
A Quest for a New Theory of Labour or a Theory of 'New' Labour?: Immaterial Labour, Value Theory and Future of Work

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Résumé

re: POL ECON OF WORK

Theories of 'creative labour', 'immaterial labour', and 'emotional labour' have advanced since 1980s to study the cultural, informational, social and emotional dimensions of the labor process and how they reflect wider transformations of the society at large. While scholars like Florida celebrate creative labour as the pinnacle of modernization and freedom, Lazzarato, introducing the concept of immaterial labour, explores the role of creativity in capitalist production and describes in its capitalist form corrupted and limited form of creativity as it is contained only for the capitalist production where all social experience is used as a factory for the emergence of new products by creating new 'worlds' (Brouillette, 2009, 143). This form of labour increasingly puts emphasis on cognitive and emotional capacities of workers creates an illusion of freedom that according to some commentators, lead to widespread depression as workers' expectations of freedom and achievement depart from what they are actually able to accomplish within the existing production process (Moore & Robinson, 2016; Fisher, 2009).

My paper argues that a comprehensive analysis of the labour process must incorporate an analysis of emotional, cognitive and immaterial labour in the workplace, particularly the way in which non-labour activities or life-world have become part of the production process. In that sense, I aim to extend Marx's analysis of productive labour as a form of labour that enables valorization for capital. As a result, I will demonstrate the continuity of the exploitative and value-producing nature of the capital/labour relation under post-Fordist mode of capitalism while calling attention to changing demands on workers' ability to integrate their creativity and individuality.

To this end, my paper presents two theoretical propositions. First, it rejects the argument that the value theory is now obsolete to understand contemporary labour process. It argues that capital's invasion of the life-world has always been part of capital's subsumption of labour. While Marx's analysis of capitalist production did not elaborate on the components of capital that was not measured by direct labour time, he was well aware of role of the 'free gifts' of nature, 'the cultural achievements of pre-capitalist societies', 'the development of cognitive and physical capacities outside the workplace', 'the unpaid care-labour of women', 'the scientific-technological knowledge developed in the early modern period' which have always been a source of wealth production under capitalism (Smith, 2013, 243). Second, it observes and theorizes contemporary characteristics of new digital working environments

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characterized by advanced mechanisms of control through task management and performance evaluation software. Contemporary capitalism demands that workers embrace values such as innovation, entrepreneurship, personal development and self-management, and that they use their social and creative capacities to the fullest.

Mots-Clés: future of work, cognitive capitalism, emotional labour, immaterial labour, value theory, future of work