



Dynamics of Virtual Work

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Wikipedia, Work and Capitalism: A Realm of Freedom?

by Arwid Lund

The Dynamics of Virtual Work

COST Action IS 1202, *The Dynamics of Virtual Work*, is an international interdisciplinary research network on the transformation of work in the Internet Age, supported by COST (European Co-operation in Science and Technology) within the Individuals, Societies, Cultures and Health Domain. Chaired by Ursula Huws, Professor of Labour and Globalisation at the University of Hertfordshire in the UK, the Action is managed by a committee of representatives from 30 participating COST countries. Further information about the Action can be found at

http://www.cost.eu/domains_actions/isch/Actions/IS1202.

ICTs have had a major impact on the content and location of work. Digitisation of information has transformed labour processes whilst telecommunications have enabled jobs to be relocated globally. But ICTs have also enabled the creation of entirely new types of 'digital' or 'virtual' labour, both paid and unpaid, shifting the borderline between 'play' and 'work' and creating new types of unpaid labour connected with consumption and co-creation of services. This affects private life as well as transforming the nature of work. Because of the gender division of labour, this affects women and men differently.

The changing geography of virtual work and the emergence of new value-generating virtual activities have major implications for economic development, skills and innovation policies. However these are poorly understood because they have been studied in a highly fragmentary way by isolated researchers.

This Action will distil knowledge to enable policymakers to separate facts from hype and develop effective strategies to generate new employment and economic development in Europe. It will bring together experts in the fields of communications, innovation, management, digital media, creative industries, technology, employment, economics, sociology, geography, gender studies and cultural studies to consolidate theory, map this emerging field, support early stage researchers and develop new research agendas.

This Working Paper is one of a series published by the Action in pursuit of these aims.

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Abstract

The peer production of free and open software and Wikipedia has produced use value that competes with commercial exchange value and shown that people are not only motivated by economic self-interest. The peer production of Wikipedia differs from other open cooperative communities in ways that inform this study of how the Wikipedians perceive peer production's place, influence and potential within society's economy. Unlike free software, Wikipedia is largely based on amateurs and non-professional participants.

The broad number of participants, largely comprising amateurs, who create an encyclopaedia, has turned a number of ingrained opinions about job sharing and specialisation upside-down. Marx's idea that no one in the communist society has an exclusive occupation but instead can realise themselves in whatever sector they wish, appears to be slightly more achievable bearing Wikipedia in mind.

Peer production explores the possibility of creating a public economy based on these mechanisms and on an autonomous internet, but not necessarily antagonistic in relation to capital. According to some social scientists the idea of evolution is key for the P2P principles, which are often set against an antagonistic interpretation of social production in Marxism. Peer production has thus the potential of introducing new political thoughts in Marxism.

Introduction

Playbour, what kind of a strange bird is this? Does it exist at all or is it only a fantasy? Should it be desired or avoided? Does it have any relatives?

Metaphors are difficult to use. Concept analysis of that which is symbolised is even more difficult. This study focuses on productive activities in a digital network and on digital platforms that are often described as pleasurable, creative and playful. The actual concept of playbour was first launched by the gaming theorist Julian Kücklich in an article about the growing gaming industry, its capital concentration and increasing number of players who are no longer satisfied with consuming games but would rather produce their own games using tools made available by the gaming industry, or when these are not available to create their own tools. He pointed out that "computer game modification" or "modding" was an important part of gaming culture but also increasingly acted as a value-creating source (Kücklich 2005). At the same time as play is usually defined as a non-instrumental and spontaneous activity, while work creating use value and value-creating labour, controlled by alien interests, are instrumental and in the latter case exploitative. The blend of the two concepts says a good deal about the perspective of those who use them: playbour contains the idea of a playful capitalism.

My interest in the underlying ideas for this study began to take shape around 2007 when people spoke about web 2.0 and user generated content as an aggregation of information, different broadcasting models and interactive rooms (Tkacz 2010, p41; Lindgren 2014, p612). Synergies were discovered throughout the digital part of the economy. Ideas reverted essentially to what in the 1990s was referred to as *the new economy*, which Richard Barbrook and Andrew Cameron called *the Californian ideology* (Kelly 1997; Kelly 1998; Barbrook & Cameron 1995). It was then, in the 1990s, that the ban was lifted on commercialism on the internet and a young generation of 20- to 30-year-olds started micro-enterprises in the "empty frontier space opened by internet commercialization". Enormous amounts of capital were invested in the resulting gold-rush, in what Tiziana Terranova calls a form of generalised gambling. The capital was used to finance labour cultures or "ludic cultures" which were very different from earlier similar cultures. The new cultures were based on a counterculture that went back to the birth of the personal computer around 1980 (Terranova 2010, pp153–54).

Since then, in urban environments at the forefront of the economy, a no-collar-mentality and working style similar to a bohemian artist has thrived, which Andrew Ross characterises as a pariah for the nine-to-five world. The new informal attitude dated back to the 68-generation protests against the assembly line and a refusal to act as machines. Culture was influenced by the non-traditional habits of computer programmers and the main labour tool was the computer and the new information technology. For these so-called *digital artisans* who like post-industrialist advocates in the 1970s saw technology as key, rather than class conflict, to worker freedom, free-time and labour time became blurred and the dotcom entrepreneur developed new forms of self-education and self-exploitation (Ross 2004, pp10–11; Terranova 2010, p154; Florida 2002).¹ "Communism's utopian aspirations could, it was claimed, be realized without conflict, within the boundaries of capitalism through social media self-organization" (Dyer-Witheford 2015, p9). Cybernetics would abolish class society and wage relations were complemented by more variable income from interest-bearing stock activities and options in the future of the company (Terranova 2010, p154).

