Political Economies of the Media: Theories and Methods
Summer School at the IUC Dubrovnik
11 – 15 September 2023

B O O K O F A B S T R A C T S

Monday (11 September)

Session 1 (10:00 – 11:30)

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
Christian Fuchs, University of Paderborn, German

TITLE
Humanity, Alienation and (In)Justice in the Digital Age

ABSTRACT
This talk asks and deals with the following question: How can we understand and explain the challenges humanity is facing today in the light of digitalisation? First, the speaker argues that we need a critical theory of communication and society and that such a theory can in a feasible manner be based on insights from, updates and the further development of approaches that come from a variety of approaches in critical thought, theory and philosophy. The presenter advances an approach to research that stands in the tradition of Critical Political Economy of Communication and combines critical theory, critical empirical social research, and critical ethics. In this context, the notions of radical (digital) humanism, social production, work, injustice as alienation, domination, exploitation, social struggles, media/communication/digital (in)justice, and democratic socialism/socialist democracy play an important role. Second, the talk discusses the question: In what kind of societies do we live? It outlines some aspects of the notion of digital capitalism and compares it to other concepts such as the network society (Castells), surveillance capitalism (Zuboff), and platform capitalism (Srnicek). Third, the talk will present aspect of specific case studies that deal with questions of humanity, justice, and democracy in the digital age. The discussed cases will include the digital mediation of death and labour in the context of COVID-19; a critique of big data-based computational social science research methods; reflections on the political economy of the decolonisation of Media and Communication Studies; reflections on trends in academic publishing and open access publishing in the age of digital capitalism; the spread of false news, authoritarianism, nationalism, racism, patriarchy and fascism online; and discourses on digital, AI-based automation. All of these and other cases pose in one way or another the question: How have humanity and the role of humans in society been transformed in the digital age? Fourth, the presentation will engage with the question of what alternatives there are to the explosion of a variety of forms of (digital) injustice and (digital) alienation that we are experiencing throughout the world today and what role communication and digitalisation play in this context. A key question in this context is how to organise communications, media systems and the Internet in a just manner. The presenter will discuss the role of mediated social struggles, platform co-operatives, and the Public Service Internet.

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

SPEAKER
Thomas Allmer, University of Paderborn, Germany

TITLE
Universities and Academic Labour in Times of Digitalisation and Precarisation

ABSTRACT
This talk provides a critical perspective on the digitalisation of universities and precarisation of academic labour. While research and teaching become more virtual and digital at universities, academic labour is becoming more and more casualised and temporary. This talk aims to analyse and theorise academic labour and study the experiences academic workers have made at universities that are shaped by economic, political and cultural contexts.

Session 3 (15:00 – 16:45)

SPEAKER
Joan Owen, Royal Road University, Canada

TITLE
Exploitation of the Digital New World: Capitalism, Colonialism, Polarization and Social Media in Canada

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
During the Covid-19 pandemic, I witnessed an upsurge of divisiveness in Canada, exemplified by the now infamous 'Freedom Convoy' occupation of Ottawa, Canada in early 2022. This led me to the question: How did Canadians get to this state of polarization? The thesis presented in this paper suggests that capitalism and settler colonial ideologies are the forebearers of the current polarization witnessed in Canadian media, social and otherwise. To make these connections, I will conduct an extended literature review that intends to show how capitalism, via settler colonial expansionist practices lays the groundwork for polarization that has been further exacerbated by the colonization of our relationships by social media technologies.
Capitalism: The Precursor
Capitalism is a system that inherently creates polarization in society (Ekman, 2012; Fuchs, 2010). The capitalist class system, by its very nature, separates people into two distinct and somewhat oppositional groups: the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat (Marx & Engels, 1848 ,1977, 2021). According to Delanty (2019), capitalism operates beyond the economic sphere and is, in fact, embedded in the social fabric of society. Furthermore, once dominant European capitalist nations exhausted their own resources, they turned to the colonization of the New World to fulfill their production needs (Ekman, 2012; Fuchs, 2010). Today, capitalism cannot be disentangled from the modern society which has a commodifying effect on social relations (Delanty, p, 13-15). The foundational principles of capitalism, namely the system of classes, and the commodification of social relations can be tied to polarization, since it is concerned with separation and domination. Emerging out of a capitalist frame, colonialism has inherent structures in place that keep people apart.
Colonialism: An Original Sin of Polarization?
Settler colonial structures and the resulting polarization emerging from them have become embedded in a shared national consciousness in Canadian society. The organizing ideologies of colonial Canada have sowed the seeds for polarization through the colonial power dynamic included in The Doctrine of Discovery, the framework upon which colonialism is justified (Miller, 2019). Colonialism, like capitalism, divides people into two separate and often

oppositional groups (Miller, 2019). Part of the development of any system is the development of a set of behavioural and moral guidelines or rules that govern how we are supposed to act (Ross, 2018, p. 80). In the country now known as Canada, cultural narratives steeped in capitalism and colonialism continue to be handed down from generation to generation and influence actions, norms, and values (Giddens, 1986; Ross, 2018, p. 81). Thus, when capitalism is replicated through colonialist expansion, and divisiveness is a founding cultural norm of these nested systems, polarization becomes embedded in the collective psyche of Canadian society. Both capitalism and colonialism have the intentional act of dividing society into distinct groups and thus have an unintentional consequence of polarization. As capitalism and colonialism continue their expansion into social media, this division is exacerbated (Ekman, 2012; Fuchs, 2010).

New Wave Colonization: Social Media and Its Users Are The Next 'New World'.

The capitalist driven expansion of social media is 'New Wave Colonization'. Social media has allowed capitalist expansion into the realms of information/knowledge and human relationships, which are now claimed as commodities to be monetized. The exploitation of unpaid labour reinforces the hegemony of capitalism in these new digital spaces (Ekman, 2012, p. 166; Fuchs, 2010, p. 191). Social media corporations are some of the richest in the world, yet the people who produce content for these mega-corporations are not equitably compensated, if at all, for their work (Fuchs, 2010). This paper argues that society and workers are, once again, pressured by a capitalist system that keeps asking for more. People are exhausted with little leisure time. What respite time people have is often spent on heavily commercialized social networking sites, controlled by large corporate interests (Ekman, 2012, p. 169). With the capitalist structure of labour exploitation intact, social media today has moved from a free voice of the people to another field of information domination where users spend their time researching, sharing, and posting online for free (Fuchs, 2010). The more things change the more things stay the same (Karr, 1859, p. 278, in French) and history is repeating itself with class division, wealth inequity, and the exploitation of workers and citizens. Regardless of the passage of time, the structures within capitalism and colonialism yield the same outcome: polarization.

The Outcome: Polarization

Capitalism drives settler colonialist expansion, both capitalism and settler colonialism contain polarizing structures. These structures are intensified by social media. In today's society, there is little time for leisure and late-stage capitalism, or the age of entropy, has us fending for ourselves in individualistic ways (Streeck, 2016/2021). When people spend much of their leisure time on the participatory internet, homogenous groups form and group polarization ensues (Iandoli et al., 2021, abstract; Sunstein, 1999, pp. 3–4). Group polarization, often referred to colloquially as 'echo chambers', is not a new phenomenon, nor is it a product of technology. Unlike historical revolutions, people today are too preoccupied with the capitalist mode of accumulation to fight the employers; instead, they fight with each other via groups formed on the participatory internet (Bernacer et al., 2021; Darius & Urquhart, 2021; Ekman, 2012; Jungkunz, 2021). As is the thesis of this research, with the foundation of disconnection due to capitalism and colonialism, polarization among conformed groups on social media is inevitable and bred into our collective Canadian psyche.

