The Prevalence of Self-Exploitation in Media Production: Analyzing the Impact of Technological and Societal Transformations

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Abstract: The development of science and technology and the changes of society have given a new look to traditional conceptual work. The developed network and ubiquitous communication have broken the time and space boundaries of work. Working from home has become a reality. Some people continue to predict that work will become a relaxed enjoyment. But the reality is frustrating. Not only did people not relax, but they also took on increasingly heavy work pressures. The boundaries between work and leisure are eliminated by heavy business, and the office is transformed into a place where people spend the most time. Therefore, work is no longer a pleasure, but self-exploitation behaviour. The unstable and unsafe nature of creative work in the media industry creates stress and anxiety, and the strong emotional pleasure associated with this kind of work exists. The tension between "pleasure" and "pain" in creative occupations has been fully proven. Unstable labour has now become a key feature of creative work. Creative occupations are driven by self-fulfilling desires and are places for exploitation and serious insecurity.

Keywords: self-exploitation, creative occupations, media industries, recreational labour, new media

1. Introduction

The media industries are dynamic and changing, Media industries are increasingly important sources of wealth and employment in many economies. The development of science and technology and the changes of society have given a new look to traditional conceptual work. The developed network and ubiquitous communication have broken the time and space boundaries of work. Working from home has become a reality. Some people continue to predict that work will become a relaxed enjoyment. But the reality is frustrating. Not only did people not relax, but they also took on increasingly heavy work pressures. The boundaries between work and leisure are eliminated by heavy business, and the office is transformed into a place where people spend the most time. Therefore, work is no longer a pleasure, but self-exploitation behaviour [1]. It is necessary to think through the relation between work and art, and by implication, culture and economy [2].

2. Marxian critiques of exploitation

Marx believes that before the labourer is dominated by capital, his labour is a pure personal labour. In the course of his labour, this labourer combined the functions that were separated from each other later, that is, mental and physical labour. However, when the labourer becomes the dominant person under the rule of capital, the mental and physical labour in the labour process are separated from each other. The theory of exploitation is an important doctrine of Marx's critical capitalism. Like Marx, Cohen firmly believed that workers were exploited by capitalists, and Cohen believed that the exploitation of workers by capitalists was unfair. While Marxists suggest that cultural workers are forced to accept capitalism because they're powerless, govern mentality theorists suggest that workers/subjects are trained to accept and reproduce for themselves their subordination.

3. Immaterial labour, Creative labour and Digital labour

The concept of immaterial labour is a new category created and used by Italian Autonomous Marxists. This concept is also defined as the production of commodity information, cultural content, and service and emotional labour. It not only refers to the production of a commodity, but also produces a capital relationship. Once the concept was proposed, this triggered intense discussions and reflections by Chinese and Western scholars. Some people believe that immaterial labour is of great significance to further study the new situation of Marxist political economy in contemporary social and economic development, as well as the new changes in capitalist exploitation and value production, and points out Marx's labour theory of value has long since become obsolete. Some people criticize that the labour paradigm has undergone a fundamental change, but to use the concept of immaterial labour to understand this fundamental change is obviously not helpful, because it has not really jumped out of Marx's productive labour . The cognitive proletariat is the person who embodies various forms of universal intelligence. They process information in order to produce various products and provide various services [3]. Immaterial labour has not changed the nature of the capitalist exploitation relationship.

Creative workers are players of some significance within society. Their work is the communication of experience through symbolic production. The current discussion on digital labour mainly focuses on the following two research topics: the discussion on the exploitation of professional labor and the audience a discussion of exploited labour. The former focuses more on critical capital's exploitation of professional workers in different digital fields, while the latter focuses more on critical capital's exploitation of audiences in varying degrees from time to data. The discussion of treating the audience as exploited labour derives the gift economy and the discussion on free labour formally puts the initiative of the audience into the discussion of digital labour.

Today, the era of digital media is occupying the world's historical stage. The unprecedented process of human proletarianization has begun. It also heralds the digital media as an ever-increasing habitat and labour place for netizens and labourers around the world. Marx pointed out on this basis that the production process will produce a hierarchical structure of labour power, and the monitoring of the labour rhythm and efficiency of workers is the source of capitalist alienation. Therefore, the emergence of digital machines is the logical consequence of capital's pursuit of accumulation and profit. When more and more labour, especially rural labour, is involved in the field of industrial production, it is also a process in which machines continue to replace labourers. The so-called industrial upgrading also means continuous transformation of labour. The media industry is the key, because the global information supply chain plays an increasingly important role in industrial upgrading, and it is continuously networked along with the labour process.

