legitimize everything that follows by way of their appeal to the

TRUSTe program (and the visual prominence of the organization's logo in the policy).

The TRUSTe program is often associated with the European Union Safe Harbor

initiative, which is an agreement between the European Commission and the United

States Department of Commerce that enables organizations to join a Safe Harbor List to

demonstrate their compliance with the European Data Protection Directive[3] (Connolly

2008, 4). The TRUSTe program is a privacy seal program that gives "added assurance

that a website is abiding by its posted privacy statement. [TRUSTe] offer[s] third-party

verification and monitoring of the information practices of websites. [They are] an

independent, non-profit initiative working to build consumer trust and confidence on the

Internet" (Jasper 2008, 80).

It has been observed that privacy seal programs have been known to break with

their implied impartiality as third-party arbiters, and TRUSTe in particular has in the past

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[3] See, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31995L0046:EN:HTML

failed to punish those companies that breach their own privacy policy (Pollach 2005, 224; Electronic Privacy Information Center 2011). Connolly has observed that companies that use the TRUSTe seal in their privacy policies, as a way to legitimate their data handling practices, often include false claims regarding the jurisdictional power of TRUSTe:

> The Safe Harbor is a self-certification scheme, and most organizations reflect this in the text of their privacy policies. However, great care needs to be taken regarding claims that US organizations have been 'certified by the Department of Commerce' or even 'certified by the EU'. There are also some references to the 'Safe Harbor Act' that may mislead consumers, as the Safe Harbor is not a legislative regime. (Connolly 2008, 9)

What we see in Facebook's privacy policy is the following:

> Facebook has been awarded TRUSTe's Privacy Seal signifying that this privacy policy and practices have been reviewed by TRUSTe for compliance with TRUSTe's program requirements... Facebook also complies with the EU Safe Harbor framework as set forth by the Department of Commerce .... To view our *certification*, visit the *U.S. Department of Commerce's Safe Harbor Web site*. (Facebook, Inc. 2010b, emphasis added)

The implication here is that TRUSTe's break with impartiality calls into question its legitimacy as a *bona fide* privacy watchdog. It also potentially renders fallacious Facebook's appeal to them as a body that endorses Facebook's data handling activities: "There has been little improvement in either compliance or data quality since the negative 2002 and 2004 EU reviews of the Safe Harbor .... The growing number of false claims made by organisations regarding the Safe Harbor represent [*sic*] a new and significant privacy risk to consumers" (Connolly 2008, 16). The continued presence of the TRUSTe seal in Facebook's privacy policy, since 2006, supports an overall logic of appearances inherent in this document; however, despite the serious concerns with TRUSTe's performance, its presence still implies that it is an "authority" and is "certified by the Department of Commerce". That the logos themselves have been known to be

counterfeited by some companies that choose to include it in their privacy policies further weakens claims in support of proper data handling and their continued appeal to TRUSTe as a guarantor of dataflow responsibility (Connolly 2008, 10).

Why is an analysis of legitimation relevant in our case? Although TRUSTe may function as a signifier of accountability, authority, and responsibility in terms of data handling, it is also a fetish construct. It mystifies the actually existing data practices of Facebook. The TRUSTe service implicitly frames the principal problematic plaguing online social networks that choose to use them as one of enforcing individualistic, bourgeois notions of privacy, which does nothing to negate or challenge the commodification of user data in these digital spaces, let alone bring this issue to the fore.

3.2.2. Facebook and Twitter's Terms of Service

The central thesis of this chapter is that both the privacy policy – as strategically concealing the commodification process through framing the ongoing problem with interactive online social networks as primarily a matter of peer-to-peer information flow and privacy – and the terms of use are effectively deployed together as work contracts. What is it about these texts that make this the case? When we turn to the historical development of the terms of use of both Facebook and Twitter, we see an overall picture of a refinement and augmentation of clauses as well as a problematization or increased complication of user control over their data.

Twitter has crafted five versions of their terms of use policy (Twitter 2011a). The first version was posted prior to 10 September 2009 and exhibited rather scarce and boilerplate-like characteristics, frequently drawing upon contract law discourse without much regard to readability. In fact, a footnote of this version suggests that it was quoted

from or "inspired by" Flickr, a photo-sharing social media site (Twitter 2011a).

Interestingly, version one of the policy states,

> We [Twitter] claim no intellectual property rights over the material you provide to the Twitter service. Your profile and materials uploaded remain yours. You can remove your profile at any time by deleting your account. This will also remove any text and images you have stored in the system ... [and that] We encourage users to contribute their creations to the public domain or consider progressive licensing terms. (Twitter 2011a)

This passage suggests that Twitter was not overly concerned about the content that users produced on their site. Elsewhere in the first version, there is no explicit indication that would lead one to believe that Twitter was also a broker of user content. Neither did it in any way position the service as being interested in commodifying such content. All of this changed rather explicitly with the introduction in September, 2009 of the second and subsequent versions of the terms of use, (i.e., versions three through five, the latter being the most current version at the time of writing):

> By submitting, posting or displaying Content on or through the Services, you grant us a worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free license (with the right to sublicense) to use, copy, reproduce, process, adapt, modify, publish, transmit, display and distribute such Content in any and all media or distribution methods (now known or later developed). You agree that this license includes the right for Twitter to make such Content available to other companies, organizations or individuals who partner with Twitter for the syndication, broadcast, distribution or publication of such Content on other media and services, subject to our terms and conditions for such Content use. (Twitter 2011a)

Even more striking is the following clause, also found in versions two through five:

> Such additional uses by Twitter, or other companies, organizations or individuals who partner with Twitter, *may be made with no compensation paid to you* with respect to the Content that you submit, post, transmit or otherwise make available through the Services. (Twitter 2011a, emphasis added)

It is unlikely it is mere coincidence that these clauses were added to the terms of use at the same time that Twitter began talks with Microsoft and Google regarding a new data-

mining initiative. This initiative allowed the latter to draw user-generated content from the former: "Microsoft and Google would license a full feed from the microblogging service that could then be integrated into the results of their competing search engines" (Swisher 2009). This multi-million dollar initiative, which immediately gave Twitter a $1 billion valuation, has since expanded, as it was a deal that remained non-exclusive. In 2010, it was reported that Twitter again sold its user data, this time to Gnip, the social media aggregator. Gnip offered fifty percent of all the messages posted to Twitter for $360,000 per year, or five percent of all messages for $60,000 per year (Dumbill 2011). On Gnip's homepage, we see the logos of both Twitter and Facebook as two of its main data sources (Valeski et al. 2011b).

Similarly, we see in Facebook's terms of use similar clauses, which extend to the provider the distributional powers over user-generated content. Take, for instance, version one of Facebook's terms of use:

> By posting User Content to any part of the Site, you automatically grant, and you represent and warrant that you have the right to grant, to the Company an irrevocable, perpetual, non-exclusive, transferable, fully paid, worldwide license (with the right to sublicense) to use, copy, publicly perform, publicly display, reformat, translate, excerpt (in whole or in part) and distribute such User Content for any purpose, commercial, advertising, or otherwise, on or in connection with the Site or the promotion thereof, to prepare derivative works of, or incorporate into other works, such User Content, and to grant and authorize sublicenses of the foregoing. You may remove your User Content from the Site at any time. If you choose to remove your User Content, the license granted above will automatically expire, however you acknowledge that the Company may retain archived copies of your User Content (TOSBack 2011).

Further,

> Company shall own exclusive rights [to user submissions such as questions, comments, suggestions, ideas, feedback or other information about the Site or the Service], including all intellectual property rights, and shall be entitled to the unrestricted use and dissemination of these Submissions for any purpose,

commercial or otherwise, *without acknowledgment or compensation to you* (TOSBack 2011, emphasis added)

Although we see a progressive change in the textural register of Facebook's twenty-six versions of its terms of use, as well as Twitter's four latest versions of the same, much of this change is merely aesthetic in that what remains consistent throughout all versions is the preservation of the rights granted to both service providers to valorize user-generated content. It is this persistent characteristic that guarantees the transformation of "pure surplus value" (Terranova 2004) from user-generated content into profit; it is also evidence suggesting that there indeed exists a working relation between social network user and social network provider. Thus, to the extent that users produce value for these social network sites, it is not difficult to construe both the privacy policy and terms of use as work contracts. Through the imposition of these clauses, social network sites effectively render the work of the user "productive" (Marx 2000, 1:–3:153–304) at all times, as users cannot opt out of their own exploitation as they engage with them.