Conclusion

In this exploratory literature review, I show how the ideologies of capitalism and colonialism both have inherent polarizing structures that are enhanced through predacious social media technologies. Capitalism creates polarization through class divisions and colonialism creates polarization through separation by power and race. Furthermore, the use and exploitation of labour is ever present in both systems. While many thinkers argue that polarization is a direct outcome of misinformation (see for example, Au, Ho and Chiu, 2022), I aim to show that polarization is actually a logical outcome of late capitalism. From capitalism through colonialism and the new wave colonization of social media today, polarization is the inevitable outcome. The self-styled 'Freedom Convoy' can be thought of as a reasonable consequence of the broken systems of capitalism and settler colonialism, supercharged by technologies like social media. Though originally thought of as a unifying technology, social media is embedded with the polarizing foundations of its forebearers. Though this paper focuses on these

divisions in a Canadian context, the 'Freedom Convoy' and the sentiments that drove it, are a worldwide phenomenon.

SPEAKER
Marylin Luis Grillo, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Spain

TITLE
Latin American cinemas in Spain's transnational SVOD catalogs: Which Latin American films do Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, HBO Max (Max), Disney + and Apple TV + buy and why?

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
The film industry value chain evolves from production or creation to distribution, exhibition and, finally, the effective consumption of films. Subscription video-on-demand (SVOD) platforms are based on exclusivity distribution as a brand identity; thus, their catalogs, geographically and temporally delimited, are structured with contents that monopolize most of the promotional strategies and other additional audiovisual products, which therefore find the possibility of circulating and reaching potential audiences. In a dynamic environment, which is already reaching evident levels of economic saturation of the market, this paper focuses on those subscription video on demand services that operate in Spain's marketplaces but at the same time have a global reach and their matrix company is located in the United States. Under these criteria, it has been studied Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, HBO Max (Max), Disney + and Apple TV +, since their transnational character proposes a negotiation of cross-border political, cultural, creative, audiovisual production, media ownership, circulation and reception dynamics. Cinematography produced by Latin American countries has in these SVOD services an increasingly frequent and necessary marketing and exhibition window to recover investments, obtain profits and continue producing in national contexts marked by the low screen share in theaters in their domestic markets. International distribution becomes, then, an even more important link in the value chain, and Spain is one of the main foreign markets for these countries. After mapping the availability of films with at least a Latin American country producers, it has been found that there is a low availability, however, a deeper look from the perspective of audiovisual diversity and the Political Economy of Communication leads us to asks: what factors influence the acquisition decisions by these companies of the distribution rights, whether exclusive or not, of Latin American films?
As a first answer to this question, the following research objectives have been established: 1. To determine visible patterns in the supply of Latin American films in the Spanish catalogs of these VOD services; 2. Based on these patterns, discern business strategies in companies' decisions to purchase or not films with Latin American production. The methodology used is novel and challenging, since all research that focuses on VOD catalogs faces the challenge of the lack of transparency of the algorithms of these companies. In this sense, we created an ad hoc tool to determine the films and analyse them, while relying on databases, observation of catalogs and documentary bibliographic review. The indicators are: country or countries of production, format (fiction/documentary; real reference film/animated film), genre, year of release, production company and producer, director, actors and actresses, languages of the film, soundtrack, maturity rating, previous circulation of the film in theaters or if it was direct to streaming and awards, and nominations, as well as presentations at major film festivals. In addition, the paper included both those that had the Original or Exclusive label and those that did not. The analysis of the supply offer allows us to verify the importance of factors, such as film director or the Latin American star system, in the acquisition of cinematographic works by Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, HBO Max (Max), Disney + and Apple TV +. This result is even more significant if it frames to those films that are distributed with the Original label of any of these platforms. Another decisive factor is the "previous reputation of the film", that is, if it has been

nominated or won an international competition or if it is considered a cult or emblematic film. These films constitute an important and generally the most prominent partof the catalogs. However, an in-depth analysis reveals little diversity in the totality of works available and poor representation of the diverse identities within the region.

SPEAKER

Lilly Lixin Lu, Stockholm School of Economics, Sweden

TITLE
Institutional Logic Perspective on SVoD Content Strategy

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Cultural production today is undergoing a transitioning period driven by platformisation, the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries. (Powell & Nieborg, 2018, p. 4276) Both cultural production and consumption are increasingly contingent on a few powerful digital platforms, ever much so since the abruption of COVID-19. These organizations are now under wide scrutinization in Information Science, Cultural Policy, Media Studies, and Political Economy. (Morris, 2020; Powell et al., 2021; Plantin et al., 2019; Prey, 2017)
The research attention paid to SVOD platforms galvanized not only from the subjects' sheer economic volume, but also growing impacts on industry structure and field dynamics. Digital platforms' data driven approaches to creative activities introduced uneasiness amongst researchers and policymakers. Many problematizes SVOD platforms' disruption of existing, default conventions of creating contents and denounces their production legitimacy in lack of artistic values or disregard of social responsibility. As these organizations far fetch in reach, there is a compelling need to investigate their socio-cultural implications and to generate a reviewed understanding of creativity. The application of an institutional lens is useful here given its ability to situate the organizations in question in wider social contexts. Additionally, multiple traces indicated that digital platforms bear institutional attributes and prompted structural changes. This paper borrows the concept of institutional logic to analyse the influence of streaming video-on-demand (henceforth SVoD) platforms on culture production in relation to wider constellations and structures of meanings they are embedded in. (Powell et al., 2021) I intend to investigate the logics driving their content-related activities and the advocating effects of algorithms.
Theoretical Framework
Institutional logic is the "set of material practices and symbolic constructions [that] constitute organizing principles". (Friedland and Alford, 1991, p.248; Thornton and Ocasio, 1999) The co existence of logic and institutions gives birth to contradictory social arrangements, which enables individuals and organizations to act, or in other words, to attain agency. (Johansen & Waldorff, 2015) Institutions from this perspective are dynamic structures constantly under transformation, whilst actors strategically manoeuvre different sets of logics in accordance with their interests. Platformisation phenomenon analysed from this outlook may widen the array of perspectives to institutional changes.
The agency of technology has been an unamiable proposition for many institutional theorists, but more recent organizational research began to consider the relationship between institutions and technology. Pinch (2008) criticised the tendency to downplay materiality in neo-institutionalism and questioned whether technology itself qualifies as institution. Institutions have an undeniable material dimension that is closely tied to the much more promoted social dimension. Technology hence is best understood when studied within the institutional framework as a socially embedded construct subject to and liable for institutional structure. (Gawer & Phillips, 2013)

Research Questions

This research project is inspired by prior academic conversations surrounding digital platforms, and culture and creative industries, which led to the following research questions: 1) What logic or combination of logics drives content-related activities at SVoD platforms? 2) To what extent does algorithm shape these activities and the logics that drive them?

I intend to conduct a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with SVoD employees specialised in content sourcing and curation affairs. The interviews are further supplemented by relevant media sources and SVoD company documents that reflects organizational rationales. Due to the open endedness and novelty of the research problem and possibly also data, I will attend to the analysis abductively. Pragmatically, I contemplate a combination of abductive inference and thematic analysis. This allows a recursive process between data collection and analysis that stops only at the point of saturation where new themes are exhausted.

Content Sourcing and Curation

Content sourcing and curation are core activities adding values towards service based SVoD platforms. Through controlled decision-making of what, where and when to display productions, SVoD platforms determine contents' onsite visibility and potential popularity. As such, SVoD platforms can be perceived to contain attributes of gatekeeping. Content sourcing by SVoD platforms usually entails two types of activities: content acquisition and content production. Content acquisition refers to the process of SVoD platforms obtaining license of distribution of a given production for a certain timeframe. Content production, on the other hand, implies that the SVoD platforms contributed directly prior to or during the production process, and claimed at least in part, if not the full ownership of the content.

Content curation at SVoD today is usually mesh of algorithmic prediction and human enterprise. The flagship recommendation system at Netflix, for example, uses semantics to understand user behaviours as metrics and customise suggestions. Powerful as its algorithm is, Netflix's reliance on human curators grew substantially since the initial testing in 2019. It has been disclosed that nowadays content curation at Netflix is 30% algorithmic and 70% human, representing a rather radical trajectory.