Wired-editor Kevin Kelly saw Moore's and Metcalfe's laws concerning computer performance and network value as highly important, which was added to the value of IT firms towards the end of the

¹In addition to digital artisans the concept of *digerati* is used, with the connotation that the creative digital craftsman also has an unconventional and alternative lifestyle in relation to traditional corporate culture.

1990s, and also increased exponentially until the crash.² In the new *network economy*, Kelly believed it was communication between computers, rather than the actual computers, that was important, together with innovations. The power came from the surplus in the network effects, where more nodes and increased use resulted in a growth in value. In the network economy shrinking marginal costs and industrial objects will eventually be subject to "the law of plentitude" (Kelly 1997; Wikipedia-bidragsgivare 2013). Kelly's seventh law stipulates that different services become more valuable the more "plentiful" they are, in combination with that they become better and more valuable the cheaper they become, which means the most valuable is that which is given away (Kelly 1997). In this new economy there are no longer conflicts but all the more "interest income" from advertising.

The form of network plays here a central ideological role. Eran Fisher describes the close, almost organic, relation between what he calls the digital discourse and neo-liberalism. He compares Friedrich Hayek's teachings with Kelly's book and articles in the magazine *Wired*. Fisher believes the concepts of spontaneous order and chaos transcends the gap between the two. The spontaneous order is already present in Smith's invisible hand, but Fisher points out that Hayek criticises the emphasis in neoclassicism of balance in favour of the idea that markets always exist in imbalance and a constant process of discovery. Both the digital discourse and neo-liberalism look upon spontaneous order as involved in a constant flux and recommend flexibility, laissez-faire and that the state should relinquish the civil society. Periods of economic turbulence are interpreted as when the market is part of a benign and progressive process, where the old is replaced by the new. The digital discourse surpasses even neo-liberal arguments by linking these with network technology, by which capitalism is internalised and receives a technological covering, and the network form where entrepreneurs and labourers are portrayed as equal nodes on a horizontal plane despite research showing that this is wrong (Fisher 2013, pp63, 69, 74–75, 81–82, 100, 130, 136).

Andrew Ross also discusses the relationship between labour market stakeholders and claims that the dotcom crash provided an excellent foundation for labour disciplining. Before the non-collar story began it was believed among post-industrialists in the 1970s, that "natural unemployment" was under four per cent, while the myth within the new economy implied that outsourcing material production to peripheral areas of the global market could replace high-quality white-collar labour that was also open to blue-collar workers who retrained in the service sector. For those who after the 2000 crash kept a job high up in the value chain then work became instead insecure with fixed-term contracts and regular redundancies as a reaction to market fluctuations³ in an environment that is essentially different from the time with low unemployment. Labour has today become more intensive within the framework of autonomy. And if exploitation of the early programming pioneers has been called *geeksploitation*, in the 00s an "industrialisation of bohemia" took place, which raises the question of the artisanal quality of the everyday situation for information labourers (Ross 2004, pp.vii–viii, 10).

Nick Dyer-Witheyford takes this idea of neo-liberal globalisation one step further and states that today's *Weltgesamtearbeiter*, the world total labourer, is different from yesterday's global total labourer as a result of the degree of systematic connection that exists between individual jobs. Contemporary collective labour is transnationalised, colourfully nuanced (due to complex labour division), feminist through its integration of women in both paid and non-paid work in the home, mobile and migratory within and between countries, precarious as a result of a chronic reserve force of unemployed and part-time, fixed-term employees, the cause of an environmental and climate crisis, and, finally, intertwined by "2 billion internet accounts and 6 billion cell phones" (Dyer-Witheyford 2014, p166). The labour unit is no longer a factory, not even the social factory, but rather the planetary factory. For the world total labourer the *value chain*, just as the assembly line for the

² Moore's law: Performance is doubled every 24 months, Metcalfe's law: Network value increases as a square of the number of nodes included.

³ Fluctuations that have been driven by financial capital and increasingly demanding shareholders.

mass labourer, is the technical foundation for a new class composition (Dyer-Witheford 2014, pp166–67):⁴

In its ur-form the value-chain headquartered research, design, and marketing in the high-wage areas of the global economy, subcontracted manufacturing, assembly, and back-end office functions in new industrialized territories, where they could be rapidly scaled up or down with market fluctuations, and sent mining and waste disposal to abyssal sacrifice zones. (Dyer-Witheford 2014, s167)

The entire process illustrates three ways that Marx pointed out as having an adverse relation to the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.⁵ Optimism continued flowing and almost everything was win-win. Terranova believes the new economy was recalibrated after the crash in 2001. It signalled the end of variations of old pre-digital business models. Instead, concepts such as the social web appeared and the general idea was to create worlds of social relations based on digital platforms and environments that attracted large groups of users (Terranova 2010, p.155). The digital network, with its platforms, is still highly cherished and we have even more names for it: *creative industries*, *intellectual property industries*, *experiential economies*, and *attention economies* (Florida 2002; Rifkin 2000; Davenport & Beck 2001).