Consider, for instance, assertions made in these policies (all versions) which state that both privacy and control are matters of extreme importance: "Your privacy is very important to us" (TOSBack 2011); "You own all of the content and information you post on Facebook, and you can control how it is shared through your privacy and application settings" (Facebook, Inc. 2010b). In the case of Facebook's terms of use, these statements are followed by what is arguably an entire document's worth of conditional statements that render problematic the meaning and assumptions of privacy, control, and consent. Immediately following these assertions is a list of conditions that actually de-privatize, or, rather, open up new communication flows between the user and the social network provider, thereby rendering distributable, transferable, and commercially valuable user

data, irrespective of whether or not Facebook and Twitter give users control, as they claim.

Assumptions regarding the degree of control a user has are problematized the moment they begin interacting with these sites. Indeed, what is meant by control here? Certainly, users are not under any ongoing obligation to interact with these sites and as such have the choice not to participate. They do not, however, have the option to both participate and control their information to the extent that these sites claim. The question of control, as one's ability to regulate the flow of data, then, is effectively a red-herring; what is often not explicit, either within these documents or in the larger debate over privacy and, say, Facebook privacy settings, is the unavoidable shift of control over data flow to the provider. This shift is simultaneously a broadening or, at worst, a weakening of one's control over their data.

The above analysis was meant to map the linguistic terrain of both Facebook and Twitter's privacy policy and terms of use, and, through the adoption of Norman Fairclough's dialectical-relational model of critical discourse analysis, demonstrate the problematic language presented by this genre of text. The analysis was guided by the following questions:

> What dominant linguistic features characterize the privacy policies of Facebook and Twitter? How are these documents acting linguistically, i.e., what are they backgrounding, foregrounding, obfuscating, clarifying, etc.?

The textual analysis of Facebook and Twitter's privacy policy and terms of use has highlighted a number of linguistic characteristics that work toward concealing elements of their institutional processes, namely the commodification of user information. Though

it is clear that these documents function discursively as legal texts, as they draw from the legal discourse and explicate the roles and responsibilities of the user and provider (albeit in varying degrees of clarity), the policies also have a promotional quality to them, as they move away from boilerplate legalese and toward a more accessible advertising discourse. This process – conversationalization – is when a text is rendered more attractive and persuasive through the enhanced accessibility of the language used so that it may be maximally comprehensive and influential.

Further, an attempt has been made to demonstrate how these documents, by way of their semantic and grammatical relations and their strategic use of nominalization, are indicative of a logic of appearances rather than an explanatory report. These documents may describe in great detail how data is curated, but in this descriptive role there is also a preclusion of any explanation as to why, beyond the business-centred rationale of service improvement, these data are collected at all.

Moreover, by virtue of their genre as legal contracts, they are prescriptive documents that govern people's behaviour (Graham 2001, 765) along with outlining rights and responsibilities of both user and provider, perhaps in ways that are not always obvious. This process of aestheticization is one of deflecting and concealing other aspects of reality than those described – namely, that through commodification, users are effectively put to work. So, although such aestheticization may satiate a collective desire to increase the readability and appeal of these documents, of which they still bear highly complex language that deter many from reading them, this does not mean that any significant change has taken place as regards Facebook and Twitter's data handling practices, only how such processes are described in these texts. Since 2007, Facebook

began to generate revenues by developing advertising informed by user activities and preferences (Gane and Beer 2008, 48), and since at least 2009, Twitter began the same (Swisher 2009); the conclusion must be that the concealment of certain facts, ones that serve the material and financial interests of capital, and not users, is strategic, not accidental. It is simply not in Facebook and Twitter's interests to emphasize to its users that the latter's data are being commodified and sold. Concealing this aspect of online social networking behind the highly complex legal discourse deployed in these texts is indeed an effective deterrent from inquiry beyond first glance.

The next section will attempt to theorize this new working relation using the work of Marx; in particular, his labour theory of value and his understanding of the role of rent in capitalist society. The digital, online context has both confirmed and challenged much of Marx's observations and assertions, especially those centring on the labour theory of value. Indeed, capital's mode of development has led to substantial and incremental reorientations of economic social relations in certain sectors, especially in light of information-communication technology advances; however, as the next section will demonstrate, much of what has been argued and described in the pages above confirm many of Marx's observations.

THE EXPANDED FORM OF VARIABLE CAPITAL MODEL AND MARX'S
THEORY OF RENT

> With the real subsumption of labour under capital a complete ... revolution takes
> place in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers and in the
> relations between workers and capitalists .... [C]apitalist production now
> establishes itself as a mode of production *sui generis* and brings into being a new
> mode of material production.
> – Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*

> Entertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism.
> – Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

How can we begin to understand social networking activity from a critical

political economic perspective? In what particular way does the relationship between

social network user and social network provider take on the characteristics of capitalist

relations? How can we begin to identify the circuit of accumulation that transforms user

activity into value-creating activity? These questions shall guide the discussion of this

section. In order to address these questions, it will be necessary to return to the work of

Marx and some of his contemporaries and their discussions on labour, value, the

commodity, and other facets of capitalist production. To suggest that online social

networking comprises a new circuit of capitalist accumulation implies that a number of

political economic concepts, including Marxian ones, are at play, such as value (use,

exchange, and surplus), exploitation, formal and real subsumption, and the commodity.

But to simply transplant these concepts into a realm of activity sufficiently beyond the

character of nineteenth century industrial labour and assume their conceptual and analytic

efficacy would contravene the very notion of criticality and the historical contingency

essential to Marxian analysis. The goal of this section, therefore, will be to critically

engage with these concepts to permit us to make sense of the current object of study in

the current historical moment, and to also recognize that such an analysis is deployed not without difficulty.

This section centres on the question of value creation in online social networks, and argues that, given the evidence presented in section three *vis-à-vis* the commodification of user-generated content of social media data, the importance of Marx's labour theory of value will be reconsidered, despite claims of the inefficaciousness of such a theory in so-called post-Fordist or knowledge-based economies (Hardt and Negri 2000, 354; Negri 1989, 89–92; Negri 1999). This germinal debate within Marxian circles over value in the information economy can be framed in the following and admittedly oversimplified manner: "in the sale of manufactured commodities, capital grows ... through the accumulation of surplus value, but in the sale of information commodities, capital grows through the imposition of rents and the collection of tributes" (Adair 2010, 259).

The argument will be that Marx's theory of rent is, at best, a problematic framework with which to explain the value-creating activity of online social network users. In fact, such a theory risks reifying the role of those who are not only implicated in the value chain of capital, but who represent *the* source of value in these environments. The alternative, therefore, will be to propose a modified framework of Marx's circuit of capital, what this study calls the expanded form of variable capital model.[4] This expanded form of the circuit preserves Marx's labour theory of value and, therefore, the moral and

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[4] This model is formally expressed in Fuchs' article "Web 2.0, Prosumption, and Surveillance" (2011). His work represents a highly developed and more formal expression of the author's own research. However, prior to Fuchs' publication, the author of the current study, in considering how the labour theory of value applies to prosumption work, developed a similar line of argumentation that less formally reflects the detailed work of Fuchs. As such, the timing of Fuchs' publication and the author's research is serendipitous, yet timely; ideas not the author's own but Fuchs' will be textually acknowledged inline.

political imperatives of the theory. This perspective, of which this chapter defends, forwards the view that immaterial labourers, whether formally employed or part of Terranova's "free labour" paradigm (2004), i.e., unpaid labour performed outside the traditional work places, are the source of value of an information commodity, thus positioning and insisting upon the user as a *necessary* condition for the realization of profit in places like Facebook and Twitter. Value, as Marx always insisted, can only stem from human labour (1977, 1:128–131).

The second perspective, to be critiqued, has been forwarded by those working to a greater or lesser extent in autonomist Marxist paradigms. Some who follow these currents hold the view that revenue generation in Internet "digital enclosures" (Andrejevic 2007b) is best explained using Marx's theory of rent (Pasquinelli 2009; Caraway 2011; Vercellone 2008), which, as will be demonstrated, decouples, rather ironically, the relationship between user and value with the effect of depoliticizing the entire online labour relation. From a political point of view, the second view is seen as fundamentally problematic. Before these perspectives are considered in detail, however, a brief overview of some of the essential concepts in Marxian analysis will be presented in order to demonstrate how capital has developed to subsume into its logic those areas of social life that are not immediately understood as sites of production and work.