Entangling Logics

SVoD platforms display intrinsic institutional characteristics, an important aspect being that they enable and constrain the creative undertakings simultaneously. (Webster, 2011) On one hand, their technological affordances allowed capitals and distribution channels for more eccentric productions, and their global content sourcing strategy extended the reach of contents produced on a more local scale. On the other, SVoD platforms' distinct approach to content ownership and their algorithm-driven curation mode forged an imbalanced power relation between them and other stakeholders. As no outsiders can access their data or technological black box, they are cut off from direct audience feedbacks demonstrated by viewership or revenues.

Motion picture industries may exhibit very different logics in particular of the specific geopolitical environments in regional or national contexts. By embedding themselves in various markets and institutional structures, existing industry logics played a transitional role in SVoD platforms' identity construction and relational mediation. During the process, SVoD's inherent logics and existing industry logics meshed up and consolidated. The phenomenon informs how new organizational actors with a distinct set of logics strategically draw on the established one amid an environment of multiple logics during an institutional process. A closer investigation of SVoD's institutional process may educate us of the optimal institutional conditions more compatible with the SVoD logic, which could be meaningful for policymaking.

Tuesday (12 September)

Session 1 (10:00 – 11:30)

SPEAKER
Benjamin Birkinbine, University of Nevada, United States

TITLE
Incorporating the Digital Commons: Corporate Involvement in Free and Open Source Software

ABSTRACT

Session 2 (12:00 – 13:30)

SPEAKER
Toni Prug, University of Rijeka, Croatia

TITLE
Global battles for the economic determination of form: capital and public wealth

ABSTRACT
Social scientists tend to utilise the concept of capital to explain every object of research when it comes to anything resembling wealth. If the fit between the concept and an object is not straight forward, the link is forged. A theoretical understanding of the object develops to create the fit. Differences between forms of wealth are erased while everything outside the circuit and logic of capital is treated as a temporary exception, often under the name of market failure. Mirroring capital's predatory logic of limitless expansion, scientists continue to utilise the concept to invade unpacified spheres and theoretical schools across the social sciences. A range of theories and practices continue to resists the dominance of the logic and concept of capital: commons, peer production, degrowth, diverse economies, the foundational economy, public-common partnerships, critical development theories, and more than any other, freed from the immediate demands of industrial development and party politics of the 20th century socialist states, strands of marxist theories.

In this session we will investigate the social and economic determination of forms as a methodological direction by which we can break out of the image of uniformity constructed by the concept of capital. It will be demonstrated that an immense volume and variety of forms of wealth and productions co-exist within capitalist social formations. This wealth ranges from the historically much older and mostly collectively consumed outputs (military, physical infrastructure, urban planning, public administration and legal institutions), relatively newer and mostly individually consumed outputs (public health care, housing, education, various cultural content etc.), civic sector activities, to the latest generation of digitally storable wealth available free of charge, appearing in science, culture, entertainment and technology. Typically, in clear contrast to commodities, there is no direct profit motive, the vast majority is publicly funded and allocated either according to some specified criteria, or at some discretionary price (e.g., public sport facilities and publicly funded arts). Despite major differences between those broadly grouped types of outputs and productions, and despite the highly problematic use of the term wealth for military and police spending, we capture their common social character on the highest level of abstraction with the thick historical concept of public wealth.

We will discuss the application of form analysis in the realm of software and digital platforms, demonstrating the importance of licences as legal forms that shape social and economic possibilities

and outcomes. Given the global capitalist competition between firms, national states and regions, and in the context of inequalities and climate changes as perhaps the most serious contemporary problems, it will be argued that public wealth in its egalitarian form, when outputs are available free of charge and outside of circuits of capital, can be a significant contribution to the global production of equality. Freed from being formed by capital, shaped by legal forms that allow universal free use, software, medical drugs, biological materials, technological solutions and sciences at large could be utilised in circuits of global and local wealth production. This would especially benefit the less richer countries and regions that have been subjected to the extractivist global economy, and whose populations have been hit hardest by the climate changes, despite contributing only a tiny fraction to the global warming.

Session 3 (15:00 – 16:45)

SPEAKER
Tobias Stadler, University of Oldenburg, Germany

TITLE
Enclosures and Progress: Understanding the Historical Continuities and Ruptures of the Transition to Digital Capitalism

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
The reorganization of current capitalism is a central point in most concepts trying to explain the transition into what some describe as digital capitalism - be it called "terraforming",[1] "landnahme",[2] or even "neo-feudalization".[3] Various concepts try to describe discontinuous phenomena, highlight differing aspects in these processes, and even disagree on fundamental questions like the historical particularity of such processes - but they are inherently connected in what they want to describe: The expansion of the logic of value into more and more aspects of our daily lifes, the ability for capital to command and control almost everything through datafication and capture, and more generally the regulation, stabilization and enforcement of a continuous but renewed mode of production.

In this paper, I argue that the notion of enclosure is a key to understanding the changes in contemporary capitalism and their resulting fractures. I will take a closer look at (1) the processes of capitalist enclosure which lead to this situation, and their (2) impact on our social reproduction and how they reorganise our bodies, subjectivities, or communities. I will further examine the (3) ideological ideas of technological and historical progress which enable and normalise them.

Looking at the history of social networking from the perspective of open protocols and alternative networks shows a long series of (1) technological and economical enclosures. This uncovers centralisation and enclosure as a core strategy of the platform-form generally, and commercial social networking platforms (CSNPs) specifically. Their walled gardens resemble the fenced-off common land of the historical primitive accumulation[4] not only in name but also in function: Removing people from the means of (re-)production in order to impose their own exploitative systems, thereby sucessfully trying to become necessary infrastructures of our social, political and public life[5]. Datafication and capture[6] are not passive, but rather active mechanisms reformatting the processes they surveil, to make them parsable for automated systems - and therefore more efficient for the production of exchange value. The open protocols and standards powering the internet are a core focus of the free software/user freedom movements, but at the same time enable these processes of proprietary platformisation, mirroring a long connection between DIY-media cultures and digital capitalism. Examining this connection more closely is important to understand the current configuration of the ongoing processes of real subsumption of our sociality under capital.

Subsuming our sociality and reconfiguring it for more efficient exploitation implies (2) a restructuring of our social reproduction. The field platforms intervene in is what I call sociality, and it includes not only the posting of memes and comments, but means the whole of our social relations on which we depend to reproduce ourselves as subjects, as workers, as humans.7In this sense, social reproduction has material as well as ideological sides, both heavily affected by processes of enclosure. The "crisis of social reproduction" therefore does not only mean the destruction of reproductive resources or care structures, but needs to be analysed in the context of changing subjectivities and practices, often gendered ones.8 Subsumption of the social and unpaid labour is not new or specific to digital capitalism,9so understanding their current, historically specific configuration is important to show continuities and breaks: While there are specific platforms for organizing reproductive work, the big CSNPs are still a central place to find more informal work or help. But their main part in the ongoing processes of enclosure is the normalization of a user-subject: Apellated by the interfaces and structured by the protocols, fractured and regrouped by social data, and thereby removed from a collectivity beyond the industrial metrics of numerical likes and shares. This radicalisation of neoliberal individualism still works under the guise of community and collectivity, undermining solidarity, care and organizing even more effectively. Capture and datafication mean insecurity and precarity for the people, but security and predictability for capital.

These processes of enclosure are supported by a long-running ideological project, recently returning as a powerful force. The notion of (3) technological determinism understands technology as an autonomous agent with its own interests, moving along a nebulous notion of progress.14 In this view, technologies and their impacts appear as things happening to us, being their own force like nature - rather than part of a deliberate capitalist project, we are forced to take part in. And once every social, economic or cultural advancement just appears a consequence of technological process, every technology beginns to appear good, resistance against technological regimes of power seems unjustified. Just like primitive accumulation removed people from their means of reproduction, and changing subjectification removes them from their communities and themselves, such ideologies of progress remove them from the historical process, from politics itself.16 There are deep connections between historical and technological determinism, both in how they frame the necessity of labour and how they constantly point away from the present as the time and place to act politically, and they have often been used to enforce and normalise historical transformations in the interest of capital.