All of this was not initially clear to me, but the relationship between pleasurable play and what Marx refers to as *abstract labour*,⁶ was problematized in several critical studies from the period, which I found interesting. The studies noted conflicts within commercial projects *crowdsourced*⁷ by fan-subculture activities (Grimes 2006; Coleman & Dyer-Witheford 2007; Dyer-Witheford & Sharman 2005; Dyer-Witheford & De Peuter 2005; Kline et al. 2003). There has for the past decade also been a smaller conflict within the hacker community that split what Pekka Himanen referred to as hacker ethics and the potential hacker politics into two parts (Himanen 2001). The movement for *free software* and the movement for *open software* differ in their relationship towards enclosing commercial applications of the open and free source code, though both are based on what is known as peer production, a term I chose to use in my case study of Wikipedia. New forms of voluntary cooperation, but with differing degrees of autonomy, resulted in different forms of conflict with capitalism and its logics.

The classic division in Western Europe, from the ancient slave economy to capitalism's *Fordist* phase,⁸ between play and work; leisure time and working hours, has changed. Some believe it is no longer possible to distinguish between them, others protest against this type of understanding, while another group believe it is about a new form of subordination of labour under capital through self-control or by using a manipulated form of play or *rationalised imitation* of this (Deleuze 1998; Söderberg 2008).

⁴ The concepts of mass labourer and class composition are covered in more detail in Chapter XX.

⁵ George Caffentzis summarises Marx's account in Capital volume three with three possible methods to counteract the tendency to fall by *increasing the mass of extracted surplus value* by raising the intensity of labour or by extending the working day, *decreasing the mass of variable capital* by cutting wages and increasing external trade, or *reducing the mass of constant capital* by increasing productivity and external trade. Different combinations can be used and there is no definite capitalist strategy with regard to breaking various types of labour struggle. "These struggles can lead to many futures" (*In letters of blood and fire*, p. 72-73)

⁶ Abstract labour will in this study be called labour. The concept refers in part to the value producing labour of products sold for their value in exchange on the market, but will also be used in another meaning to designate commercial activities focusing on value exchange and value realisation.

⁷ A concept launched by Jeff Howe in 2006.

⁸ Fordism indicates a phase in the capitalist production method characterised by a strict division of "manual and intellectual labour". This was based on an extreme division of labour and fragmentation of the work process, planned and designed outside the control of the worker and implemented within a strict time frame. Henry Ford's assembly line constitutes an emblematic example.

In the latter example, free and real play is seen in an emancipatory light. It is play in peer production and among hackers that provides power to contemporary working class mutations and their new *cycle of struggles*.⁹ People strive after more of the happiness and the reduced feeling of alienation offered by play. Play expands the sphere of non-commodified relations by being different from labour, and assumes that people have enough to eat, are in good health and not stressed, as well as including central elements without identifiable purpose. Playfulness not only expands, it also provides an opposition to be diminished (Kane 2004; Wark 2013b, § 112 Endnotes). It is the participant in the peer production who is the new *social labourer* with the potential to develop into a political subject with a praxis based on communal play that strengthens solidarity and creates new *social needs* (Söderberg 2008, pp.112, 150, 153–56, 166–68, 182–83).

A hypothesis has been presented that there is a conflict between play in *peer production* that is characterised by non-instrumentality and capitalist production's instrumentality. Playfulness motivates hackers to take part in peer production, as they want to move away from hierarchies and order issuing within the capitalist production method. Söderberg develops the concept of *play struggle* and claims that as the hacker's play and labourer's work are as productive and important for capital then both will be disputed. But the conflict and struggle over play are different compared with those over labour in the workplace. There are two reasons that hackers could consider acquiring a class awareness, despite a generalised lack of this in the community. *Firstly*, play is itself a source of knowledge and collective forms of play strengthen solidarity between participants, in particular if play takes place within peer production with relations characterised by both synergies and competition in relation to capitalism. *Secondly*, peer production will be exposed to repression from capitalist players because of its destabilising impact on capitalism, which in turn can lead to a political struggle about issues of free information and open digital architectures (Söderberg 2008, pp.156–57, 169–71). The attitude fits in with Paolo Virno's comment that the role of knowledge and social relations in contemporary cognitive capitalism can be seen as productive living labour, which has the potential to result in critical questions about profitable labour and demands for citizen wages in a discussion focusing on freedom of speech (Virno 1996, pp.266, 270–71). Privacy issues concerning personal integrity can be added to this.

Terranova believes peer production¹⁰ explores the possibility of creating a public economy based on these mechanisms and on an internet that is autonomous, but not necessarily antagonistic in relation to capital. She maintains that the idea of evolution is key for what she calls P2P principles, which are often set against an antagonistic interpretation of social production in Marxism.

The evolutionist motif is preferred to antagonism and is used to sustain the possibility of thinking of the economy as an ecological system, that would allow for, at least at first, the coexistence of different forms of productive organization and social cooperation valorization that can coexist side by side, at least until the day when the success of P2P will render other forms of economic organization obsolete. (Terranova 2010, p.157).

Why Wikipedia?

The peer production of free and open software has produced use value that competes with commercial exchange value and shown that people are not only motivated by economic self-interest. The peer production of Wikipedia differs from other open cooperative communities in ways that make the project important to analyse in order to obtain a better overall understanding of the place of peer production, influence and distribution within the national economy. Unlike the development of

⁹ A cycle of struggles is a concept in autonomous Marxist theory that claims that class struggle, with the working class as an active subject, drives technical and social development.