4.1. Capital and its Circuit

When speaking of the capitalist mode of production, one necessarily speaks of capital, or those basic elements that go into and come out of this particular mode of production. Marx, and the political economists before him, defines capital in a number of ways: capital is stored-up labour (1988, 36); capital is commodities (1977, 1:255); capital

is money which begets money (1977, 1:256); capital is made up of stock or funds that produce revenue or profit (1988, 36), which leads him to ultimately conclude that capital, being all of these things, are products of human labour, and therefore contain value (1977, 1:255). But capital is not simply a sum of discrete values, or useful things, put into a system of production; it is value which is in a constant state of metamorphosis from one form to another – the ends being the accumulation of more capital and the generation of profit. Despite the possibility for many things to be capital, the common thread linking all of them is that, unlike the view of classical political economists, value is transformed within a process involving the interplay of all of these elements:

> Capital is not a thing, but a process – a process, specifically, of the circulation of values. These values are congealed in different things at various points in the process: in the first instance, as money, and then as commodity before turning back into money-form. (D. Harvey 2010, 88)

Marx repeatedly draws on the metaphor of metamorphosis to convey the importance of understanding capital in this way: "We perceive straight away the insufficiency of the simple form of value [the value of one commodity expressed in another, i.e., barter]: it is an embryonic form which must undergo a series of metamorphoses before it can ripen into the price-form" (1977, 1:154, 198–210). Capital is thus value in motion (Marx 1977, 1:256; D. Harvey 2010, 90), and it takes a particular trajectory. This is an important departure that Marx takes, as it leads him to show how each of these traditionally hypostatized elements of the capitalist mode of production relate to one another as well as how they are linked by and operate in a larger process of circulation. This is to say that by understanding the capitalist mode of production as value in motion, involving the deployment of discrete capitals, Marx can begin to move beyond classical political economy's fetishistic view of capital-as-things towards capital-in-motion to illustrate

where the profit generated from this process actually comes from. Namely, the reduction

of the actual value of labour's output to that of a wage, the latter reflecting only a portion

of the value actually produced by labour over a given period of time. In so doing, Marx is

able to also emphasize the political implications of this mode of production by locating

the existence of class struggle within it (Cleaver 1979, 81–84). After all, "capitalist

production is not merely the production of commodities, it is, by its very essence, the

production of surplus-value" (Marx 1977, 1:644). More formally, the circulation of value

can be represented generally as,

$$M - C \left\langle \begin{matrix} LP \\ MP \end{matrix} \right\rangle ... P ... C' - (M + \Delta M)$$

where finance (M) buys commodities (C), labour-power (LP), and means of production

(MP), such as machinery and raw materials, which together produce another commodity

(C'), only for it to be sold in order to recoup the costs incurred producing it (M) *and* to

collect an increment above the capital invested in its production (ΔM) (Marx 1992,

2:124; D. Harvey 2010, 121).

Each node along this cycle can be considered capital, because they are specifically

deployed and employed in a process to generate money, not merely use-values. Important

to observe here is the difference between M at the beginning and M at the end (M + ΔM).

The idea is that M + ΔM must always be greater than M (implied by delta); otherwise,

profit is not realized, the growth of a particular capitalist enterprise stops, and crisis

ensues. As profit is realized, the process starts anew, but at a greater magnitude whereby

some of the profit generated at the end of the cycle is invested back into production in the

form of machinery, raw materials, or wages, thus expanding its scale. Overall, the

capitalist strategy of accumulation is a never-ending, ascending spiral of investment/reinvestment. Strategies intended to maintain the difference between M and M+ΔM are a direct result of, as Marx says, capitalists forced to operate under the "coercive laws of competition," compelling them to always find innovative ways to improve their capital, so as to preserve it by means of progressive accumulation (1977, 1:739). It is these coercive laws, according to Marx, that prevent capital from operating benevolently, ethically, morally, or by any other standard beyond that of mere accumulation (1977, 1:254). Competition among various capitals dictates the terms and nothing else. Capitalists are not above this law, nor can they ever be.

Understanding capital as a process is also important because, as will be shown, the role of the online social network user is implicated in the cycle at the point of (LP), but in a rather unorthodox way. Only through understanding capitalist accumulation strategies in terms of a process can one begin to see how social networkers become subsumed under it. The implication then is that if they perform a function at point (LP), then they also must be involved in producing a commodity, and therefore value.

4.1.1. The (Information) Commodity

One of the more interesting socio-historical categories posing a challenge to aspects of the Marxist paradigm is the concept of the information commodity. It has an unusual character: it acts like and contains the elements of a material commodity (i.e., it possesses use-value and exchange-value, and is produced and exchanged for money), but, on the bases of its supposed immateriality, its lack of discreteness, and persistence even after consumption, it is quite plainly, unlike a material commodity. But when we consider for a moment Marx's reflections on use- and exchange-value, we find that information

commodities meet the basic criteria of what constitutes the most basic unit of wealth in capitalist society, despite these imperfections. If information behaves like a commodity, it is only because capital finds innovative ways to impose the commodity-form upon it.

Marx's ontology of the commodity contains three essential elements: use-value, exchange-value, and value. As one might guess, something that is produced implies that it has use in that it fulfills a particular need or desire. A thing, therefore, has value in use, and such use is realized in consuming it (Marx 1970, 27; 1977, 1:126). This particular form of value comes from the properties of the object itself, but does not express the relations of production of a given society. Use-value expresses the qualitative, specific elements of a thing. So, for instance, Marx uses the example of a diamond being worn for aesthetic purposes and wheat being eaten for nutrition; but, the acts of wearing a necklace and eating bread tell us nothing about who and by what means these objects were produced. Marx concludes that, because this is the case, use-value lies outside of political economy (1970, 28). However, he is not suggesting here that it is irrelevant to political economic investigation, simply that use-value need not be considered beyond the fact that it is a necessary precondition for exchange, the latter expressing directly the relations of production. All things must have use before they can be exchanged. Plus, it is only in a commodity's unique, specific, and physical character that it can be exchanged for another use-value of a different unique, specific, and physical character. It does not make sense for two things of equal quantity and quality to be exchanged.

Exchange-value, in contrast, does not flow directly from the object itself like use-value. One cannot dissect a potato and find exchange-value in it. This value-form, according to Marx, appears to express a quantitative relation between things which

eventually become bearers of exchange-value determined by capitalist social relations.

Exchange-value is the proportion in which use-values are exchanged for one another

(1970, 28). So, irrespective of their use-values, a car may be equal in exchange-value to

that of thirty-five thousand donuts. In more formal terms, x Commodity y is worth y

Commodity b: "Quite irrespective, therefore, of their natural form of existence, and

without regard to the specific character of the needs they satisfy as use-values,

commodities, in definite quantities are congruent, they take one another's place in the

exchange-process, are regarded as equivalents, and ... have a common denominator

(1970, 28)." But the question is this: If a use-value embodies a unique property which is

consumed because of its specific characteristics, how is it possible for two unique use-

values to be rendered exchangeable, a process implying congruency between disparate

things? Marx explains:

> It follows from this, firstly, that the valid exchange-values of a particular
> commodity express something equal, and secondly, exchange-value cannot be
> anything other than the mode of expression, the form of appearance of a content
> distinguishable from it .... [Exchange-value] signifies that a common element of
> identical magnitude exists in two different things .... Both are therefore equal to a
> third thing, which in itself is neither the one nor the other .... human labor in the
> abstract (1977, 1:127–128).

Labour in the abstract is the common element found in all commodities. It is what links

use- and exchange-value into one dialectical unity and renders all things exchangeable.

Therefore, labour creates value and value expresses that labour. Labour in the abstract

refers not to the specific, qualitative aspects of producing a use-value, e.g., the skill of a

craftsperson in creating a woodcarving, his or her technique, and the tools used. Rather,

what is abstract is the average quantity of labour time congealed in that woodcarving,

irrespective of how that labour is performed. Abstract labour flows from the fact that all

labour is an expenditure of human labour-power (1977, 1:137). Among other things, it is

on the basis of the quantity of abstract human labour, or what Marx calls socially

necessary labour time (1977, 1:129), that the capitalist mode of production relies upon.

So, a commodity embodies not only useful, concrete labour (creating use-value),

but also abstract labour time common to all other commodities (creating exchange-value).