A core point of the three aspects of enclosure I just sketched is the sublimation of actual people under the process of production. Whereas most analyses of the emergence of digital capitalism mostly focus on the sphere of circulation, my perspective on enclosure aims to bring the re|production of value, bodies, and subjectivities back into center. Looking specifically at the capitalist enclosures of historical and current open protocols and alternative platforms (from SMTP/Email to XMPP/Jabber and Mastodon/the Fediverse) shows the historical specifity of this new phase of enclosures. Understanding the historical specifics of the restructuring project we are facing now may help us formulate an intersectional critique, aiding us to overcome the platform, the cloud and hopefully capitalism itself.

SPEAKER
Thomas Zenkl, University of Graz, Austria

TITLE
Algorithmic Eruptions: Exploring a Research Agenda for Tactics in Crises

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Despite, or especially because of their ubiquity, processes of algorithmic selection within contemporary media ecologies and their consequences, both for the political economy of the platforms that utilise them as well as for users that are being subordinated by them pose great challenges for research: Woven into the fabric of everyday life and mundane interactions, subtle algorithmic guidance and subliminal manipulation are exerted on often unaware consumers, who, in trying to make sense of them, rely on the industry's carefully crafted "imaginaries" (Bucher 2017) of algorithmic precision and infallibility (Beer 2017). Moreover, research shows how "algorithm awareness" is unequally stratified within societal groups (Gran, Booth, and Bucher 2021; Siles, Valerio-Alfaro, and Meléndez-Moran 2022), how algorithmic systems and their social consequences are being perceived differently along algorithmic literacies (Starke et al. 2022) and how processes of algorithmic mediation serve to stabilize and optimize a capitalist status quo, perpetuating economic inequalities and discriminations (Carr 2014; Eubanks 2017). As manifestations of socio-technical power within a technological-institutional "apparatus", different readings ascribe to AI applications a positioning on the political spectrum between "conservative" (Zajko 2021) and "fascist" (McQuillan 2022), but in any case in the service of the capital that mobilises them.

Researching algorithms in practice therefore usually means talking about phenomena that - if known by a target group at all - are difficult to reduce to a common denominator and that – through their opaque operation as infrastructures – hide in plain sight and actively mask their underlying agenda. Thus, I argue for a reconceptualization of the study of algorithms by focusing on the irritations they produce to understand how even unaware and illiterate users actively participate in shaping dynamic algorithmic systems through acts of resistance, a concept inspired by Scott's (1985) idea of "peasant resistance": Algorithms "articulate" (Airoldi and Rokka 2022) themselves within practice, but their presence only manifests when expectations of their functions are being disrupted, when their actions deviate from the anticipated "flow of things" and they and they infringe the norms attributed to them, in some cases violently (Bellanova et al. 2021). This focus, anchored in the manifold algorithmically produced irritations, can be a novel way of exploring the pervasive, yet mostly subtle effects of algorithmic regimes (Jarke et al. forthcoming) and the consequences of their epistemological authority in the production of truth (Beer 2016). By considering users' perceptions and tactics (Certeau 2011), a re centering of human agency over dystopian notions of algorithmic omnipotence will not only embed empirical research into users' experiences, but also help to avoid the reproduction of ideologically driven paratexts of AI and their discursive perpetuation.

However, as present ethnomethodological approaches to "thickly describe" algorithmic "doings" within different context often ignore users' potential to actively resist normative algorithmic claims and lack the capacity to contextualize such resistance within a broader critique of capitalist relations, it seems necessary to bridge these gaps by referring to critical theories of technologization and algorithmization.

In my contribution, I want to explore and discuss how invisible algorithmic infrastructures and their ontological consequences can be assessed empirically by focusing on the manifold irritations they produce, how a sociology of conflict and crisis aided by breaching experiments can provide an empirical starting point to do so, and how resistances to the algorithmic management of everyday experience can emerge as a tactical bottom-up response to the surfacing fissions of algorithmic regimes. Thus, by investigating the methodological possibilities of "hacking" algorithms within everyday practices to make users underlying yet often prereflexive knowledge explicit, I want to empirically examine the moment of the eruption errors (ERRuptions) in users experience to better understand how and why users resist the means of their algorithmic cognition.

Wednesday (13 September)

Session 1 (10:00 – 11:30)

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
Kylie Jarrett, Maynooth University, Ireland

TITLE
Understanding Workers in the Platform Economy: The Case of the Etsy Strike

ABSTRACT
In April 2022, nearly 30,000 Etsy sellers, declared a strike, putting their stores into vacation mode for a week in protest against a substantial increase in fees by the retail platform. This strike, though, raises some complex and important questions about how to understand the range of actors working in the platform economy. Are Etsy traders workers? They are, formally, independent retailers or artisanal producers but their grievances in the strike echo those of other platforms workers, so what exactly are they? Relatedly, what is their class position – and how do we fit the strike into it? These are the questions this paper will systematically work through in order to understand the nature of Etsy traders' labour. How to answer these questions is important as platform traders are an often overlooked part of the platform economy ecosystem. But it is also important because self-employment and entrepreneurialism via digital platforms is an increasing feature of the economy, demanding critical exploration of work beyond waged labour.

Session 2 (12:00 – 13:30)

SPEAKER

TITLE
Trajectory of film work as precarious project work: From organisations of associated labour, through semi-permanent workgroups to gig jobs

ABSTRACT
The aim of this presentation is to show the trajectory of film work as precarious project work; firstly, this will be done by examining the policy instruments oriented towards the film industry in the late period of the former Yugoslavia, where I will try to illustrate how the market principles based on the project logic, nested themselves within the models of organising film work. This has been exacerbated by the entering of the Yugoslav film industry in the global film industry flows through the service production, that is, through catering to the so-called 'runaway productions'. The first foreign film productions started to take place in the 1960s in the former Yugoslavia, with Jadran film (Zagreb, Croatia) and Avala film (Belgrade, Serbia) playing the key role, but the bigger productions came in the 1970s and 80s. The decentralisation model of Yugoslav cinematography introduced in 1962 enabled different republics to have their own film policy trajectory. In the case of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, this model in 1967 was based on the Cinematography Fund oriented towards the production model of the auteur cinematography. In 1976, the Law on Cinematography based film production on the basis of the self-management postulate that created the Self-Management Community for Cinematography of the Socialist Republic of Croatia (Samoupravna zajednica za kinematografiju SR Hrvatske (SIZ KIN)). Thus, in 80ies Croatia, with the strong film company and film studio Jadran Film, the organisation of the funding of SIZ KIN through project applications by film workers on the one hand, and working on the Hollywood and other market-based cinematographies' films, the Yugoslav film workers have been among the first to experience the market project-to-project approach. Secondly, the presentation will show how in the following years, the approach of semi-permanent work groups that have been established has been evident in the organisation of film

production in Croatia, especially with the introduction of the foreign film production incentive programme (cash rebate system introduced by HAVC-Croatian Audiovisual Centre). In conclusion, it will be shown that the lack of tradition of unionisation of film labour from Yugoslavia to today, in the context of the small industry opens up possibilities of the exploitation of the film workers, especially considering the recent entry of the 'streamers' and their gig work policies for film labour.