¹⁰ She calls this social production or peer-to-peer.

free software, Wikipedia is largely based on the commitment of amateurs and non-professional participants. While voluntary programmers can use their interest to improve their career opportunities, this is "practically impossible" with Wikipedia (Jemielniak 2014, pp.3, 106–07).

[W]riting encyclopedic articles is not a profession one could specialize or prove skills in. Thus, even though Wikipedians represent all kinds of professions, virtually none of them have professional experience in encyclopedia development, and their motivations to contribute are not job related (Jemielniak 2014, s.107).

The broad number of participants, largely comprising amateurs, who create an encyclopaedia, has turned a number of ingrained opinions about job sharing and specialisation upside-down. Marx's idea that no one in the communist society has an exclusive occupation but instead can realise themselves in whatever sector they wish, appears to be slightly more achievable bearing Wikipedia in mind. Just as Marx's vision where "well rounded" and "complete individuals" in a form of universal social combination transform labour into a self-activity and phases out private property, with Wikipedia it is possible to do one thing today and another tomorrow; "to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, and criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic." (Marx & Engels 1998, pp.53, 97). The project is not dependent on individual people, cooperation is mostly ad hoc across the closest available (not forgetting *the digital divide* and global difference that still play a large role) digital network which allows participants easily to scale the production of use value (where reproduction of each copy nears zero).

Similar ideas have been put forward by Firer-Blaess and Fuchs who argue that Wikipedia has communist potentials "that are antagonistically entangled into capitalist class relations" (Firer-Blaess & Fuchs 2014, p.99). Questions about how antagonistic the relationship is, within what time horizon and how important it is for the development of communism will all be touched upon in this study. Firer-Blaess and Fuchs are completely right in stating that Wikipedia with its practices and roots in info-communism is introduced into economic structures through info-capitalism's profit-driven infrastructure and the market for personal computers, through which a well educated and global working class with enough leisure time and knowledge can contribute to the real, and not only ideological, realisation of info-communism. "The free knowledge production by Wikipedians is a force that is embedded into capitalism, but to a certain degree transcends it at the same time. A new mode of production can develop within an old one." (Firer-Blaess & Fuchs 2014, p.99) The concept of info-communism is used by these as largely synonymous with the concept of peer production. A focus on information does not exclude cooperation with other production methods in agriculture and industry. This perspective seems to see info-communism as a transition stage towards a dominant communism and is characterised by the fact that high technological productivity enables a "post-scarcity society" with an end to the tough and alienating labour and an opening towards creative intellectual labour for all people (Firer-Blaess & Fuchs 2014, p.90).

One can at the same time question Jemielniak's earlier claims about the lack of subject specialists and career opportunities at Wikipedia. The number of employees at the foundation and its national local sections is continuously growing, at the same time as cooperations are formed with external institutions and businesses that contribute a variable amount of capital to the project. The number of hidden professional academics involved in the project is also unknown. This combination of a popular, radical, horizontal and voluntary collaboration and division of labour with greater career opportunities and professionalism (in both a concrete and abstract sense) is inadequately researched and contains an insight that Wikipedia is a production method emerging within capitalism, which will influence our social lives profoundly if it becomes dominant. It is Wikipedia's potential and perceived influence on this societal collaboration, based on its characteristic of peer production and cooperation but also in the interface with capitalism among those taking part in the project, that form the basis of this study.

Wikipedia's community is understood in this study as *one* community, but not a homogeneous community. On a formal level it is radically open and also rough at the edges, an openness that is also open to negotiation. The participants can at any moment chose to copy the database and initiate

a project of their own. *Forks* have been given democratic importance as a means to reach consensus, but the strategy has been criticized by Nathaniel Tkacz. Theoretically they could lead to a radical form of separation where everybody is king in their own kingdom. At the same time there is a gap between the will to break free and the difficulties of actually doing it without the right social and technological conditions. The difficulties in making a successful fork increase as projects grow (Tkacz 2015, pp.136, 142–44, 149). The openness could also be reduced as a result of social exclusion mechanisms and technical restrictions such as *flagged revisions* and demands for participant registration, which have been tested with some language versions in recent years. There is an assumed core area in the project where the motive for involvement is centred around the creation of an encyclopaedia, but there are also activities that are mainly social (or even antisocial), and activities that are primarily focused on its own economic interests. Groupings for specific projects and topics are formed and similarly disappear over time. Wikipedians form a community that is multifaceted and in constant motion. In this perspective I find support in the latest decade's discussion about *the multitude*, in contrast to industrial capitalism's and Fordism's *people* or *mass*, but also to the central Marxist category of class. Where the boundaries for this multitude are drawn is no easy question, rather a political question. Are some of the commercial players, which are on the margins of Wikipedia's peer production, part of the community? A similar uncertainty is inherent in the value of thinking in terms of class and classes, which is further complicated by new relations concerning production methods with a form of common ownership by a non-profit foundation in combination with a commons-based peer production:

Programs and servers can be considered as common property managed by the Wikimedia Foundation. Servers are bought thanks to donations. Wikipedia uses the free software MediaWiki to run its website. MediaWiki is based on a "copyleft license" that makes it a free software commons (Firer-Blaess & Fuchs 2014, p.94)

Uncertainty about the concept of class has its origins in a similar uncertainty if it concerns labour or play, which ought to be important at least with regard to an autonomous Marxist or political understanding of the class concept. "The pleasure to work is not only derived from cooperative production and from the love to program or to write articles but also from the autonomy of the worker within the production process. The work process is self-determined." (Firer-Blaess & Fuchs 2014, p.98)