Marx writes: "Whereas labour positing exchange-value is *abstract universal* and *uniform*

labour, labour positing use-value is concrete and distinctive labour, comprising infinitely

varying kinds of labour as regards its form and the material to which it is applied" (1970,

36; emphasis original). This dual character of the object is what differentiates a

commodity from a useful thing. Things come into being as a result of labour which

produces a use-value, but these things only become commodities (the expression of a

social relation of production) when they are produced for others and are rendered

exchangeable. But in what way does this relate to an information commodity, and, in

particular, social media user-generated content?

An information commodity behaves and takes on the appearance of the

commodity-form. It embodies a use-value, an exchange-value, and is the result of human

labour-power. However, relative to the physical discreteness of a material commodity

like a bottle of wine or a loaf of bread, information commodities have unusual

characteristics which do not fall so neatly within Marx's schema. Daniel Solove explains

the curious nature of information commoditization in the context of intellectual property:

> Information can be easily transmitted and, once known by others, cannot be
> eradicated from their minds. Unlike physical objects, information can be
> possessed simultaneously within the minds of millions .... There are problems
> with viewing personal information as equivalent to any other commodity.
> Personal information is often formed in a relationship with others. All parties to
> that relationship have some claim to the information .... Often, the market value of

information is not created exclusively by the labor of the individual to whom it relates but in part by the third party that compiles the information. (2008, 27)

Here, Solove rightly emphasizes the non-scarcity of information commodities and their social character as products of collective social labour. Non-scarcity problematizes the notion of ownership, thus leading the law to distinguish between an idea and its formal expression, the latter capable of being possessed and controlled by an individual, the former less so. Solove's analysis also implies that information commodities cannot be consumed in the traditional sense; that there is a persistent quality to them: one consumes a potato once, a book many times. Information commodities can be used repeatedly without losing their use-value. But these factors does not change the fact that information commodities behave just like physical, tangible commodities, i.e., they are packaged and circulate like discrete objects (Bansal et al. 2011; Valeski et al. 2011b). Despite this, however, ownership is still a necessary condition of exchange: " For a thing to be sold, it simply has to be capable of being monopolized and alienated" (Marx 1991, 3:772). So, in what ways is the commodity-form imposed on the fluidic, ephemeral, and persistent information commodity?

Adair develops what he calls an ideal-type of information commodities on the basis of five ontological propositions (2010, 248–252). Two of these propositions provide a clarifying perspective on how information commodities might come to be owned: (1) The value of information commodities is depleted through obsolescence; and (2) information commodities retain an exchange-value through a political process that creates scarcity and exclusivity (2010, 248, 250). Adair elaborates that information commodities have a short shelf-life and that high-priority is placed on newness and currency (2010, 248). Old information is simply not useful in light of new information, the latter

maintaining the unique and specific quality of the commodity (i.e., its use-value).

Solove's analysis, then, can best be summed up as a synchronic, rather than a diachronic,

analysis of the information commodity. He does not consider the temporal element –

crucially dependent on an ongoing labour process – of an information commodity's

value. Terranova observes that the Internet is about the extraction of value out of

continuous, *updateable* work, and it is extremely labor intensive" (2000, 48; emphasis

added). By updateable work, she means such activities as chatroom typing, website

construction, programming, newsletters, and real-life stories (2000, 38).

Moreover, the notion of artificial scarcity is essential to maintaining capitalist

social relations, and this process, argues Adair, is a political one achieved through the

imposition of intellectual property rights, Digital Rights Management software, nurturing

a discourse of criminality *vis-à-vis* piracy and peer-to-peer sharing, emphasis on

innovation as guarantor of newness and exclusivity, branding and advertising, and

celebrity endorsements (2010, 250–251). All of these strategies work toward the

contradictory movement from maintaining property rights over public goods, (hence

controlling the speed at which commodities circulate) to concomitantly allowing for such

circulation to proceed in a productive manner, which realizes their value through the acts

of purchase and consumption.

What becomes immediately evident is that Facebook and Twitter's terms of use

and privacy policies, in conjunction with contract law, is a directly observable form of

this political process, which creates artificial scarcity on the information commodities

themselves and that act as mechanisms that impose the commodity-form on social

networkers' activity. By agreeing to the terms of use, social networkers also agree to the

commodification of their user-generated content and become implicated within a capitalist strategy of accumulation as they register with these sites.

So, even despite the idiosyncrasies inherent in an information commodity, they still very much behave like any other commodity in physical form, be it gold, hay, corn, or DVDs: they are bearers of use-value and exchange-value as well as being products of human labour; however, they are not consumed, but rendered obsolescent. Even in this difference however, the result is the same: a tendency towards replenishment, be it in the form of consuming a physical quantity of something or gaining access to updated information on latest consumer trends.

In much the same way that Marx identified a dialectical split in the commodity-form (use/exchange, concrete/abstract, and quality/quantity), so too do user-generated data *cum* information commodities display a similar split. Turning to the question of user-generated content, it was earlier defined as "content that is voluntarily developed by an individual or a consortium and distributed through online platforms" (Trosow et al. 2010, 10). The use of the term *content* is often interchangeable with the term *data*; but, they do refer to two different aspects of what is effectively the same thing. In the same way that Marx's mode of expression in *Capital* volume one oscillates between the concrete and the abstract (D. Harvey 2010, 109), and much like the dialectical tension found within the commodity-form produced by use- and exchange-value, the latter existing alongside concrete and abstract labour, respectively, content refers to the specific, qualitative aspect of a particular information object. The content of something implies an idiosyncratic quality of a given piece of information as well as the actual time taken to produce it. When we read a book, we read more than simple data on a page. We read a story, an

article by journalist x, an argument by author y, etc. However, even in a thing's content data are present and *vice versa*; these elements are inseparable from one another, in the same way that one cannot separate use-value and exchange-value under the capitalist mode of production. This dialectical relationship between data and content is best understood as one of abstract and concrete respectively: Data are the abstraction of content, content the concrete instance of data.

In the case of online social networking, content refers to the particular, unique, and qualitative elements of one's profile made possible by the concrete labour of the individual. The content of a social media profile is a direct expression of a personality, or more generally, a living entity. It is that part of the social media information commodity which represents "some specific useful and concrete labour" (Marx 1977, 1:150). This is the primary reason why profiles are constructed. It is a useful, highly personal endeavour that enables a particular form of communication; they are not created to simply produce data. The use-value of a social media profile, and the service itself, is the *raison d'être* of the entire online social networking edifice. Often is the case with such lines of inquiry as Internet privacy, the formation of "networked publics" (boyd 2007; boyd and Ellison 2008), and uses and gratifications research (Katz, Haas, and Gurevitch 1973; LaRose 2010; Papacharissi and Rubin 2000; Rubin 1984; Ruggiero 2000) that the usefulness of social networking services are analyzed without adequate regard to understanding them as taking on a logic of commodification and exchangeability. That the contradictory nature of use- and exchange-value – i.e., usefulness, as a specific quality, cannot be exchanged without reduction to the abstract common element of labour – reveals that

what is actually commodified and rendered exchangeable are user-generated *data*, not necessarily content (Andrejevic 2009b, 418).

Residing within user-generated content is user-generated data. The latter, though referring to the same object, comprises the "uniform, homogeneous, simple labour" (Marx 1970, 29) of the information commodity; or, the common form of labour across all social media information commodities. It is the substance that is common to all information commodities. Such data could be considered the result of the combination of labour-power (the social networker) and the means of production (among other elements, the algorithms deployed to mine aggregate data based on network connections, network nodes (i.e., a group of user profiles), and the links between them (Tang and Liu 2010)). These data can be, for example, the aggregate elements of each profile on a particular social network site, but stripped of their qualitative idiosyncrasies.

For instance, in 2011, a two-hundred megabyte zip file containing supposedly anonymous Facebook user data was released by Oxford University researchers to the general public (Zimmer 2011; Porter 2012). This file is perhaps exemplary of the social media information commodity, insofar as it appears as data rather than as content. In a follow-up blog post to his analysis, Zimmer reported the following:

> The data files are separated by institution, and in total include, by my estimation, about 1.2 million user accounts. The content of each institution's file is described as containing the following:
>
> > Each of the school .mat files has an A matrix (sparse) and a "local_info" variable, one row per node: ID, a student/faculty status flag, gender, major, second major/minor (if applicable), dorm/house, year, and high school.
>
> Thus, the datasets include limited demographic information that was posted by users on their individual Facebook pages. The identity of users' dorm and high schools were obscured by numerical identifiers, but to my surprise, *the dataset*

> *included each user's unique Facebook ID number.* As a result, while user names
> and extended profile information were kept out of the data release, a simple query
> against Facebook's databases would yield considerable identifiable information
> for each record. In short, the suggestion that the data has been "anonymized" is
> seriously flawed. (2011, emphasis original)

This is one example, among others, illustrating the dual-nature of the social media

information commodity. Although stemming from the same source, there is both a

qualitative and quantitative aspect to these commodities, made possible by the work of

users and computer software engineers to create, mine, and package that data. As was

discussed above, there is evidence to suggest that as the data granularity increases within

each of these particular commodities, so too does the price (Bansal et al. 2011). The

larger the dataset, the more value contained within it because data granularity depends on

the sum of users, the detail of their profiles, the time spent networking (adding, updating,

deleting information, etc.), and the diversity of the data contained within each

commodity. It follows then if more value is contained within a given information

commodity, then its price will also be greater, which seems to be the case.