Session 3 (15:00 – 16:45)

SPEAKER
Marlene Radl, University of Vienna, Austria

TITLE
Concentrated Masculinism? The Feminist Political Economy of the Media in the Context of Authoritarian-Populism

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Right-wing, authoritarian populism has been characterized as masculinist for several reasons – from male party membership and parliamentary representatives, male constituencies and voters to a masculinist antifeminist ideology (Sauer 2020). To become popular, however, masculinist authoritarian-populism relies on the support of mass media, not only to make populist politics more visible and publicly relevant, but also to help populist parties to consolidate their power once they reached electoral success. While existing literature established the role of media in the rise and endurance of right-wing authoritarian populism with a focus on its cultural and discursive pillars (e.g., Mazzoleni et al. 2003, Wodak 2022), they offer fewer clues about the structural or political economic entanglements between media ownership dynamics and democratic backsliding. Hence, the connection between the rise of authoritarianism and the erosion of "the democratic distribution ownership principle" (Baker 2007, p. 10) within the media sphere deserves closer examination. While some scholars have recently argued that news media ownership concentration provides favorable conditions for populist politics (Schnyder et al. 2023, Freedman 2018), gendered dimensions of this connection have so far been muted. However, neither political nor media power is gender neutral; power and power concentration, as critical feminist scholarship has long established, is gendered. Media ownership concentration not only directly impacts women's representation in media governing structures and media content, but also comes with de-democratizing effects to disadvantage women on a structural level: it concentrates power in the hand of a few (wealthy) men, reinforces existing structural blockages and consequently impedes women's voices in the public sphere (Byerly 2014). The inquiry about women's communicative power in media ownership attains a distinctive significance in authoritarian-populist conjunctures when media ownership concentration not only serves economic, but also political and cultural ends.
Our study therefore aims to explore the relationality between the concentrated male media ownership and masculinist-authoritarian populism from the lens of feminist political economy of communication and structural masculinism. By drawing on a comprehensive news media ownership data-set created for the POPBACK research project, we employ a comparative analysis of women's involvement in news media ownership across Austria, Slovenia, and Turkey. The sample countries chosen for this study have been exposed to masculinist authoritarian-populist politics in the last two decades, albeit in very different contexts and to varying degrees: While Austria represents the clearest case of populist backlash in Western Europe due to the early "Haiderization" of politics starting in the 1990s, Slovenia as a CEE country with a post-socialist history has experienced intermittent authoritarian-populist governments over the past two decades that have been characterized by fierce control over the media. As a non-EU trendsetter country in authoritarian populism, we also include Turkey which since 2002 has been uninterruptedly ruled by the authoritarian-populist and masculinist party of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. With this sample we aim to

reveal the similarities between the countries' mediascapes in terms of common patterns of patriarchal gender structure, family business models, media ownership concentration and authoritarian restructuring, whether these are situated within the categories of Western European democracies, post-socialist contexts or the non-West.

In this article we first present the state of research on feminist media studies and political economy of communication to substantiate the severe research gap on gender and media ownership (concentration) in both traditions. Second, we discuss our theoretical framework that draws on the feminist political economy approach as well as on theories on structural masculinism. We then present descriptive data about women's ownership in the news media sector in the three countries and introduce key cases to reveal how masculinist, concentrated, and clientelist media ownership play out empirically in the countries under study. In this respect, we specifically dwell on the place of family businesses in media markets as well as the clientelist ties between media owners and populist political parties. We thereby provide missing evidence of the masculinist configuration of media ownership within the three studied media spaces. While it is not possible to suggest a definitive causal relationship, we emphasize a hitherto overlooked facet of media ownership that simultaneously contributes to provide a suitable background for authoritarian-populism: the masculinist, clientelist, informal, and patriarchal-family structure within media ownership. We thus conclude by discussing the affinity between masculinist concentrated media ownership structures and masculinist authoritarian-populist developments.

SPEAKER
Annika Weiss, Goldsmiths, UK

TITLE
The creative indentured labourer: Initiating structural change in film work

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Headlines of striking workers regularly dominate our present media reporting. They are churning everyday life, whether it is affecting our means of transportation, our travel plans, our health and care systems or our universities. Where strong unions exist, organised strike disruptions often result in improvement of working conditions or wage increase. What happens if whole industries developed deliberate strategies to prevent unionisation? What strategies keep labour in film industries alienated and how does it affect workers?

Working conditions in the film industry remain marginalised, although offscreen workers are exposed to precarity, unfair pay, long hours, limited opportunities, discrimination, unsafe working environments and thus suffer from lack of unionisation (Gill, 2011; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). Freelance and self-employed individuals constitute the largest workforce within the cultural industries, where e.g. only 5% German film industry workers are permanently employed (Langer, 2021: 14). In four years as a camera assistant, I signed at least 64 contracts - in hope that each additional working day would secure state support for the industry's periods of unemployment in winter. The worker's precariousness became shortly exposed when whole creative industries shut down in a global health crisis (Oltermann, 2021). Little attention has been paid to these worker's creative autonomy in the context of cost cutting strategies and crises disruptions while the industry is expanding.

Like Ursell (2000) already observed in her study on British TV workers, the individual labourer undergoes a "self-commodification process" enabled through informal structures within a "social factory" (Gill and Pratt, 2008). In the pursuit of self-fulfilment through 'creative' or positively connoted work, the film labourer's perspective focuses on the valued autonomy that the market

pressures them into. Depending on the department and position, they thereby produce different forms of what Lazzarato called "immaterial labour" (1996). While the more classical 9-

to-5 office employee spends their working life within a specific time frame, immaterial forms of labour involve time fractured processes that interfere with or are a part of private life (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). As a result, a customised product is created and judged by its market profitability and quality. The labour invested in the final product often involves incalculable hours of dedication, which become invisible or are disregarded by the remitter to secure the maximum potential profit. The commodification of creative products additionally challenges the actual space for creativity in the cultural industries. Through the high initial investment in creative products and the uncertainty of successful product distribution, labour cost cutting is a popular choice within the cultural industries (Berry, 2019), exploited through imprecision of immaterial labour and the precarious situation of short-term employment. Neoliberal capitalism has therefore advertised a mirage of a performance society, that creates social inequalities through highly intensive and consuming work (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). As Bale (2022) investigated, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the precarity of film industry workers, whose lives are shaped and dependent on periods of economic flow and stagnation in relation to state policy structures. Only

Extended Abstract Annika Weiss through the lens of a film industry worker on the micro-level is it therefore possible to democratise whole institutions (Weiss, 2023) or to initiate macro-level structural change. In my research project, I'm investigating the present state, motivations and organisation of film labour in Germany and the UK. The aim is to provide a unique perspective, in order to identify possible improvements to working conditions and to challenge political, economic and technological developments that produce social injustices. As an experienced camera assistant, I'm exploring the concept of film labour in context of affective (McRobbie, 2010), immaterial labour (Lazzarato, 1996) as well as union movement and state support in both countries. Freelance and self-employed individuals and their subjectivities will constitute the focus of this research to map wider structural change to political economies. My specific background allows me to access the networks needed to scrutinise and compare film work in the UK and Germany. Therefore, my project will draw on quantitive and distinctive qualitative methods to paint a picture of the German and UK film industries, where freelance workers are balancing creativity, autonomy, rising workload and precarity due to increasing financial cuts and crises disruptions. This project will combine cultural studies' research with critical political economic theories, not only to map work related issues, but also to explore and structure solutions. The findings will help me to identify work exploitation and biases in film to determine micro- and macro-level improvements to creative autonomy.

SPEAKER
Corrine Weinstein, Rutgers, United States

TITLE
The neoliberalization of identity politics in American television production

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
With the rise of American television streaming services such as Netflix, television programming has become increasingly complex and diversified (Lotz, 2018; Mittell, 2015), which in turn has created space for representations of diverse identities on screen beyond the normative and privileged American identity of straight, white, male, middle-/upper-class characters. While this growth in representation has been upheld by some as evidence of a "post-" society no longer organized by

systemic inequalities related to race, gender, class, and sexual identity, neoliberal ideology inevitably constrains the progress signaled by more diverse representation, and must be scrutinized accordingly.

In this project, I argue that neoliberal ideology has in fact co-opted identity politics and assimilated them into the dominant neoliberal order so that diverse representation on television is rendered apolitical and thus fit for the neoliberal marketplace, or what I refer to as "the neoliberalization of identity politics." By emphasizing visibility over collective action, diverse representation on television is used to bolster the idea that the marketplace is an equal-opportunity space for all regardless of identity, while identity is repurposed as a commodity fit for consumption. In this conception, systemic inequalities based in identity are deemed irrelevant and the persistence of economic inequality is reframed as an individual shortcoming, rather than a product of systemic forces. Utilizing concepts including plastic representation (Warner, 2017), homonormativity (Henderson, 2013), and neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg, 2018), I show how diverse representation appears to challenge neoliberal ideology, but in reality, is neutralized by it. Specifically, I situate this process in a larger discussion of how the American television industry has been shaped by neoliberal logics that emphasize the prioritization of profit and facilitate the consolidation of privatized media power that ultimately serves to strengthen existing wealth inequality between elites and the public (Harvey, 2005; Táíwò, 2022; Ventura, 2012; Wasko & Meehan, 2020). Although services like Netflix appear to offer the promise of greater consumer choice and power to affect programming decisions through an emphasis on individualization, individualization has become yet another neoliberal business strategy in which algorithms orient viewer tastes towards what is most profitable and culturally homogenous (Higson, 2021; Napoli, 2016).