The use value of Wikipedia is created, influenced or destroyed to varying degrees by the different attitudes and practices expressed within the multitude. What constitutes the actual use value is ideally an open question which could be discussed. The young Wikipedia has its structural inertia built-in and the surrounding society has its demands for what is a socially required encyclopaedia. Conflicts in the surrounding society also enter into the editing. Nathaniel Tkacz illustrates how controversies in an article about Muhammad in the English Wikipedia originate outside the encyclopaedia where there is a long history of differing opinions. Tkacz goes so far as to suggest that terms such as consensus-based and community do not fit with the activity that is taking place, instead it is about two clear stances that are being addressed, to keep or not to keep an update: "these people are not 'giving' or 'sharing'" (Tkacz 2010, p.45). In my eyes this appears to be relevant with regard to conflicts, but not about other activities within Wikipedia. Wikipedia is based on a voluntary interest and does not aim to generate a profit. Perhaps it is possible here to talk of playbour or labour play? Or in line with how the category *use value-oriented concrete labour* is referred to in this study: playwork or workplay?¹¹

¹¹ I developed the idea *playwork* in autumn 2012 to designate a playful creation of use value that is separate from capitalism and the concept *playbour*. The activity of uploading a video to You Tube would be included under the latter concept as the platform is controlled by players with an interest in *value-oriented abstract labour*, which this study calls labour.

Aim and research question

In this study I assume that Wikipedia is a new, emerging *mode of production*, or alternatively a *proto-mode of production*. How the character of activities within this mode of production are experienced by participants, together with an understanding of the social exchange of activities and the collective organisation of the activities are three vital aspects of inclusion in every economic system. How the activities are shaped and embraced influence the social, economic, cultural and political life as a whole which in turn has an impact on production. If I, based on a case study of the Swedish language Wikipedia, want to understand how the participants in a peer production perceive their relationship and their project's relationship to capitalism, then these aspects are therefore key. At a micro-level I have primarily chosen to focus on the first aspect: the activities character in the form of play, gaming, work and labour. But sometimes I introduce the other two aspects if they contribute to a better understanding of the problem at hand. These themes can only be analytically separated. In reality they intersect each other. Social status in a gift economy cannot in practice be separated from conquering power over the social relations of production, which in turn influences the perceived character of the activity for the participant. Analytically though it is necessary to differentiate between them to enhance the understanding of which conceptions clash against or strengthen each other on an ideological level.

The overall aim of the study is to explore, through interviews, how Wikipedians perceive this dialectical relation, and contribute to an understanding of how different conceptions about micro-level activities and a macro-level relationship to capitalism coexist, interact and clash with each other in order to illuminate how the economic, political and social values within commons-based peer production look like. It is hoped that we can deepen our knowledge about the political awareness on different ideological levels among participants in the Swedish language version of Wikipedia and contribute a preliminary map of potential development tendencies contained within the project among its historical players. The question is important in order to carry out a critical evaluation of the role of peer production in capitalism. The study also tests a hypothesis in relation to contemporary Marxist understanding of cognitive capitalism

Having said that, it is now time to formulate the overall research question: *Which ideological formations distinguish the Wikipedian view of the character of their own activities and Wikipedia's relationship with capitalism? How are the two levels of formations similar or dissimilar from each other? How do the two level's formations relate to each other? And finally: What is the relationship of the result of the ideology analysis to Marxist understanding of contemporary social dynamics?*

In order to answer the first question, two supplementary questions will be used. What attitudes do Wikipedians have towards their activities in terms of play, work, competition and labour? What attitudes do Wikipedians have in terms of additions and alternatives to their (proto)production method's relationship to capitalism and its processes? The second question requires precise and carefully reasoned categorisations of ideologies that are empirically founded as well as analytically identified in latent layers under the manifest surface. The result of the analysis is then weighed against the Marxist literature's contemporary analysis presented at the start of the study.

Finally something that will *not* be included in the study. Wikipedia produces world views or knowledge, depending on your perspective. The use value is relative to its character, it concerns thoughts and statements about the world. Within library and information science it is common to problematize the relation between knowledge and power, and vice versa (Olson 2002; Olson 2010). This is of course possible with regard to Wikipedia: How should we understand the principle of a neutral perspective which is present in this community? Does it in practice strengthen the status quo and the prevailing mindset, hegemony, ideology, choose your own concept, in society? Interesting

questions that require their own studies. But attention is focused in another direction in this study. Instead of focusing on the world views that are undermined by the encyclopaedia, I am interested in the neutrality principle's *recruitment function* of voluntary participants, and the *anti-commercialism* that is associated with the principle, which moreover could be more difficult to approach for today's power elite than if Wikipedia was based on the same approach to knowledge as the critical theory's.¹²

Theoretical and methodological starting points

Ideologies on an intersubjective and social level among the active on the Swedish-language version of Wikipedia will be identified using interviews. The form of the interviews, ideology analysis and the central concepts will be expounded in Chapter 4.