The first is the understanding of unpaid labour on the Internet. It refers to online behaviour that is not voluntarily voluntary based on the capitalist salary system, and is used to obtain pleasure. Whether

it is unpaid or "immaterial" is also exploitative [4]. The point of critical theory is to reveal this exploitability, but more importantly, it is necessary to explain the paradoxical relationship between exploitation and voluntary. On today's platforms and social media, it is already difficult to distinguish between the public economic part, the market economic part and the gift economic part. They all contain, or mainly belong to, non-material labour. That is to say, even if the concept of labour is extended to the relationship between non-material and non-employment, the relationship between labour and exploitation is obscure and not self-evident.

4. Features of cultural work and workers

Unpaid work.

In the United Kingdom, more and more people are beginning to try "unpaid work", through this way to establish connections with others. It is reported that this "unpaid" job has gradually become a new strategic means [5]. Affected by the emerging digital business model, the economic downturn, and the increase in the number of freelancers, it has become common practice in certain industries to abandon remuneration in exchange for a promise to increase "exposure" or a vague "network". But for workers in the media industry, unpaid work is a common state. Today's popular unpaid work has a long history in the creative and entertainment industries [6].

Starting from Amalia Illgner's own internship experience, in the article Why I'm suing over my dream internship, he talks about the phenomenon of unpaid interns in Britain that has been intensifying since the financial crisis. During his interview, the executive editor made it clear that although he was encouraged to publish articles, any articles published during the internship were free. At the same time, he will understand the role of the editor and will be able to publish articles at the rate of 80 pence per word after the internship period, which is unheard of by a young freelance writer. And he learned that some top editors started as interns. Therefore, it is not difficult to find out why many hopeful writers, critics, podcasters, commentators, and opinion leaders cram their personal resumes in media companies' inboxes. Most people do not hesitate when they have the opportunity to intern here, even if the daily salary is only equivalent to a movie ticket, a pint of beer or a pack of cigarettes. Cultural institutions, movies, television, fashion and media have shaped our hopes and dreams, as well as our stereotypes, and provided us with access to important information [7]. Psychic income compensates for lack of monetary success. Internal rewards inherently bound up in various strong practices in modern societies, as opposed to outside rewards such as money, power and fame.

Precarious and economically insecure.

New media industry practitioners have become the biggest anxiety group in the workplace. With the advent of the information explosion era, in the media industry, a large number of people are devoted to whether they make their own content or provide services to businesses. The short life cycle of the enterprise and the low stability of work have become the biggest anxiety factors for media practitioners [8]. The low income and frequent overtime work are even more painful. For media practitioners, job stability not only refers to the frequency of individual job-hopping, but also the passive job-hopping caused by the enterprise's life cycle.

In an era, where anyone can become a new media person, the improvement of the processing power of personal computers, the reduction of the cost of digital authoring tools and the convenience of publishing on the Internet have promoted the rise of fan activities. Today, fan sites, blogs, and message boards are common, and fan groups are organized on every social media site. In these online communities, fans post their work: reviews and close reading, stories and poems, songs and videos, re-enactments and animations wallpapers and screenshots and icons. Fan works are all over the Internet. Low conversion rates, low reading, and insufficient activity are new problems encountered by new media operations. Those companies that rely solely on content handling are gradually disappearing, and more and more the business life cycle is shortening. In today's complex of invalid

information and fragmentation of industry information, it is becoming more and more difficult for media practitioners to create texts. The probability of producing high-quality works is also gradually reduced. New media practitioners still lack money, which intensifies the pressure on the media practitioners' work, and the salary level is gradually decreasing. The current media wages are becoming more and more differentiated. If you want to increase the salary level of media workers, practitioners must do a good job of pre-accumulation and foreshadowing, consolidate their own capabilities, and ensure the quality and quantity of content output.

High education.

Baker and Hesmondhalgh pose the vital question of why some particularly privileged creative workers should be studied: creative workers tend to be highly educated, to come from middle-class backgrounds, and it has been difficult for non-white workers and women to gain access to the most prestigious sectors of the cultural industries [9].