What has been assumed up till now is that capitalist logic has somehow seeped

into elements of life beyond its traditional workplaces such as the factory and farm. That

the very "mode of development" (Castells 2007) of capital has exacerbated an outward

expansion of its logic points to the dynamism of its ability to adapt in order to

accumulate. Marx himself writes that

> capital is not a fixed magnitude, but a part of social wealth which is elastic, and
> constantly fluctuates with the division of surplus-value into revenue and
> additional capital. It has been seen further that, even with a given magnitude of
> functioning capital, the labour-power, science and land ... incorporated in it form
> elastic powers of capital, allowing it, within certain limits, a field of action
> independent of its own magnitude. (1977, 1:758)

It is clear that a major theme running through Marx's work is an emphasis on the flexibility and dynamism of capital. Unlike the view of classical political economy, Marx did not see capital as a rigid monster; indeed, capital has and often deploys innumerable strategies of accumulation and organization (D. Harvey 2010, 262). In what way did Marx see capital develop over time? To answer this question is to begin addressing the ways in which capitalist logic has permeated areas of society which appear as the least likely locations of value creation, production, and valorization. Focusing in on the outward expansion of capital necessarily challenges many of the orthodox understandings of what constitutes labour, leisure, class, and other political economic categories. Perhaps the most fruitful direction in which to turn is the work of some in the Italian autonomist thread of Marxist inquiry, whose analysis of the social-factory (Tronti 1970) is predicated on Marx's understanding of how capital subsumes labour into its fold.

4.1.2. Formal and Real Subsumption

Marx's analysis on formal and real subsumption appear mainly in an appendix in volume one of *Capital.* There, Marx analyses the way in which capital uses labour in two forms: in its early form, formal subsumption, and in its more advanced form, real subsumption. Each of these forms of capitalist production is tied to his discussion on absolute and relative surplus-value, two ways in which surplus value is extracted from workers. Marx views the labour process as a moment of capitalist production. It is an instrument of capital that valorizes the entire process of production. The labour process under formal subsumption, Marx writes, is subsumed under capital and the capitalist intervenes in the process as director, manager (1977, 1:1019). Here, capital finds labour as the latter presents itself. It is clear that what Marx is describing here is the predominant

geography of capitalist relations in society, i.e., those directly observable sites of production like factories, farms, mines, offices, etc. These sites are distinct from non-capitalist spaces such as the home and elsewhere. This early form of capitalist subsumption merely takes over an existing form of labour such as handicraft and brings it into the fold of, for example, factory production. Formal subsumption, Marx writes, is a method to establish a period of working time, i.e., the work day (1977, 1:1021), and, as such, is concerned with the extraction of absolute surplus-value, a form of surplus-value generated within a set period of time. These sites are the general form of every capitalist process of production (1977, 1:1019), but they are by no means the only sites.

Marx goes on to identify what he calls the "specifically capitalist mode of production," real subsumption (1977, 1:1021). In this advanced form, "a complete (and constantly repeated) revolution takes place in the mode of production, in the productivity of the workers and in the relations between workers and capitalists" (Marx 1977, 1:1035). He goes on to say that the tendency for capital to move from formal to real subsumption, even though they may coexist side-by-side, is a result of capital increasing the value of its operations to the point where it assumes social dimensions, and so sheds its *individual* character entirely (1977, 1:1035; emphasis original). Capital must extend itself beyond its general form in order to accumulate (*cf.* Circuit of Capital). This passage is of crucial importance, because Marx maps the cartography of a process that is still happening today, and, in part, exacerbated by the development of micro-processing, information-communication technologies, and globalization: "Marx's account of the arrival of [real subsumption raises] important questions as to the relationship between class struggle, development, and forms of exploitation" (Wright 2002, 37).

This movement from formal to real subsumption of the labour process, and the technological development determining such a shift, is a theme picked up and extended by Mario Tronti in his essay "La Fabbrica e la Società" [*The Factory and Society*] (1970). Tronti extends Marx's account of the specifically capitalist mode of production to suggest that all of society becomes a moment of production:

> The more capitalist development advances, that is to say the more the production or relative surplus-value penetrates everywhere, the more the circuit production—distribution—exchange—consumption inevitably develops, ... [t]he relationship between capitalist production and bourgeois society, between the factory and the society, between society and the state, become more and more organic. *At the highest level of capitalist development social relations become moments of the relations of production*, and the whole society becomes an articulation of production (Tronti 1970, 19–20; Cleaver 1992, 137; emphasis added).

Online social networking on Facebook and Twitter is precisely a moment of this articulation between production and sociality. It is a process determined by the constantly revolutionary character of real subsumption, or that tendency in capital to find new, alternative ways to extract value from workers. It is a contradictory moment found in the space between leisure time and work time, the former taking place increasingly in online environments. Activity often assumed to be unproductive has been rendered productive, in the sense that users are implicated in creating value for the social network provider. The link Tronti identifies between the factory, society, and the State is readily observable in online social network infrastructures. The terms of use and privacy policies are the legal mechanisms by which not only the circulation of capital is sustained, through the codification of network provider rights which impose an artificial scarcity on social media data, but documents which turn a relation of sociality into social relations of production enforced by contract law.

As Wright observes, Tronti's essay was to "delineate the enormous changes that the generalisation of relative surplus-value in the form of social capital had wrought within capitalist society" (2002, 36). Relative surplus-value, recall, is that form of surplus value which results after a reduction of the necessary labour-time needed to meet the needs of a worker takes place (Marx 1977, 1:432) Surplus labour time, then, is that period of the work day where the worker, having already reproduced him or herself as well as realizing the production costs of creating goods, works for free for the capitalist. Rather than extending absolute surplus-value through the extension of the working day (hence, increasing *both* necessary and surplus labour-time), reducing only necessary labour-time in order to increase surplus labour over the same period of time results in a clever albeit intensified alternative by which surplus-value is squeezed out of workers. Marx writes,

> But when surplus-value has to be produced by the conversion of necessary labour into surplus labour, it by no means suffices for capital to take over the labour process in its given ... shape, and then simply to prolong its duration. The technical and social conditions of the process ... [of production] itself must be revolutionized before the productivity of labour can be increased. Then .... the value of labour-power will fall, and the portion of the working day necessary for the reproduction of that value will be shortened. (1977, 1:432)

If the current historical period is characterized as a moment in the development of the social factory, how does this generalization of relative surplus-value present itself in the context of online social networks? If relative surplus-value is that part of the working period where the worker performs labour not for him or herself, but for the capitalist, then this would suggest that they, working within these society-factories, work for free, i.e., they perform pure surplus-labour and, therefore, create "pure surplus-value" (Terranova 2000). But how is this possible? Does not the working day possess a dual nature, that of

necessary labour-time and surplus labour-time? Can necessary- and surplus-labour be

divorced from one another?

In a rather interesting passage in the third volume of *Capital*, Marx's discussion

of agricultural rent *vis-à-vis* the relation between capitalist, worker, and landlord, alludes

to a different understanding of the relationship between necessary- and surplus-labour,

> We have already shown, just as the labour of the individual worker breaks down
> into necessary and surplus labour, so the total of labour of the working class can
> be divided in such a way that the part that produces the entire means of
> subsistence needed by the working class (including the means of production these
> require) [farming] performs the necessary labour for the entire society. The labour
> performed by the whole remaining part of the working class can be considered
> surplus labour .... Some, moreover, perform only necessary labour, from a social
> point of view, because others only perform surplus labour, and vice versa. This is
> simply the division of labour between them. (Marx 1991, 3:771)

Marx goes beyond the specific, molar instance of the individual's objective conditions of

work in the production process and generalizes this relation between necessary- and

surplus-labour to entire segments of society, where one segment performs free labour,

and others necessary labour. Here, Marx is predominantly analyzing the relationship

between established agriculture production processes and the nascent industrial

production processes of industrial capitalism; but, could one not extend this

understanding to online social networking, as a sector of the social factory that produces

surplus-value relative to other sectors of society that perform necessary labour, i.e.,

primary, secondary, and tertiary industries? If we frame our understanding of social

networking activity in terms of the totality of all human activity, a particular task carried

out *in relation to all other tasks* under a particular economic system, then we may come

closer to the idea that certain kinds of labour are for society more necessary (biologically

speaking) than others.