In recognizing the limitations of the American television industry as it functions as part of a larger neoliberal state, it is also important to recognize how and why some stories on television break away from neoliberal constraints and actually produce subversive storytelling (e.g., Bratslavsky, 2019; Hassler-Forest, 2018). As such, this project seeks to understand how stories on television are both constrained and liberated by technological and cultural developments in the American television industry.

Thursday (14 September)

Session 1 (10:00 – 11:30)

SPEAKER
Jernej Amon Prodnik, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

TITLE
Towards a Political Economy of News Sources

ABSTRACT
In the past few decades, production of news has been one of the central topics in sociology of the media (Tumber 2014, 65–69). Authors have pondered what are the major sources for journalists, what journalistic routines lead to their use, and who is deemed a legitimate source by the journalistic community (Gans 1979/2004; Schlesinger 1990; Bourdieu 1998, 69–70; Franklin 2003; Franklin and Carlson 2011). Gans's (1979/2004, 116) classic study described these relationships as a dance, where "sources seek access to journalists, and journalists seek access to sources", with sources usually leading the tango. With digitisation, connections between news, journalism and its sources have diversifed and intensifed through increasingly ubiquitous modes of news production and distribution, such as aggregation and algorithmisation.

There is little doubt that studies, which usually worked under the label of sociology of news, provided invaluable insights into the newsroom relations and (in)formal rules governing the production of news. Most of them, however, remain focused on the micro or at best meso-level of the analysis, putting scant attention to the social totality and its influence on the journalistic production process. With only a few exceptions (Tumber 2014, 67) have authors asked how unequal distribution of power in society influences production of news, why certain voices, social groups, and even whole geographic areas seem to be systematically overlooked in the process of producing news, or what these inequalities mean for the public sphere and its normative purpose.

The main aim of the paper is to re-examine the prevailing approaches to news sources by employing political economy of communication (PEC) as a macro-level approach. The paper provides brief sketches to demonstrate the significant value of PEC for these discussions, including: a) media as capitalist industries, which points at the crucial tendencies specific to media in capitalist society, but also includes the increasingly important role of corporate ownership and global concentration of the media (Hardy 2014, Ch. 4); b) journalism-as-labour that looks at the processes of precarisation, pauperisation, and general degradation of journalism in neoliberalism that brought impoverishment of the newsrooms and a deepening crisis in local news (Pickard 2020, Ch. 3); c) increasing reliance of journalists on information subsidies, which includes a variety of interconnected issues, including inequalities in the international news flows on the one hand, that have a long history in PEC and have been widely discussed in the NWICO movement, but remain as pertinent as ever with continuing concentration of the news agencies and shrinking foreign reporting (Artz 2017), and on the other hand also the role of PR and corporate propaganda in narrowing the scope of available news sources; d) digitisation and increasing commodification of communication on digital platforms that act as the new gatekeepers, which is deepening the problem of news overload and re-shaping journalistic information sourcing in the asymmetrical interdependence between media and digital platforms.

Through these illustrations, the paper demonstrates how PEC as a critical and holistic approach can be employed for a much deeper understanding of news sources, while also demonstrating that approaching this issue in a too narrow manner is necessarily incomplete.

Session 2 (12:00 – 13:30)

SPEAKER
Sašo Slaček Brlek, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

TITLE
TBA

ABSTRACT
TBA

Session 3 (15:00 – 16:45)

SPEAKER
Igor Išpanović, University of Belgrade, Serbia

TITLE
Multi-journalists: digital technology transforming the news work and labour conditions in Serbian local media

ABSTRACT
Precarity is a fundamental condition of contemporary journalism (Örnebring, 2018). This is particularly the case for the media workers in post-socialist European countries, where it never fully consolidated as an industry, while the process of transition from state-owned to private entities proved to be a major challenge for the autonomy of the profession (Örnebring, 2018). Thus, more than two-thirds of employed journalists in Serbia find themselves in a worryingly precarious position (Mihailović, 2015). The introduction and penetration of digital technologies and platform logic in the newsroom and everyday routines exacerbated this issue, with journalists having to fulfill quotas, work long hours and develop new technological skills to meet the demands of editors and job market, while receiving insufficient financial compensation for their effort. Despite this, research paid little attention to (digital) journalists' working conditions (Cohen, 2018). Furthermore, Örnebring (2018) stresses out the gap in analysing how precarity and (digital) technologies are interlinked on the micro-level. The aim of this paper is to address the outlined issue and explore how digital technologies are changing journalistic working conditions in online news outlets in Serbia. In doing so, the research utilizes the labour process theory framework, inspired by authors such as Nicole Cohen (2012; 2018) and Henrik Örnebring (2010; 2018). This approach has proved to be beneficial in this regard, as it allows to examine the relations between labour and technology, and how these tools are „deployed by news organizations in the production process" (Hayes, 2021: 2). The contribution of this reseach is twofold. Firstly, it deterritorializes the discussion from the predominant Western setting and situates it in the Serbian, post-socialist context. This move will enrich the existing literature, as journalists in this Balkan country have limited resources and work in impoversihed conditions, with some media, especially on the local level, unable to afford or invest in new technologies (Krstić, 2023). Secondly, most research focused, understandably, on national and regional for-profit, commercial media organizations. In order to examine nuances and differences, this paper will shed light on the environment of journalists in local media, as well as those that work for non-profit, civil society media. The latter has increasingly emerged in Serbia as an alternative model due to failed privatization and political influence on traditional media, both on a national and local level. In the past decade, there has been a growing number of online news outlets established by journalists, who left the mainstream, commercial media, and non-governmental and citizens' organizations (Drašković & Kleut, 2016). Thus, this exploratory study is based on ten semi-structured, in-depth interviews with journalists working in local and civil society media. The interviews are structured to cover the four main themes which rise from labour process theory: (1) the separation of conception and execution of labour; (2) the differentiation of the labour process; (3) the use of

technology to increase productivity; and (4) the eradication of skills from work (Örnebring, 2010). As this issue has been understudied in Serbia, the exploratory character of this paper will enable the gathering of preliminary insights into journalists' working conditions across media organizations and illuminate the path for the articulation of future research questions.

SPEAKER
Tjaša Turnšek, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

TITLE
Transformations of media ownership structures in the context of political changes: Slovenian media networks between 2000 and 2022

ABSTRACT
This paper aims to explore media ownership within the concept of political parallelism (Hallin and Mancini 2004), which refers to analysing the links between media organizations and political tendencies. Research on media pluralism (McQuail 1992), understood as a concept that opposes any authoritarian regime (Meier and Trappel 1998, 42), has shown that concentrated ownership reduces diversity, creates uniform content and contributes to the development of market-oriented media. The main research question is how the media network is transformed in the context of political changes, i.e., changes of Slovenian governments in 9 comparative periods between 2000 and 2022. More specifically, the aim is to investigate the influence of different politics on media network transformations as well as similarities and differences in their strategies to influence the media sphere. The media network transformations are understood and measured as changes in media ownership structures, media concentration and pluralism, and personnel replacements in editorial offices and supervisory board members of media outlets. Less democratic media systems are more politically controlled and partisan, with stronger links between politicians and media workers, there are lower levels of commitment to professional journalistic standards. (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) Political and partisan control is most often exercised through control over the appointments of members of the media outlet's decision-making structures, control over finances and content, and direct censorship and pressure on media workers. (Pajnik 2020, 171) The research uses mixed methods to provide empirical evidence of the impact of political change on media network transformations. Social network analysis serves as the primary research method as it is an effective tool for studying media concentration (Birkinbine and Gomez 2020, 1078) and enables us to analyse the degree of integration and cooperation among media outlets, firms, and connected individuals. This is combined with case studies of media outlets and interviews with journalists and editors where there has been an evident transformation in the media network during periods of government change.

