

Speculations on digital labor and Wikipedia

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Precedent

- [Why we need to pay people to create free knowledge.](#)
Wikimania, 2014. Lionel Allorge.
- ["WikiCredit - Calculating & presenting value contributed to Wikipedia."](#) Wikimania, 2014. Aaron Halfaker.
- ["Cooperation in Peer Production Economy: Experimental Evidence from Wikipedia."](#) Wikimania, 2014. Jerome Hergueux. (Includes, how introducing \$ changes motivation for contributors).
- – also [on Wiki conversations](#) about embedding Patreon or Gratipay on Userpages...

Why talk about labor and Wikipedia?

Conversations about labor are endemic to the history of Open Knowledge / FOSS

The Open Knowledge / FOSS community has a difficult relationship with labor

New economies

- Commercial economy vs. sharing economy.
Lawrence Lessig. *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*. Penguin Press. 2008.
- Commons-based peer production (Yochai Benkler)
- Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams. *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*. 2006.

Ashe Dryden

Paper: “The Ethics of Unpaid Labor and the OSS Community.” Ashe Dryden. November 13, 2013. Blog post on the author’s personal blog.

“The idea of meritocracy presumes that everyone starts off and continues through with the same level of access.”

“How can requiring OSS contributions be a bad thing? The demographics of open source contributors.”

“Approximately 1.5% of F/LOSS contributors are female as compared to 28% in proprietary software.”

Defining digital labor

- Evolved from the workers' struggles in Italy in the 1970s, which included a substantial feminist movement in the [Wages for housework](#) campaign.
- Associated with the replacement of jobs in the increasingly automated industrial sector, into globalized production systems embedded in [high-technology](#), and into a [knowledge economy](#).
- Increasing lack of separation that existed between work and play / entertainment.

Defining affective labor

- The effect of work on one's emotional or cognitive experiences
- Affective labor and feminism - considering women's emotional labor and the domestic sphere

Defining immaterial labor

Coined by Italian sociologist and philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato in: “Immaterial Labor,” essay in *Radical Thought in Italy*, 1997.

Immaterial labor is a term used to describe the affective and cognitive commodities produced by work that exist outside the traditional wage-based consideration of labor as a material-commodity-producing activity, as well as the activity of producing this new form of commodity.

Digital labor and Digital Volunteering

How is digital volunteering **similar** to previous forms of volunteering?

How is digital volunteering **different** than previous forms of volunteering?

Digital labor and leisure inequality

- Leisure inequality (gendered, classist) affords some people more time to be volunteers
- The interests of people who can afford to work on knowledge production for no direct compensation may become (indeed, may already be) overrepresented in Wikipedia.

Digital labor and harassment

- Harassment creates high levels of affective labor for everyone involved - some populations are more often targets
- Harassment requires heavy engagement with policy / administration that takes away from other things
- How does HR work in digital economies?

Tiziana Terranova

Paper: *Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy*. June, 2003. Electronic Book Review.

- The “glamorization of digital labor” in the open source
- The “gift economy” - Information economy as replacing some jobs - is it creating new ones?
- Open source = Knowledge workers not “managed” in the traditional sense

Trebor Schulz

Trebor Schulz. “What the MySpace generation should know about working for free.” *Collectivate*. April, 2007.

- Networked sociality represents monetary value
- Most recent written about in the context of micro-work (Amazon mechanical Turk) and crowdsourcing / the sharing economy

Jaron Lanier

You are Not a Gadget (2010) and *Who Owns the Future* (2013)

- Argues that the open source approach contributed to the social stratification and widening of the gaps between rich and the poor
- Questions of the gift economy - what does it mean for work when more and more things are open-sourced?

Jonathan Zittrain

The Future of the Internet and How to Stop It. Yale University Press. 2006.

- *The procrastination principle:* the release of intentionally incomplete systems which depend upon the anticipated improvements of unnamed community members who see value in the project.
- RE: Growth of crowdsourcing within GLAMs

Cory Doctorow

- Lack of confidentiality / other protections is equivalent to digital labor - your activity produces “value” in the form of data

Applying to Wikipedia: providing for the confidentiality of Wikipedia users provides securities from this type of digital labor. RE: suing the NSA

Digital labor considerations: Wikipedians in Residence

- Hard to have a 9-5 schedule “always on call”
- Are short term (6 month) fellowship stipends enough to support Wikipedians in Residence?
- How should Wikipedians in Residence be paid?
- Should there ever be unpaid Wikipedia interns?

Digital labor and the Conflict of Interest (COI) Policy

- Does it make sense to restrict community members from profiting off of their skills?
- We currently do have many people that are Wikipedia consultants that operate on the periphery of the community

Digital labor and crowdsourcing

How do we make sure that crowdsourcing projects are a win-win for institutions and volunteers?

- Make sure that volunteers are getting what they want out of the experience
- Provide HR and other support to all
- ...

Further considerations / follow-up

- [Wikipedia:Volunteer Response Team](#) + have conversations on what we can better do to provide for volunteers
- Considering adequate compensation of Wikipedians in Residence
- Considering harassment in light of digital labor
- Considering Conflict of Interest (COI) in light of digital labor
- My Facebook Group on this topic:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/immaterial.labor/>