Marx understands the relationship between necessary-labour and surplus-labour in this way, as a scalable phenomenon that exists not only at the micro-level of society, but at the macro-level of society as well, not only within the work process, but across sectors of the economic sphere. This would seem to make sense. Clearly, the work of social networkers in no way contributes *directly* to their reproduction in the same way that earning a wage does. One simply cannot live or subside on electronic communication of this kind, because there is no wage paid in order to earn their means of subsistence; nevertheless, such activity does take on the characteristics of labour under capitalist relations of production: surplus-value is realized in the commodification of user-generated data made possible by the time users spend constructing their profiles as they communicate with others. If we understand one's position within the totality of social relations, that is, if we consider online social networking in conjunction with a user's employment, then it would make sense to understand the former as the surplus-value producing element, and the latter as their necessary labour element, which together determines their overall productivity as a worker under capitalist relations of production. Just as autonomist thinkers sought to expand and loosen some of the more restrictive definitions used in orthodox Marxist paradigms, such as class, work, and exploitation, so too must we consider here the extension of the working day to include the activity of online social networking.

4.2. Marx's Theory of Rent

Marx's theory of rent shows how capitalist accumulation proceeds in the presence of landowners capable of capturing some of the surplus-value squeezed out of workers (Choonara 2009, 147). The analysis of rent presupposes, then, not two but three classes within the capitalist mode of production: wage-labourer, capitalist, and landowner (Marx 1991, 3:756). In the context of agriculture, Marx understands the relationship between wage-labourers, landowners, and capitalists in the following manner: "the actual cultivators are wage-labourers, employed by a capitalist, the farmer .... this farmer-capitalist pays the landowner, the proprietor of the land he exploits, a contractually fixed-sum of money ... for the permission to employ his capital" (1991, 3:755). Rent, then, is revenue flowing from the capitalist to the landowner so that the former can employ labourers on the land of the latter.

Rent is simply a payment made to landlords for the right to use land and its appurtenances (D. Harvey 2006, 330). This is what Marx calls ground-rent (1991, 3:755). The extraction of rents is made possible by private property, i.e., the expropriation of workers from the conditions of labour, which allows owners of that property "to enjoy the monopoly of disposing of particular portions of the globe as exclusive spheres of their private will to the exclusion of all others" (Marx 1991, 3:752). Private property guarantees ownership, and ownership allows for monopolizing land, which is the precondition for the capitalist production process.

Rents exist as deductions from either wages paid to workers or the profits appropriated by capitalists on rented land (i.e., the total surplus-value), and are partially determined by the degree to which it can facilitate production, i.e., fertility. This is to say that rather than the entirety of the surplus-value generated from production flowing back

to the capitalist, a portion of that surplus-value goes to the landlord, thus economically realizing the latter's land monopoly. So, landlords have nothing to do with the actual production process (Marx 1991, 3:960); rather, their role is to redirect into their own coffers some of the surplus-value generated by labourers who use a capital's means of production. Landowners thus impinge on capitalist profit and can do so given their monopoly. The realization of rent payments is a redistribution of the total surplus-value.

In a chapter on the sources of revenue in capitalist society, Marx distinguishes between three types: wages, which are attached to labour; rent, which is attached to land; and profit, which is attached to capital (1991, 3:953). He does so to illustrate that these sources of wealth "belong to completely disparate spheres and have not the slightest analogy with one another" (1991, 3:953). Specifically, rent is related to distribution (the divvying up of surplus-value) and profit is related to production (the realization of surplus-value into money-form). Marx writes,

> If we speak therefore of profit as the share of surplus-value accruing to capital, what we mean is an average profit ... that is already less than the total profit by the deduction of rent; the deduction of rent is presupposed. Capital-profit ... and ground-rent are thus nothing but particular components of the surplus-value; categories in which this surplus-value is distinguished according to whether it accrues to capital or landed property. (Marx 1991, 3:959)

What this implies is that rent has to do with a capitalist's *access* to land, the precondition for production. Rent in no way relates to production as such because "landed property has nothing to do with the actual production process" (Marx 1991, 3:960).

When we consider the relationship between social media provider and social media user, it is clear that the relationship is one of capitalist and labourer, respectively. As has been shown, the user engages with the website, registers, and creates data, which is then mined, packaged, and ultimately sold as information commodities. What

Facebook and Twitter are are the means of production within a circuit of capital. They provide the constant capital that social media users confront, as variable capital, in order to produce information commodities. In this sense, sites like Facebook and Twitter cannot function as landlords because they are directly involved in the production process: they create the interface, the programming, the program updates, and the policies governing the use of their service and the distribution of data produced by users. Further, the realization of value into the money-form must necessarily be profit, not rent.

When considering the relationship between third-parties and social media providers, the relationship appears to be one of rent. The prospective advertiser, desiring access to Facebook and Twitter's database (i.e., their land), must pay a sort of ground-rent for access to these data: "Facebook charges $5 per thousand views for these [engagement] ads" (D. Kirkpatrick 2010, 261). So, it would seem that social media providers like Facebook and Twitter play a dual role of capitalist-landowner, roles which, according to Marx, have nothing to do with one another. But this view is problematic. If one is to understand Facebook and Twitter as landlords, one necessarily admits to their secondary and distant role in the production process. If one is to understand their role as capitalists, then the revenue generated by the production process cannot be rent, only profit. If rent is to be found anywhere within the totality of social relations discussed herein, it would make more sense to locate a relation of rent between Internet service providers, who supply access to the physical infrastructure of the Internet, and social media providers. This would suggest that rent is realized outside the relationship between social media provider and social media user, the latter understood as a relation of production, means of production and labour-power, respectively.

The problem with understanding online social media providers like Facebook and Twitter as landlords, who claim a monopoly over digital property, is that it marginalizes their active role as managers in the production of social media information resources. Further, asserting such a relationship also tends to glaze over the central role played by social media users as productive labourers, *the* source of value in these environments. By insisting that online social networks are actually monopolized lands is to confuse land fertility (its natural use-value) with value. This is, at best, an error already produced centuries ago by the physiocrats (Marx 2000). An example of this confusion takes place in the work of Pasquinelli.

Pasquinelli understands Google (another form of interactive media like social networking) as a "global rentier of the common intellect" (2009, 1), i.e., a landlord who claims monopoly over a particular online space and who extracts a rent for access to data. He writes, "Google is not simply an apparatus of dataveillance from above but an apparatus of value production from below" and that "value is determined by the number and quality of incoming links" (2009, 2). What Pasquinelli fails to address is Marx's insistence that human labour is the only source of value: "Value is labour. So surplus-value cannot be earth. The land's absolute fertility does nothing but let a certain quantum of labour give a certain product, conditioned by the natural fertility of land" (1991, 3:954). Elsewhere, Marx writes, "the earth is not a product of labour, and thus does not have a value" (1991, 3:760). But this is not what Pasquinelli suggests; he asserts that value is derived from the Google PageRank algorithm, the latter being, in a metaphorical sense, a quality within land that Google has monopolized. Part of the land (the algorithm) is not value; the labour of users who produce data on which that algorithm relies to

properly function is the source of value (not to mention the labour congealed in that algorithm expressed as code by Google's programmers). Elsewhere, Arvidsson commits the same error when he asserts that "these forms of productive sociality [social media data produced by users in online environments] can be used as a kind of *natural resource* for brand managers" (2005, 248, emphasis added).

What proponents of the rentier argument have in common is that they confuse means of production with labour-power, labour-power with means of production. In so doing, they reify the actual production process necessary for the realization of profit in these environments. By asserting that these sites operate as landlords implies that the more important relationship is between landlord (Facebook and Twitter) and capitalist (third-party advertisers) when, in fact, the fundamental relationship to be considered is between labourer (social networker) and capitalist (social network provider). The former position abstracts away from those actually generating the value in these environments. Populating a database is not a naturally occurring phenomenon separate from a labour process as in the evolution of carbon into diamonds. To frame it inversely, without the ongoing labour process of social network users, the algorithms used as means of production would have no data to mine, and, therefore, value could not be realized as profit. The general intellect must be produced; it is not a naturally given, *a priori* phenomenon. The necessary condition of value creation in online social networks stems from users' time spent creating data. So, how is this relationship formalized into and expressed within the circuit of capital?

