

## Med-1: “Digital labour, Marx and Dallas Smythe” [in English]

Saturday 15 October, 15.15–16.30, Palme

In 1977, almost 40 years ago, Dallas Smythe published his seminal article “Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism”, in which he introduced the notions of audience labour and the audience commodity.

This session asks: What is the relevance of “audience labour” for the political project of Marxism and the analysis of online participants and user generated content in the age of commercial social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Google? Does it matter for Marxism as a political project if the analysis of digital capitalism is based on the concepts of surplus-value or rent?

Accepted papers:

### ***Sara Bannerman: “Reimagining Crowdfunding: Towards the democratization of capital in music”***

*(Ph.D., Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario)*

Crowdfunding, the act of soliciting funding for a particular project through an open call, often (but not necessarily) through an online platform, is promoted as a tool for mobilizing the small-scale funds necessary to create more opportunities to more people—fostering more widespread grassroots production amongst those who might not otherwise have access to the necessary start-up capital to carry out their projects and ventures (Bannerman, 2013). Crowdfunding, it is claimed, shifts capital allocation from “the province of a relatively small and entrenched minority” to something guided by and available to “the collective wisdom of our now 7 billion people” (Lawton & Marom, 2013, 1). At the same time, crowdfunding is critiqued for contributing to the casualization of labour, reducing resources and supports available to creators (Agrawal, Catalini, and Goldfarb, 2013).

This paper focuses on crowdfunding of musical projects, and examines empirically the claims just outlined: does crowdfunding make capital more widely available in the context of musical production? It focuses on musical projects funded through crowdfunding platform Kickstarter (<http://www.kickstarter.com>), launched in 2009.

In the context of crowdfunding cultural production or projects, the question of whether crowdfunding makes capital available to those who might not otherwise have access to it is open to empirical verification. This paper sets out a conceptual framework for, and begins, this analysis. Situated within the field of critical media and information studies (Fuchs, 2011), it analyzes the power and domination structures of the media by: 1) drawing on critical social theory; 2) conducting empirical research situated within the critical and transformative paradigms; and 3) articulating alternatives that challenge relations of domination in cultural funding generally, and crowdfunding in particular. It asks:

- Does crowdfunding significantly democratize access to financial capital for musicians?
- Does crowdfunding make accessible cultural and social forms of capital to the musicians who make use of it?

Taking the answers to these questions into account, this paper discusses alternative crowdfunding models, including both the real and the possible, as part of a project of imagining and reimagining alternatives for communal production.

**Marcos Dantas: “Digital labour, Marx and Dallas Smythe”**

*(Prof. Dr., Federal University of Rio de Janeiro)*

Assuming the audience labour hypothesis, my paper will discuss that this audience labour power occupies his time producing, in immediate interaction (time tending to zero limit) with workers directly employed by any media firm, an "environment" that is necessary for the communication between the advertisers and their markets. Examples: the time segment "sold" by TV channels to advertisers, or keywords auctioned by Google.

Because those time or space don't have the material qualities of the commodity-form, the retention of the value created by that labour relationship will only be possible if the unit of capital can "enclose" the environment. Each TV channel must to control an exclusive electromagnetic frequency band; the copyright ensures the Google exclusivity control over his website, and so. So the "owners" of the "enclosure" may impose a right of access to advertisers firms and charge for it. Theoretically, it is a model to create *differential rents* very similar to that discussed by Marx in *The Capital*, Book III, Section 6. I call it *informational rents* because we have to consider an very important difference from the rent of land studied by Marx: this is not about to monopolize any natural resource, but to monopolize the value directly created by both paid and absolutely unpaid live work tied in this relationship.