The concept of willing slaves is particularly important in writing about cultural labour, because people think that cultural workers have more choices. People who are often highly educated or relatively privileged are more likely to be associated with self-exploitation [10]. Rodino-Clauchero and Berberick proposed that higher education plays an important role in the media internship system. Higher education institutions not only encourage students to engage in internship work, but also provide a credit system programs to help employers pass on labour costs. Interns just show the blurring between students and workers. Their work can never be solved from nine o'clock in the morning to five o'clock in the afternoon, but to improve themselves by consciousness and self-exploitation [11]. Modern employees are no longer obedient after more advanced and higher education. They want autonomy and flexibility, so more and more companies are beginning to test new methods of leadership and cooperation. A core is: give the job to oneself, autonomy, and self-exploitation.

5. Internet content production company interns in China

Ross Palin conducted in a four-year survey of interns. He found that internships are increasingly becoming an important part of the lives of college students in the United States and other countries. Many interns also choose to study and work in the media industry. Ross Perlin argues that internships are a new wild west, unregulated, often exploitative, a key factor in perpetuating income inequality, and a symptom of neocolonialism's reach. And this new labour category is growing [12]. By one account, three-fourths of students now attending four-year colleges will intern at least once by the time they graduate, resulting in between one and two million interns in the United States each year, and countless others abroad. Perlin wrote with a case study of Disney World's internship program. The program is one of the largest anywhere. Each year, 7,000 to 8,000 students and fresh graduates are employed for various basic jobs. Interns earn a minimum wage, from operating amusement park rides to flipping hamburgers to playing Disney characters. Looks suspiciously like a term of indenture.

Also, in China, many students do internships in various companies even around the world. A lot number of them are doing unpaid internships. Interns are almost everywhere in the current Chinese media industry. Most of them are engaged in the production of new media content in the social media promotion department of media companies or small APP companies. Media companies employ a large number of interns at school to replace regular employees, in order to save the labour costs of enterprises; on the other hand, due to school requirements and employment pressure, interns have to succumb to low-pay, low-security and high-pressure professional work [13]. And most students are very willing to carry out these high-intensity jobs, output different texts in the media industry, have some images, videos, textual output, and continuously exploit their time and energy with creative ideas.

In terms of working hours, most Internet content production company interns should be considered full-time employees. Because interns are often students at school and need to take care of school work. From the basic logic, interns need more flexible working hours than full-time employees. However, the fact is that many interns' vacations are not approved by the team leader, because sometimes their work is related to the daily operation of the company. After the internship is over, most interns want to get the opportunity to become regular employees, but the change is often determined by "human relations" [14]. Relationships, throughout the Chinese society, from the beginning of work to the internal flow of work, people with good relationships can get more employment opportunities, and relationship networks often restrict those who are "disadvantaged in the social network. Gold also pointed out that relationship is a basic element of Chinese culture and is closely related to some important issues in Chinese society, such as "affecting things", "human relations", "face" and "reciprocity". In China, it is generally believed that a good relationship with superiors is a necessary condition for a company to be promoted. Similarly, "relationships" play an important and positive role in helping graduates get rid of fierce competition and find good jobs in the short term. In the media industry, this "relationship" rule still takes effect [15].

The willingness of young people to accept unpaid work for a long time is entirely due to the excessive admiration of creative labour, which results in oversupply. The generalization of the system of unpaid interns has reduced the treatment of full-time employees, and it has also deepened social inequality in the media industry [16]. Only young people from wealthy families can do internships without salary. And more and more college media education lists internship as a necessary course to obtain a degree, which also makes young people desperate for this unpaid job. The intern system has deepened the social inequality in the media industry. In the context of China, this issue is closely related to urban and rural inequality.

6.   Chinese reality TV production and internship

In China's variety reality shows and entertainment industries, interns are usually a typical representative of self-exploitation [17]. In China's television industry, most variety shows are recorded late at night. Recording late night shows has become the norm in the industry. Moreover, no matter whether it is a program on a new media platform or a TV station such as CCTV, it will not pay interns, or at most one Yuan. But the workload of interns is not a lot, overtime is commonplace, and there are many cases of working until overnight (such as writing scripts for the program). By engaging in flexible ways such as intimacy, emotional loyalty, and praising emotions, managers transform high-intensity labour into pleasant entertainment, capturing the intern's recognition and enthusiasm [18]. Behind this, is a set of secret ideological control: the worker is guided to accept a specific experience, thus entering a real illusion, pursuing his residual pleasure in the ideological reality, and finally, the worker entirely devoted himself to labour, and lost the ability to think and the willing to resist.