4.3. The Expanded Form of Variable Capital Model

If we are to understand the role of social networking as an extension of the working day, then we must demonstrate, using Marx's circuit of capital, how this can be expressed more formally. Fuchs provides a convincing schema that expresses exactly this understanding of online social networkers (Fuchs 2011a). Earlier there was allusion to the idea that social networkers are implicated in the production process at point (LP), or labour-power. How is this possible? Are not waged employees of Facebook and Twitter understood to be LP? Yes, but they are not the only source of labour-power.

Returning to the circuit of accumulation, Marx understands labour-power (LP) and means of production (MP) as variable and constant capital, respectively (1977, 1:317). Variable capital is labour-power transformed into a factor of production. Variable capital oscillates between constant and variable magnitudes because of its peculiar quality of reproducing its own value while at the same time exceeding it; however, the rate at which a worker is productive varies for a variety of reasons. Despite this, however, variable capital will constantly generate surplus-value, but that value will fluctuate over time. Waged-labour is variable capital, and since the wage is socially determined in that it varies according market conditions, it is not fixed. Constant capital is all the machinery, raw material, and "dead labour" (Marx 1977, 1:322) used in production, which does not add value to a product but merely transfers its use-value into the commodity produced. This is why labour creates value – it is the only commodity that can replenish itself and generate more value than it needs for its own survival. Constant capital becomes capital when it is drawn into the production process as machinery. Hence, variable capital is labour-power, and constant capital the means of production. Together, they constitute the subjective and objective factors of production (1977, 1:317).

By arguing that online social networkers are a source of labour-power, we are assuming that they also function as additional variable capital, and, as such, enter the sphere of production. Fuchs, in more formal terms, expands the general circuit of capital to include an additional node of variable capital (i.e., living labour) in the overall circuit, representing users' free labour given over to Web 2.0 platforms (2011a, 298). Therefore, we move from,

$$M - C \left\langle \begin{array}{c} LP\ (v) \\ MP\ (c) \end{array} \right\rangle ... P ... C' - (M + \Delta M)$$

to

$$M - C \left\langle \begin{array}{c} LP\ (v_1 + v_2) \\ MP\ (c) \end{array} \right\rangle ... P ... C' - (M + \Delta M)$$

where $v1$ = wages paid to employees of, say, Facebook and Twitter, $v2$ = wages paid to users, c = constant capital, and v = variable capital. What Fuchs establishes here is a formal expression of an expanded form of variable capital to include users of social media. This schema not only positions the social media user as immanent to the production process, but it also re-politicizes the terrain of social networking and prosumption media in general, as it demonstrates how capital relies on a massive pool of labour-power, a portion of which do not receive a wage beyond that of the "immaterial return" (Terranova 2010, 156) – here expressed as 0 – of using sites like Facebook and Twitter, while the latter are paid quite handsomely as a result of that labour. The providers of Facebook and Twitter, therefore, keep the costs of production quite low. The curious quality of $v2$ is that the wage is effectively zero, or $v2 = 0$. The typical situation is that $v2$ substitutes for $v1$: "If the production of content and the time spent online were

carried out by paid employees, the variable costs would rise and the profits would therefore decrease" (Fuchs 2011a, 298). So, it is not that there is no wage, but that the wage is effectively zero, representing more of an affective, fleeting, and ephemeral return than actual material compensation. The positing of a zero-wage does not in any way change the fact that online social network users are being productive.

It is this expanded form of variable capital that best describes the relationship between social network user and social network provider. It preserves the relationship between capitalist and the labour capacity necessary in creating value, and, therefore, surplus-value. But to what ends does demonstrating this relationship work? The expansion of Marx's circuit of capital accumulation illustrates how users are effectively working when they think they are not. Many still take "solace in the belief that their information is fairly unimportant or not valuable, and [that they] expected no one to be using it or wanting it" (Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada 2009). To identify the extension of the working day is the first step towards resisting it.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS THE REDUCTION OF THE WORKING DAY

> The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it
>
> -Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*

This study has focused extensively on the political economy of the online social network industry with specific reference to Facebook and Twitter. It has forwarded an argument meant to illustrate how social media users can and are directly implicated in a capitalist circuit of accumulation. It has also identified the mechanisms through which social media users are transformed into social net-workers. The terms of use and privacy policies of Facebook and Twitter, as exemplars of online social networking, not only function as (problematic) treatises on the protection of one's online privacy, but together they function as a new species of work contract, rendering the activity of their users productive, and, ultimately, exchangeable due to the subsequent commodification of their data.

When thinking about the relationship between social media user and social media provider, it is not a case of merely understanding the economic implications of this relationship. This is to say that understanding the economic consequences of prosumption media is merely a means to understanding the political consequences of this relationship, lest one falls into the same mode of reification as that of economic science, which cannot, or will not, account for the systemic inequalities of class relations brought on by the capitalist mode of production. If, as Mosco points out, political economy is focused on human wellbeing and their needs, one must admit with equal force that an explanation of the economic is but a process of working towards a greater political proposal, one which leads to not only a new mode of production, but also to a new and more direct mode of sociality without the imposition and mediation of the commodity-form along

communicational lines. Just as Marx and his successors sought to unravel the dialectical relationship between capital and labour, so too should one also unravel the same relationship between political economy. Insofar as this study has concerned itself with the economic aspects of social media, this section leaves the reader with thoughts on the political tactics required to address the problems inherent in online social networking, insofar as Facebook, Twitter, and any other commodity-producing social network site is concerned.

Harry Cleaver has forwarded the view that the work of Marx is, above all, a political tool meant to be "a weapon in the hands of the working class" (1979, 23). For inasmuch as Marx sought to discover the general laws of capitalist accumulation and to move beyond the fetishism of the system to its very essence, so too did he seek in his work tactics to change that which he discovered in the English factories of the nineteenth century. What are some of the ways one can begin thinking about tactics of resistance against the valorization of social network activity? This study concludes with a radical proposal in an effort to negate and resist what has been identified as the extension of the working day within the twenty-first century social factory.

5.1. Current Policy Recommendations

There have been several policy recommendations related to circumventing prosumption work in online social networks. It has been suggested that a way to strengthen the privacy rights of Internet users, and, in turn, weaken the economic imperative to commodify user-generated data, is to call for prosumption websites to move from an opt-out to an opt-in framework regarding the sharing and distribution of user-generated data, primarily meant to circumvent this particular form of soft-extortion. The

idea is that the default option of opting-in to sharing personal information will

"strengthen user's collective possibility for self-determination" (Fuchs 2011b, 160). This

idea is supported by privacy advocates who believe that giving users additional control

over their data will aid in balancing the asymmetries between user and provider data

flows and, at the same time, curtailing the revenues drawn from them. The problem with

this measure is that it is not necessarily a solution to the electronic surveillance inherent

in online social networks (Fuchs 2011a, 307) because those who choose to opt-in will

simply reproduce the commodification process rather than eliminating it. The

individualist approach to ameliorating the asymmetries of this social relation is quite

limited as some may presumably have no problem with Facebook and Twitter using their

data for profitable gains. Secondly, limiting data to the form of privacy controls does not

necessarily prevent the commodification of user data. Though it may be effective from a

peer-to-peer perspective, it is less so from a peer-to-provider one. This is especially the

case if the terms of use and privacy policy legally (en)force users to give their

information over to these websites as part of the registration process and as a condition of

usage. So, if such a change for default opt-in was to occur, there must be a concomitant

change in the role that privacy policies and terms of use documents play in these

environments; namely, documents that actually protect a user's privacy and strictly limit

the way in which website owners monetize user data.