The social and economic context where I will critically understand the identified ideological formations have traditionally been known as *objective conditions* in Marxist theory. Theoretically such an interpretation refers back to what is usually called *historical materialism*. My view of historical materialism is discussed in a separate theory chapter. For now, it suffices to state that concepts such as *objective* and *subjective* factors signal that there is a difference between (class)awareness and the crisis strewn development of capitalism, though it is important to remember that it is capitalism itself that produces this perceived but illusory dichotomy. The socialist collective *Kämpa tillsammans!* (Fight together!) point out that we are trapped in a situation "where subjectivity and objectivity separate, where form and content are of necessity divided and separated from each other." (Kämpa tillsammans! 2013, p.111). The collective states that this division and fetishism of the subjective and objective enables class struggle and change, while I would say that it *requires* class struggle to bridge the separation as the workforce in general, albeit to differing degrees, is separated and alienated from both their own labour, own subjectivity, and from the total product they produce together with other labourers under capitalism. The total product that the individual labourer helps to create appears in the process as in relation to he or she divorced of objectivity. When I then use words such as subjective and objective in this context it assumes a division that is not obvious (read: it is a social construction based on a historical balance of power), but where the objectivity divorced from us appears as, and accordingly constitutes, an operative real abstraction with laws of movement described by Marx in *Capital*. Capital logic is an active ideology built upon our alienation under capitalism. The subjective and objective mesh with each other and can only be separated analytically. In a similar way, ideologies are not only thoughts but also practices and technologies.

The study follows two lines of inquiry. *The first line* is dealt with in Chapter 6 to 9 and focuses on different understandings about the character of activities, even aspects concerning social exchange and understanding of corporate board and organisational forms are included to complement understanding. I note if the activities are described or advocated in a freely or fixed structured, spontaneous or regulated, decentralised or centralised forms, if they are characterised by pleasure, happiness, entertainment, gravity, responsibility, a will to be useful, undemanding, or different forms of reciprocity or lack of this. There are several different drivers, with various configurations, for participants in peer production. Each reason or specific combination of reasons, which are closely linked to the view of the character of the activities, is thought to stand in relation to the social interaction and character of the exchange of actions within the different organisations and governance.

This results in many questions. What relationship do Wikipedians have to voluntary and non-instrumental play, the serious and responsible manufacture and maintenance of use value, and the commercial labour with the production and sale of exchange value? And how do they view the

¹² Zygmunt Bauman stresses that contemporary capitalism has given a new meaning to critique and co-opted it within itself. The critique now rather strengthens capitalism than weakens it (Bauman 2000, s.23).

relationship between them? The activities and exchange of these also have links with various emotional states. The undemanding and playful contributions signal an easier-going attitude to the activity that may aim to develop, but also to undermine the encyclopaedia. The competing contributions unite passion and competition in increasingly intensifying forms, while a more serious and professional attitude with a focus on creating socially beneficial use value makes greater demands on reciprocity in the behaviour of other participants as the final product is then important. When the final aim is to create exchange value and make money through exchanges on the market then this is usually interpreted theoretically as that the active agent is to various degrees alienated in the actual activity and use value, as these are no longer important in themselves. The question is to what extent this type of argument has a bearing on Wikipedians who have short-term contracts within the project? The theoretical assumption appears to be too strict. One hypothesis that has been present from the outset is that play and manufacturing dominate in the voluntary commitment in the digital economy and that the social exchange of these activities takes place in combination with undemanding contributions and expectations of meeting a general, and sometimes perhaps even balanced reciprocity (the former less precise than the latter) from other participants.¹³ If this is the case then it would be interesting to find out more about how the relationship based on playwork and workplay meets a (paid) labour that is increasing within peer production?

The other direction in the study, which is discussed in Chapter 10, focuses on Wikipedians and their understanding of the project as a whole and its relationship to capitalism as a system. Using insights from the stakeholders, a deep understanding will be offered of continuities and deviations in relation to the surrounding capitalist ideologies and practices, which are sprouting in the new evolving production method. It is hoped to increase understanding of the political potential and character in a stricter sense that the new production method has. The point of departure here is that peer production bears some similarities to capitalist production. They aspire to produce socially useful value through social cooperation. This is also true of capitalism, but Wikipedia is satisfied with this and does not aspire to create and accumulate value. The creation of Wikipedia also differs from capitalism in the design of the cooperation, how its results are distributed, and by the aims driving the project.

Is Wikipedia seen as a complement or as a radically different alternative to capitalism? Do participants in peer production have a static or dynamic stance on the issue (timescale), i.e. do they have a principled or strategic perspective on these questions? Should peer production and Wikipedia be seen as complementary or a revitalising dissociation from the formal capitalist economy or does it have the same totalising power as capitalism once showed towards feudalism?¹⁴

¹³ Gift economies are often called moral economies that aim to create and maintain social relations. A gift requires no pecuniary compensation, but if something is given away there can still be an implicit demand for some other form of compensation. A gift can according to social anthropologist Marshall Sahlins be characterised by implicit demands that are *balanced* and *mutual*. The first demands are to a greater extent dictated when and how a gift will be repaid (it is close to a simple exchange), the latter demands do not specify time and forms for repayment, but it is still important that some form of repayment is made. In this context dominated by gift-economic exchanges it is difficult to distinguish the gift from the gift in return, the distinction is in practice unnecessary to unravel, as long as the interaction proceeds. The gift-economic process constitutes in many ways a circle motion, but can also develop into downward or upward spirals of growing asociality or sociality. These gifts and the *simple gift* of which Bronislaw Malinowski speaks and that does not require anything in return characterises much of the commons-based exchange of actions involved in the creation of use value at Wikipedia.