SPEAKER
Maximos Theodoropoulos, Panteoion University, Greece

TITLE
Uncharted: The digital game indie-stry of Italy and Greece

ABSTRACT
Digital games are a "born digital and global" (De Prato, 2014, 163) cultural and information product or service developed by digital labor (Fuchs, 2010). Following decades of capitalist "aggressive formalization" (Keogh, 2019), the digital games industry has been established as a dominant sector of the globalized mass entertainment ecosystem that permeates contemporary digital culture.

Moreover, digital games have a phenomenal economic impact. The global gaming market was estimated at US$ 202.7 billion in 2022 (Newzoo, 2022). This economic success has attracted the attention of other communication and cultural industries as well as of governments and international regulatory entities (eg. European Union), which are attempting to boost their national economies (see Fung, 2017, Sotamaa, Jørgensen & Sandqvist, 2019). The emergence of digitalization has increasingly restructured the gaming industry, diversifying it in various ways. It has allowed newly, less formalized forms of production where both big and small studios, professionals and non-professional/amateur creators can now develop games and penetrate more easily in the gaming market (Keogh, 2019). New business models (eg. free-to-play games, servitization etc) have been consolidated as monetization practices (Westar & Dubois, 2022), while the circulation of „free" and accessible all-in-one game engines has simplified game production, making it more accessible to less powerful indie creators (Young, 2021).

On the other hand, the new technological affordances have led to the saturation of the independent game market (Lipkin, 2019), the platformization of cultural production (Nieborg & Poell, 2018), and into a newly iterative intensification of game labor processes (Westar & Dubois, 2022). At the same time, the game industry is characterized by its endemic working conditions and crunch time (O"Donnell, 2014). In addition, only a very small number of digital games generate important returns (Van Dreunen, 2020, 27). Game development though takes place locally through the interaction between global trends and local production contexts. Works such as Kerr"s (2017) and Fung"s (2017) foreground the need to examine the distinct regional social-political, cultural, and economic peculiarities and factors that shape game production in order to understand deeper, the global game industry concurrently.

In this paper, I follow Cunningham and Craig"s (2019) call for a more empirically grounded approach to investigate cultural production "through the voices of the creators themselves", which can be both "empowered and precarious" (65). Drawing from 40 in-depth interviews conducted between 2019 and 2023, I focus on the social, political, cultural, and working dimensions that constitute the political economy (Mosco, 2009) of digital game production in two understudied cases: Italy and Greece. Both Italy and Greece constitute important case studies through which it is possible to better understand the plurality of experiences and identities of digital labor and localized game production activities. During the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), a vivid and newly formed independent game production ecosystem emerged in both countries that now cluster over 70 and 130 small game studios in Greece and Italy, respectively. In the years that followed the GFC, digitalization and the global gaming industry shifts have stimulated many Italian and Greek individuals to begin to create digital games and form small studios, in a bankrupt landscape with limited resources. These two ecosystems though, in contrast with other western countries, so far they do not seem to have formulated an industry production structure. Yet, an ever increasing number of indie creators constantly emerge. This analysis shows the intense precarious conditions and the empowerment elements that characterize these two peripheral ecosystems. It also presents the uneven power flows between global actors and indie Italian and Greek game workers as well as the different experiences and particularities of the two cases.

Following critical political economy (Mosco, 2009), I explore how global trends of the digital ecosystem interface with the local factors and production networks that shape the political economy of the Italian and Greek independent game labor. More specifically, by structuring this analysis according to the production of culture perspective"s (Peterson & Anand, 2004) six facets (technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organization structure, occupational careers, and market), I examine how a mix of global shifts in the gaming industry with historical and political developments can shape game production. Then, I identify and compare the working cultures and local networks by taking a closer look at the precarious conditions, work-life balance, and the various ways in which game labor negotiates and values the tensions of indie development processes.

Finally, I am critically discussing the role of the national government policies (or lack thereof) towards game development and how they influence local game workers.

Friday (15 September)

Session 1 (10:00 – 11:30)

SPEAKER
Paško Bilić, Institute for Development and International Relations, Croatia

TITLE
Abstract Labour and the Lifeworld in Digital Capitalism

ABSTRACT
Just as the Frankfurt School responded to the radicalisation of the working class in Germany and the rise of post-war consumerism in the United States, today, we are confronted by platform monopolies, automated hyper-consumption, and technological control. Critical approaches to digital media have exposed the structural coupling of internet use and capital accumulation for almost two decades. However, many authors building on this tradition can struggle to understand how online social interaction is controlled beyond the worn-out critique of false consciousness or beyond conceptualising all digital activity mediated by data as labour. This paper will attempt to theoretically untangle the Marxian ontology of labour and the Frankfurt School-inspired critique of everyday life. This is not just theoretical nit-picking. Society becomes completely dominated if we accept no difference between wage labour and lifeworld activities. Each contains its internal struggles. The value form regulates both in different ways.

Session 2 (12:00 – 13:30)

SPEAKER
Stefanie Felsberger, University of Cambridge, UK

TITLE
How do users of period apps navigate the commodification of their data in the context of Surveillance capitalism

ABSTRACT
The question of how to theorise the interconnection between datafication and capitalism has found increased attention in recent years—in the public eye especially since the publication of Shoshanna Zuboff's book 'Surveillance Capitalism' (2019). From Surveillance Capitalism to Couldry and Mejias' Data Colonialism (2019), recent scholarship has framed processes of extraction and exchange of personal data as a form of dispossession, drawing on David Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession. The commodification of user data is portrayed as a new, all-encompassing, and totalising 'version' of capitalism where people's lives and everyday activities have become the 'raw material' that fuels the digital economy. Much of this literature focuses on the activities of companies and leaves out the role of people: both the question of how to theorise the role of users in data capitalism and how people navigate the commodification of their data. This framing ends up reinforcing the power of big tech and reasserts the logic of capitalism. Capitalism's reach into people's lives is absolute. My PhD investigates these claims by asking how users of period tracking applications understand their role as "users" in the digital economy, their relations to their data and its value, and the ways in which they navigate the commodification of their data. By shifting the focus from (digital) capitalism's totalising logic and companies' strategies to the ways in which people navigate this system, I contribute to the overall understanding of how value is accrued from data in the digital economy. In my presentation, I ask how do users of period apps navigate the commodification of their data in the context of Surveillance capitalism and how can this contribute to the ongoing discussion about the value of (user) data in capitalism?

My site of investigation are users of menstruation tracking applications. This focus on users of period trackers is especially useful because: first, the data these apps collect is more valuable than most data on consumers; second, the bodies of people who menstruate have historically been controlled for in order to extract free reproductive labour. Like all self-tracking applications, period apps promise users scientific and exact knowledge about their bodies through data collection. This method, developers claim, provides more precise insights than people could ever achieve trough self-observation (Lupton 2014, 2016) and enables the collection of large amounts of intimate data. Apps are hugely popular and although they are presented to users as medical technology, their business model is the same as most companies in the digital economy: to either sell data as commodity or to sell insights derived from analysis of this data for targeted advertising (Abreu 2014, Fuchs 2013, Gurumurthy and Chami 2016, Jarrett 2016, Jarrett and Wittkower 2016, Lessig 2002, Neff and Nafus 2016, Wernimont 2018).

In my presentation, I first ask what is the best approach to conceptualise the value of user data in the capitalism. Here my presentation intervenes in the current framing of user data in capitalism. I discuss the different approaches that describe the ways in which user data is turned into value and profit (Surveillance Capitalism, Data Colonialism, Data as Commodity, Data as Capital, Data as Asset) and their shortcomings. By drawing on literature on social reproduction theory, data justice (Dencik et al. 2022), and framings on accumulation by gift (Fourcade and Klutz 2020), I explain how arguments around data dispossession enforce users experience of being cheated out of their data which in turn makes them more likely to accept individual remuneration for data.