Compared with traditional industries, labour in the variety media industries has changed: In addition to media audiences and consumers of entertainment products, labourers are also involved in entertainment when making programs [19]. Singing, performing, laughing, and calling signs are all normal. The production of variety entertainment programs is a kind of entertainment labour to entertain the audience with their own entertainment. On the other hand, this job has no time boundary and organizational boundary, and the interns as labourers are not paid and are not within the legal labour relationship. The interns ignore their physical exertion and carry out high-intensity unpaid labour in a wonderful entertainment experience, producing well-known cultural products. While experiencing, excited, and happy, the labourer obtains the desired happiness and continuously exploits themself, but dispels the ability of thinking and the willingness to resist.

The recording of the program itself is an exciting experience. When the all-black stage sounds melodious music, soft chasing light is accompanied by the rain of cherry blossoms, the singer's low singing is swaying in the night sky, and the trainees are also moved. Tears; when the rock singer jumped angrily holding the electric guitar and shivered uncontrollably, everyone roared with him. "Beautiful scenes provide us with pleasure." [20]. Under the creative environment, the messages received by everyone's eyes, ears, and mouths cause the brain to secrete a sufficient amount of dopamine, and the mood is also ignited. At this time, no one cares how hard it is to carry props around, squat under the guests' feet to make recordings, and hide among the audience to guide emotions. However, in the week-long program production, on-site recording only takes one day. In the remaining five working days, the interns need three days to discuss and produce the desk book. There is also a request to cut the film overnight. In this case, the emergence of entertainment and the continuous self-exploitation of staff need to resort to a specific emotional atmosphere.

When the recording of the program entered the last six issues, the interns had been working for nearly 60 hours a week for several months. Even if labour is used as entertainment, this is too much. Some people started to suffer from insomnia all night, some people lost their hair a lot, and many people became emotionally exhausted. In the absence of a labour contract, interns began to hesitate to withdraw or not, and anxiety gradually spread. At this stage, in order to keep the intern to continue to serve, it is not enough to rely on relationship work and emotional work. The team must inspire the intern's sacrifice spirit and noble experience.

In management research, researchers often advocate promoting corporate culture to improve management efficiency and reduce management costs. Many companies declare that they have a unique corporate culture, and write various slogans on the company's website hang it on the wall or even print it on paper cups. However, on the W team, it is not this normative method that inspires the intern's sacrifice spirit, but the cultural sentiment work: the management will pass on personal intentions to the audience through speeches, inspirational stories, lyrical text, etc., and then inspire The latter's ethical behaviour. The normative system often floats on the surface, and the feeling of work can be integrated into all aspects of work life. It calls and praises the corporate culture in an extremely personal way, and achieves an incentive effect that directly points to the hearts of the people.

"Sacrifice for media ideals" is one of the most important corporate cultures, which originated in the company's founding period [21]. When the start-up team's military was unstable, the general manager, cheered everyone who was struggling because of staying up all night. When the interns are ready to sacrifice, the management will begin to motivate through lyric poetry. Wilde's motto "We all live in the gutter, but some of us are looking up at the stars" is widely sung in media companies [22]. The importance of emotional work for labour control lies in the fact that in the absence of labour contracts and wage incentives, the management side has made the interns overcome physical and mental exhaustion and burst into spiritual power through the aura of media ideals and the praise of self-sacrifice [23].

When relationships, atmosphere, and feelings are greeted with smiles at the front desk, the formal system and market competition are hidden behind the scenes, making interns feel cold. If the interns do not work hard, they may be eliminated from the labour market. Walking side by side with cultural labour control strategies is ideological domination. Entertainment, this experience based on sensory stimulation, a pleasant activity, has become a "material ritual" that makes ideological control possible. The cultural strategies that make labour control possible also shape the real experience of labourers, intimate relationships provide a pleasant experience, the entertainment atmosphere triggers joy and excitement, and great feelings trigger a sublime experience. It is precisely because of the immersion in the noble entertainment experience that the intern's consent to recreational labour and self-exploitation can be produced.

7.   Conclusion

The unstable and unsafe nature of creative work in the media industry creates stress and anxiety, and the strong emotional pleasure associated with this kind of work exists. The tension between "pleasure" and "pain" in creative occupations has been fully proven [24]. Creative occupations are driven by self-fulfilling desires and are places for exploitation and serious insecurity. However, they are also spaces where workers have moral commitment and enthusiasm for their cultural work. Unstable labour has now become a key feature of creative work. For creative workers, creativity in contemporary society [25]. provides people with a kind of work narrative that can be deeply pleasing, The harvest is generous and full of emotional passion. However, the doctrine also plays a role in masking exploitation and insecurity [26]. In this industry, there is a strong subjective connection between creative media work and freedom, autonomy, charm, and self-actualization.

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