¹⁴ Rasmus Fleischer describes the concept of dissociation as first developed by Roswitha Scholz, an editor together with Robert Kurz at the publication *Exit*: Dissociation is according to Fleischer's understanding a concept that should be understood at the abstract level of the concept of value: "The value as structure (commodity form) admittedly contends its totalitarian claims, but rejects in practice large parts of societal reproduction. This concerns both on a material level (domestic work, upbringing) and on an affective-cultural level. Some things can quite simply not be grasped by the value form, cannot be performed as abstract labour – instead they are *dissociated* from the value, from official society. They primarily apply to women".

One basic assumption is that peer production has an influence on capitalism, despite the fact that involvement does not aim to sell its labour for a wage for material and social survival. This influence can take different forms. In part, the view of creative activity can change and in part capitalism's functions can be influenced by competition from peer production. Labour or not within peer production can also have unexpected effects on the relationship to capitalism at a structural level. Equally, the exchange of social actions should in accordance with other logics than market exchange have the potential to influence the view of the latter, while a degree of market exchange in the margins of peer production may not need to reduce this influence. Further, horizontal governance should more than those that characterise the relatively decentralised and flexible post-Fordist production be able to influence the view of labour organisation, while it is not certain how they influence the relationship between the two production methods at a structural level. The assumption is that there are differences and potential conflicts between peer production and post-Fordist capitalistic production, and not only synergies. The emphasis on more decentralised and horizontal decision making, spontaneity, social cooperation and interests, can be interpreted as a desire for play or non-alienated and pleasurable creation, whose relation to contemporary capitalism is not completely clear.

On the other hand peer production is influenced both great and small by capitalism. At an individual level this could be about improving one's employability, at a more overall level about the appointment of more employees within the project, but it could also relate to the fact that editing should result in competitive use value or that the working process needs to be more centrally organised. The underlying assumption is that the inner life and activities of the public register influence from outside, but also generate influence on how capitalism functions.

Key concepts

It is time to define the study's key concepts: play, gaming, work and labour. The definitions are founded on a literary study of the concepts and relationships between them. The definitions are to deepen and structure the ideological analysis about Wikipedians and their self-image.

The concept of labour has caused some problems. The difficulty has been that the focus of the study and its aim has changed character as it has progressed, and targets both a micro and macro level. In relation to capitalism all approaches to commercial interest (not only labour in a narrow sense), from a purely positive to a purely negative, are interesting, and the concepts complement and alternatives to capitalism provide structure to the analysis. On a micro level labour as a concept is also problematic as the focus here is also more than paid labour with regard to the analysis of the Wikipedian view of commercial activities. This has, in addition to internal and external employees in editing, concerned identifying ideas related to various types of commodifying of the main namespace. This has concerned issues such as advertising, spam and biased idealised descriptions. The conceptual combination *commodified activities* meets the broader perspective, but constitutes at a practical level a clumsy concept to use in an ideological analysis that often identifies conceptions that advocate, latently or manifestly, various combinations of the four different activities (of which the commercial activity is one) as an ideal.

I have chosen to use labour, in the stricter perspective, to describe and categorise ideological conceptions that pull in the commercial direction. This means, somewhat paradoxically that the concept of labour will here be defined in its narrow sense, and later also used in the analysis in the broader sense (commodifying activities). This in order to be able to use, categories such as gamebour, worklabour, labourplay in the ideological analysis. The decision is not completely without a theoretical foundation. Labour or abstract labour of course in Marxism as value producing labour, value is a social relationship between human effort which can easily appear as a relationship between things in exchange on the market, which in turn forms an abstract and unknown force in relation to the labourer. Labour is based on inequality in relation to the means of production and is

used by capital owners to exploit work by the labour force for its own profit. Looked at in this way then labour is included or present, directly or indirectly, in all forms of commercialism that are developed under capitalism.

I hope it will be clearly evident in the following presentation whether the concept labour is used in a narrow sense or as a general indicator of ideological conceptions that pull in a commercial direction. As this decision was taken after the interviews had been completed, the use of the concept of labour in the interviews is often, such as when its relationship to play is studied, actually referring to manufacturing.

As regards the concept of play I assumed at the time of the interviews Johan Huizinga's definition which does not differentiate between play and gaming. Over time I have become convinced that it is necessary to separate play and gaming into two different categories, which can explain some peculiarities in the relationship between what is present in the transcripts and in the following analysis of them.

In my literature study concerning the concepts of play, gaming, work and labour, and the reality these refer to, I studied five basic themes: the aim of the activity, the form of practice, the degree of voluntarism, involved feelings and the question of whether the activity was characterised as transhistoric or historic (Lund 2014, pp736–37). The following offers a brief description of the relationship of various concepts to these dimensions.

Playing

Literature about play is extensive and contains, just as the cultural movement, both broad and narrow definitions of play. The subject is also interesting for everyone from biologists, psychologists, socio psychologists, culture historians, sociologists, aestheticians and cultural anthropologists. Despite many different emphases and approaches, there is relative consensus with regard to the identified aspects.