Second, I discuss how the people I interviewed encounter and engage with this system of datafication, extraction and commodification in the case of period apps and how in many cases, users' relationships to their period strongly influences their data sharing practices and how they understand the value of their data. Specifically, I talk about how the fact that it is data about menstruation colours their conceptualisation of the value of their data. App users, on one hand, understand their data to be less valuable because of its association with periods, and, on the other hand, as especially valuable because of the lack of research on reproduction and menstrual cycles. Both of these facts, make users more willing to share data with companies. Finally, I draw from my insights to address the overall question how value is accrued from user data in capitalism and what we can learn from looking specifically at data about menstruation.

SPEAKER
Aaron Moreno Ingles, TU Delft, Netherlands

TITLE
The Political Economy of Algorithmic Rewarding

ABSTRACT
The term algorithmic rewarding, as introduced by Kellogg, Valentine and Christin (2020), refers to the use of algorithms "to interactively and dynamically reward high-performing workers with more opportunities, higher pay, and promotion" (Kellogg et al., 2020, 381). The concept is presented in the discussion around algorithms at work as a mechanism used by employers to discipline the conduct of workers and direct them to carry out certain activities, especially in the context of platform work in digital capitalism. If employees adhere to certain performance standards they may receive rewards that do not only relate with a better remuneration, but also provide increased flexibility in their schedules and in the selection of tasks (Ivanova et al., 2018).

The use of rewards at work is not a novel mechanism for disciplining workers, and its effects on worker's behaviour and wellbeing have been widely studied in the literature. (Mottaz, 1985; Ezzamel and Willmott, 1998; McLoughlin et al., 2005; Ganster et al, 2011). However, the incorporation of algorithms in corporate rewarding systems is fairly recent, and it may pose significant changes in

worker's material conditions and subjectivities. This paper will constitute an in-depth exploration of the topic from the lens of critical political economy, while also drawing upon interdisciplinary literature from critical sociology and philosophy of technology. I will argue that algorithmic rewarding provides the epitomical attempt of corporations (largely, platform economy companies) to re-align worker's interests with their own through two different mechanisms that will be thoroughly analysed: the intentional opacity of rewarding algorithms, and the gamification of rewards (Kellogg et al., 2020). After exploring different case studies, I will conclude that the use of algorithmic rewarding does not often achieve the expected re-alignment, but it rather increases competition among colleagues and jeopardises the wellbeing of workers, who often times face mental and/or physical health issues in relation to overworking (Ganster et al, 2011).

First, corporations using algorithmic rewarding rarely disclose how their algorithms operate, giving workers little insight into the rewarding system in place, which is usually presented as an strategy "to discourage manipulation and ratings inflation" (Kellogg, 2020, 382). This is a major difference with traditional corporate rewarding, that entails understanding the standards through which workers are evaluated, so that they can comply with them and improve their performance. In contrast, algorithmic rewarding puts the worker in an "invisible cage", a control mechanism based on the unpredictability of success criteria and its possible changes (Rahman, 2021). In the platform economy, this often makes workers unable to comprehend how to get better gigs or projects, which translates in higher stress and "pushing" for more jobs, or working for longer hours, thus "gambling with their time". Some platforms may even only offer certain statistics of appealing rewards to workers to encourage this effect (Ivanova et al., 2018). All in all, this information asymmetry is an example of epistemic injustice, perpetrated against workers who are harmed in their capacity as knowers (Fricker, 2007). Information asymmetries have been a constant since the introduction of labour market platforms, to the point that experiencing "suspicion and frustration" for the unclear guidelines on accessing and being paid for work might becomes the norm (Martin et al., 2014; Kellogg et al., 2020; Rahman, 2021). Furthermore, the lack of interactions with a human manager may cause difficulties to ask for more information, or even resisting and challenging these situations. (Kellogg, 2020, 382).

Second, corporations may decide to institute gamification of rewards "to make the affective experience of work more positive and fun for employees" (Kellogg et al., 2020, 382; Kim, 2018; Bogost, 2015; Mollick and Rothbard, 2014). From the lenses of the political economy of media, gamification can be understood as a "digital metanarrative that is very susceptible to the sociological discourses of political economy" (Ndi, 2018), used by corporations to "capitalize on a cultural moment" (Bogost, 2015) by trying to reinforce certain ideological paradigms on employees, such as having a forward-looking attitude towards work and voluntarily working for longer hours, which in many cases has been achieved (Kerfoot & Kissane, 2014). This feature becomes particularly relevant in digital platform economy, that often uses the rhetoric of "flexible work" to overwork employees.

In conclusion, and through the analysis of these two mechanisms, it will be sustained that the introduction of algorithms in corporate rewarding systems has important implications for worker's wellbeing and their perception of work. This is a result of the intent of corporations, especially in digital platform economy, to re-align workers interests with the companies' (by, for example, voluntarily "pushing" for more gigs or working for longer hours). This project will call upon further research on the effects of the implementation of different discipline and control algorithms in the workplace from the lens of political economy.

WHAT TO DO IN DUBROVNIK
The following list features places that are part of the standard Dubrovnik's gastro, bar and cultural scene but they retain a sense of distinctiveness for the reasons that they are owned by locals and frequented by locals. Thus, the list is not long as most of the restaurants and bars predominantly cater for tourists.

TO EAT
MOBY DICK
Prijeko 20a
Fish & seafood
https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g295371-d1093312-Reviews-Moby_Dick-Dubrovnik_Dubrovnik_Neretva_County_Dalmatia.html

MOSKAR Street Food
Prijeko ulica 30a
Phone number: + 38520805350
Traditional dishes, seafood, meats and veggies.
https://moskar-dubrovnik.com/

LADY PIPI
Peline ulica bb
Phone number: +38520321154
Open-air grill, fish, seafood and meats. No reservations are possible, secluded from the crowded areas
https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g295371-d1797401-Reviews-Lady_Pi_Pi-Dubrovnik_Dubrovnik_Neretva_County_Dalmatia.html

KOPUN
Poljana Ruđera Boškovića 7
Phone number: +38520323969
Old Croatian recipes
https://www.restaurantkopun.com/

NISHTA
Prijeko bb
Phone number: +38520322088
Vegetarian and vegan food
https://www.happycow.net/reviews/nishta-dubrovnik-10021

PANTARUL
Ul. kralja Tomislava 1
Phone number: +38520333486
Nouvelle Croatian cuisine
https://www.pantarul.com/

RESTORAN ORSAN
Ul. Ivana pl. Zajca 4
Phone number: +385436822
Fine dining fish restaurant
https://www.restaurant-orsan-dubrovnik.com/

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

BOTA ŠARE
Ulica od Pustijerne
Oyster &sushi restaurant
Phone number: +38520423034
bota-sare.hr/menu-bota-dubrovnik.pdf

TO DRINK

M'ARDEN
-          wine and cocktail bar -
Ulica od Domina 8
https://www.instagram.com/marden.dubrovnik/

BUZZ BAR
Prijeko ulica 21
Phone number: +38520321025
https://www.facebook.com/dubrovnikbuzz

BETULA
Antuninska ul. 5
https://www.facebook.com/Caffe-bar-Tinel-1028241190567904/

LIBERTINA CAFÉ (LUČI) – works in the morning hours only, the last genuinely local bar in Dubrovnik
Zlatarska ul. 3
https://restaurantguru.com/CAFFE-BAR-LIBERTINA-Dubrovnik

GLAM CAFÉ
Palmotićeva ul 5
https://www.facebook.com/glamdu/

ARTS AND CULTURE

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART DUBROVNIK
Put Frana Supila 23
www.momad.hr

ART WORKSHOP LAZARETI
Ul. Frana Supila 8
http://www.arl.hr/

GALERIJA FLORA
Šetalište kralja Zvonimira 32
https://m.facebook.com/Galerija-Flora-1025816650817690/