Another solution has come in the form of alternative, non-profit, and non-

commercial social networks such as Diaspora (Diaspora* 2010). Diaspora, the "privacy

aware, personally controlled, and open source social network" (Daniel, Maxwell, and IIya

2011) is currently in development as an alternative to for-profit social networking

platforms, which do not normally allow users to retain control of their data. Diaspora is

described as follows:

> Diaspora aims to be a distributed network, where totally separate computers
> connect to each other directly, [and] will let us connect without surrendering our
> privacy. We call these computers 'seeds'. A seed is owned by you, hosted by you,
> or on a rented server. Once it has been set up, the seed will aggregate all of your
> information ...We are designing an easily extendable plug-in framework for
> Diaspora, so that whenever newfangled content gets invented, it will be
> automagically integrated into every seed .... Decentralizing lets us reconstruct our
> "social graphs" so that they belong to us. Our real social lives do not have central
> managers, and our virtual lives do not need them. (Diaspora* 2010)

Its website also is akin to that of a manifesto, a rallying point around which you can "take

back your network," to "maintain ownership of everything you share," and to give "you

full control over how [your information is] distributed" (Diaspora* 2011). A brief look at

the interface and into the privacy policies of the distributed Diaspora seeds (hosts) will

reveal greater transparency in terms of what data are collected, for what purpose, and by

whom; a greater concern for the user in terms of information visibility; and a platform

that allows users to exercise stronger privacy controls. Although a start, transparency is

only the first step toward protecting users from organizational commodification.

What is perhaps most interesting about Diaspora is that it operates as a distributed

network rather than as a centralized server-client network like that of Facebook or

Twitter. This architecture is a progressive step forward in thinking about how to curtail

the privacy abuses commonly associated with centralized networks like Facebook:

> A completely centralized social network is a network made up of individuals and
> a supernode. Individuals do not form relationships with each other. Rather, each
> individual forms a relationship with the supernode. The supernode may then
> register quasiconnections between pairs of nodes with which it has relationships,
> and may inform the nodes of these quasiconnections, allowing the nodes to form
> quasirelationships among themselves. But, ultimately, traces in centralized
> systems always pass through the supernode. (Lucas 2008, 8–9)

Even though users may experience user-to-user connections in Facebook and Twitter, these connections are always mediated by the owners of the site. In centralized networks all information must pass through the system or supernode before connections to peers are made. Lucas has noted that since centralized client-server systems aggregate information at a centralized point, it creates the opportunity for violations of privacy even if the privacy of the information is protected by law (2008, 1). The virtue of a distributed system is that peer connections are unmediated in the same way as centralized networks that aggregate data in one place, which potentially lead to increased privacy violations of greater magnitude as a result of this aggregation. Secondly, a distributed-network operating on a non-profit model, such as the donations-based Diaspora, effectively nullifies the need to create and sell audience commodities, thus decreasing the privacy concerns associated with sites like Facebook and Twitter whilst negating the imposition of the commodity-form.

Fuchs forwards another recommendation in favour of stronger civil-society organizations that govern online corporate behaviour and their privacy practices (2011b, 160). The problem with this strategy has already been raised in section three. There is a risk of these organizations, like the TRUSTe initiative, to not follow through with privacy complaints and to move away from impartiality. Further, such initiatives do not have any legislative or regulatory power to correct for potential privacy violators, so they can only serve as public awareness initiatives. Though this is by no means problematic, it may take long periods of time before measures can be put in place that work in favour of protecting consumers and social media users, especially if alleged violations move to litigation.

5.2. Social Net-work as Employment in the Informal Economy

In following with the above initiatives, this study proposes a radical policy recommendation in the interests of developing what Fuchs calls a "socialist view of privacy" (2011b), that is, a prosumer-centred tactic that protects users from economic surveillance and exploitation. Seen from the perspective of commodity-negation, and understood as an information-flow control mechanism, privacy is instrumental in challenging corporate and commercial techniques of online surveillance and commodification. But, a sufficiently different view of privacy is what is needed; not one based on the more liberal, individualist interpretations that work more in the interests of capital than consumers. Recognition on a global level of these economically-driven information flows in online environments is an added step towards balancing the asymmetries between Internet users and Internet prosumption websites.

The informal economy can be defined as "jobs that generally lack basic social or legal protections or employment benefits and may be found in the formal sector, informal sector or households" (Diez de Medina 2011, 11). Further, "employees are considered to have informal jobs if their employment relationship is, in law or in practice, not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, social protection or entitlement to certain employment benefits" (Diez de Medina 2011, 11). The informal economy is predominantly observed and measured in order to curtail tax evasion from employers or employees who wish to increase their earnings; but this has a negative effect on a region's development as it limits the amount of government revenue for infrastructural improvement, thus leading to increased taxation in the formal sectors. Beyond the need

for governments to quell tax evasion in order to lower taxation, the informal economy can also be a useful political paradigm in which to situate prosumption work.

The common sense view of online social networking is that is not a form of employment in the same way as formal sector work. There is a zero-wage, no set standard of hours that users must work, no benefits paid to workers, no bosses or supervisors that oversee the work day, and there is no explicit job description or workplace objectives. Yet, the end result of online social network activity produces commodities and generates a profit for the owners of online social networks. Moreover, it has already been argued that users enter into a work relation with these social network sites the moment they register, as evidenced by their terms of use and privacy policies. So even though there is significant disparity between prosumption work and formal sector work, the former do take on the characteristics of work. As such, prosumption work, by virtue of this invisibility, falls completely outside of any social or legal protections afforded by labour laws and other regulatory frameworks that govern employment.

Could prosumption work not be included as informal sector work? If the impetus is to develop alternative methods of sociality and to ultimately negate and resist the imposition of the commodity-form in all areas of social life, then it would seem that recognizing prosumption work as a legitimate form of informal work is one step towards increasing global awareness of the changing nature of work in the face of knowledge-producing industries and the wider information society, with the hope that such awareness will lead to a more equitable social arrangement. Measures taken by organizations such as the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development all attempt to statistically

graph the extent and breadth of informal sector work to understand how it functions

alongside and against other sectors of the global economy. More importantly, the ongoing

project of measuring the informal sector is a means towards exposing situations that may

exacerbate broader social consequences like inequality (Andrews, Caldera Sanchez, and

Johansson 2011, 5). By including prosumption work into the informal economy, one can

begin to address the lack of social and legal protections against economic surveillance

and exploitation. Officially recognizing at the international level areas of social life not

normally associated with the work place but areas that nonetheless take on the

characteristics of exploited work may facilitate support for the other initiatives listed

above. Garnering recognition of prosumption work may raise greater awareness of not

only the changing nature of work in the information economy, but expose the unequal

social relations produced by these online environments.

And awareness is clearly needed. Recent reports suggest that many still take

"solace in the belief that their information is fairly unimportant or not valuable, and [that

they] expected no one to be using it or wanting it" (Office of the Privacy Commissioner

of Canada 2009). Further, when users think about user privacy,

> ... the impression [is] that the privacy settings already in place on Facebook
> provide an adequate level of comfort and control over who can and cannot see
> their personal information. It is worth noting that when discussing the privacy
> concerns relating to social networking sites, the conversation always defaulted to
> being about the information that can be seen by people who visit a user's page –
> *not the information provided to the social networking site for its own use* [italics
> mine]. Some did augment the discussion by mentioning this aspect, but the overall
> view was that providing the "mandatory" information was a reasonable price to
> pay in exchange for using the service free of charge. (Office of the Privacy
> Commissioner of Canada 2009, 14)

Joseph Turow's work on online privacy and consumers' misconceptions about corporate

information-usage practices is clear evidence demonstrating the troubling gap between

actually existing corporate data-handling practices and consumers' knowledge of them (2005). In a nationally-representative sample of fifteen-hundred American consumers, Turow et al. found that 75 percent of respondents thought that if a website had a privacy policy, then that company would not share information with other Web sites or companies (Turow, Hennessy, and Bleakley 2008, 416).

If the project of communication in the twenty-first century is to proceed on fair, accessible, and equitable ground, then prosumption work in its current state must be called into question. The asymmetric social relations between social media user and social media provider is evidence of what Althusser has called the "reproduction of the conditions of production" (2001a, 86), i.e., the sustainment of class relations within communicational (productive) processes through the imposition of the commodity-form. Raymond Williams observed that mass media forms tend to become naturalized as they are used. The same can be said today with new media. This naturalization process mystifies the actually existing social relations within communicational processes. This is exacerbated by the fact that new media networks are often accessed free of charge, and many see this as a reasonable arrangement in exchange for their user information. But the problem is not a matter of equitable exchange; it is a matter of equitable, autonomous, and democratic communication practices, free from private interests and their control over the value produced by users. Recognizing the extension of the working day to include online social networking, as a specific, concrete example of a greater trend in online digital labour, is one step closer towards the creation of a more socialized communications array whereby "the means and systems of the most direct communication [are] under our own direct and general control" (Williams 2010, 69).

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