Firstly the aim of play for the playing subject is the activity in itself and there is a proximity in the moment. Goals can be used to frame the activity, but the activity remains most important. Behind the backs of the playing individuals the act of play may produce many productive results and Vygotskij emphasises that play by children over time becomes adult labour. Play is *secondly* a mobile, dialectical process that is not reified at a subjective level. It is in many ways like life, but is freer in its relationship to reality and to playmates, among other things in the use of rules. The processes are more open and allow negotiations and improvisations during play. Play is therefore not completely predictable. Play can be performed inside the person playing alone, in the player's relation to the world or within a playing community, and is often an exaggerated and uneconomical "galumphing", i.e. placing entertaining obstacles in order to reach a specific imaginary target. Games are played *thirdly* when our basic needs have been met and because the player takes a voluntary initiative. *Fourthly* because play is fun, entertaining and enjoyable. It is characterised by a measure of simplicity and relaxation, and by a certain luxurious feeling of unnecessary abundance. Play also includes passion and excitement. Play is *fifthly* a part of nature and the human constitution, at the same time as it is central for social life and our communication (Lund 2014, pp746, 757–58, 770).the same time as it is central for social life and our communication (Lund 2014, pp746, 757–58, 770).

Gaming

Gaming seems in the same way as play to be interesting for a range of different scientific fields. As with play, the effects of gaming activities in these scientific disciplines is often hidden for the players and gamers themselves. When it comes to the identified dimensions then gaming is *firstly* target-oriented, it is the target that enables comparisons between gamer activities and it is therefore often linked to quantitative measurements and varies depending on the performance of participants. The

target is used as a basis for the gaming context and introduces competition to the game. Targets are here more important than in play, which mainly uses targets to act around (play would end if the target was achieved and it is the path towards the goal that is the target for the players). In gaming and play both the activity and the result are important for gamers, the former often because it provides happiness, entertainment, excitement and pleasure, but the result is increasingly important the more onlookers and an audience witness the game. *Secondly* games are rule based. These have an a priori structure of formal rules that govern and organise them. Breaking the rules leads to various sanctions. Before each new game the results or the accomplishments from the previous game are reset and the game start anew. The game and its results are not productive in the sense of creating something permanent, but within capitalism gaming can constitute a product for others as a service or entertainment. *Thirdly* games and gaming are at a formal level voluntary, and more effectively so than labour, in its nature, but social pressure or threats of social isolation could to a greater extent be a reason for the activity than in the case of play. *Fourthly* games often include the same feelings as play, they can be funny, passionate and exciting, but there are also other feelings associated with gaming such as "serious leisure time", self-fulfilment, risk and endeavour. Finally, *fifthly*, games are socially constructed in societies that relate to competition for social distinction. The lack of games and gaming among the !Kung people indicates that gaming does not refer to a trans-historical phenomenon among human beings and their societies (they are not part of the human constitution) but are purely a product of history. The increased presence of an audience and spectators changes the game in the same fundamental way as Moishe Postone claims abstract labour, labour changes the character of work (concrete labour) under capitalism (Lund 2014, pp766, 770; Postone 1993, pp67–68).

Working

Work is characterised *firstly* by the fact that it is target-oriented and focused on creating use value that is socially beneficial. Work is productive in this sense. *Secondly* work concerns specific and concrete work processes with certain qualities that change depending on the type of use value created. Work is not competitive as the various concrete processes cannot be compared with each other and focus on different social needs. *Thirdly* work is primarily necessary for the survival of humanity and social life (play can also be seen as necessary for humanity, but only after basic needs have been met). Work with its close relationship with necessity and usefulness for the *fourth* connected to feelings of seriousness, but also to self-realisation through the activity and its objectification in manufactured use value. Work always takes place in a direct or indirect social context and coherence and social belonging are important ingredients in work processes. *Fifthly* work is trans-historical and constitutes humanity's metabolism with nature to satisfy human needs. This includes cultural production and social reality (Lund 2014, pp761, 770).

Labouring

The aims of labour are dependent on where you view it from: capital or work. In contrast to the other categories which are dealt with here, labour is linked to a historical epoch that is a distinctive but specific class society. This means that each dimension here has two separate sides, where one, capital, is dominant. As regards the *first* dimension the aim for capital is to accumulate capital and maintain the capital relation, through the production of exchange value from employed labour from which surplus value is created as additional work and additional production. Valorisation is rather than production of use value the aim together with maintaining the capital relation. This aim influences all parties involved. For labourers the aim is to earn a living in a society where goods are generalised and procured by the universal equivalent of money. In order to make their living labourers must take up employment with an alien power. *Secondly* the various forms of practice are controlled as they are offered by the market. Labour is the production of exchange value for the market through the purchase of a workforce on the same market. Between different capitals this is seen in competition and a contest in accumulation where the biggest wins, which leads to "run-away

growth" and recurring crises. Labour is based on the exploitation of labourers, which influences the livelihoods of labourers and capital's realisation of surplus value and competitiveness. Labourers work more than they are paid for, additional work is systematic. *Thirdly* labour is in a formal sense voluntary (for capital as taken for granted to *not* need to work for others) but in practice it is forced on labourers through the historical prerequisites for earning a living in the capitalist class society. *Fourthly* labour is characterised by feelings linked to supremacy and subordination. This could concern superiority and inferiority, the right to exploit, anger and resistance against being exploited, different degrees and forms of alienated gravity, but also an alienated idleness of capital and the absence of commitment from the worker. An instrumental wisdom characterises social relationships from both sides of the capital relation, for instance that the labourer is used as an instrument for the interests of capital. A series of ideology creating or influencing emotional states can be connected to this dynamic and thrilling phenomenon, which in itself would require its own analysis. *Fifthly* labour is a historically and socially constructed form that is based on transhistoric manufacturing, but is qualitatively different from other historical versions and class societies which have been non-economically motivated (even if they were also founded on earning a living). Labour has an abstract character and logic that steers the alienating activities (Lund 2014, pp769–70).

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