ECONOMIES OF THE INTERNET III: SPHERES

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The internet has increasingly been conceptualized as a space of economic activity. This contemporary imaginary has been particularly influenced by insights from the school of Autonomist Marxism in the foundational work of Tiziana Terranova and through the dominance of Christian Fuchs' application of Marxist economic concepts. While this has generated great insight into the political economy of the internet, and in particular allowed for the conceptualization of user activity as labor, this approach is only one paradigm for considering the economic activities and implications of the internet. For internet research, there is also the need to move beyond the long schism between political economy and cultural studies as we try to understand user activity that is socially and affectively rich, but emerges from commercial contexts. This series of panels proposes to expand the exploration of the internet as an economic construct in a number of directions. It pluralizes the definition of "economy", expanding it from the strictly fiscal to include other economies such as the moral, (sub-) cultural, affective, queer, or libidinal (to name merely a few). Various papers propose different economic models for understanding the interactions within and between these various economies. They also expand the range of actors and economic contexts associated with the

internet, drawing attention to the intersections of race and gender in particular. The goal of these papers across the various sessions is to expand our imaginary of the internet economy.

The internet is a diverse place in which a diverse range of activities take place, both paid and unpaid. However this complexity is not always represented in studies of economic activity which often abstract from specific practices of users and industry workers in favor of proving an economic model, or focus on the obvious examples of SNS use by a de-racialized, de-gendered, de-sexed consuming subject. This has left gaps in our understanding of internet economies, whether that be of particular economic activities or networks, or of how social status inflects and informs economic activity both within the paid workplace and in the sphere of leisure. The papers in this panel explore little-considered arenas of online economic activity and economic actors, working to develop the plurality of how we conceptualize the internet as an economic assemblage. They also demonstrate how economic spheres cannot be analyzed discretely from social contexts.

The first two papers engage with sport, an important arena of economic activity that is only rarely studied as a mediated cultural form. The first speaker explores the relationship between media technologies and the extremely lucrative horseracing and online gaming industries. The paper outlines the history of horseracing and wagering and their embedding in growing leisure economies, but also links that growth to changes in information and communication networks, including networked computers and the internet as we now know it. This paper goes on to explore how the online horseracing economy at times exemplifies and other times challenges our assumptions about online activity, in particular the ways in which class and gender intersect in this over-looked arena.

The second speaker investigates the relationship between sport, Twitter and the informational economies of the public sphere. Examining mediated sports events such as the 2011 revelations of serial sex abuse by Penn State football coach or the suspension of Baltimore Ravens player Ray Rice, this analysis reflects on how, despite the potential of Twitter to amplify debate in negative ways, it also functions as a site for deliberative democracy. This paper explores the informational economy of the Habermasian public sphere generated in the discussions of sport on Twitter.

The third speakers discuss the complex context of alternative currency system Mazacoin, claimed to be the "official tribal currency" of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and developed with the imprimatur of a sovereign governing body. This study examines forums related to this cryptocurrency, analyzing the boundary and identity work undertaken by a variety of stakeholders as they negotiate the intersection of personal, cultural and economic values in the development and implementation of the financial technology.

The final paper enters into the sphere of paid work, exploring the labor of an emerging set of actors in digital media's economy, digital strategists. As a new profession responsible for combining advertising, marketing, branding and public relations, the cultural intermediaries who do this work are not only responsible for setting tastes but

are engaged in position-taking relating to their economic and social role. Based in a series of interviews with Canadian digital strategists, this study identifies the specific ways in which these actors' conceptualize their labor's contribution to social media's economics. This paper, like the others in this panel, explores the ways in which the lifeworlds of workers and consumers are entwined with fiscal value creation.

Paper 1: Economies of Horse Racing in the Digital World
Author: Holly Kruse

Horse racing, a sport that has existed for hundreds of years in its modern form, has much to tell us about overlooked online economic practices. Betting on horse racing contributes to the estimated $40 billion annual generated by all online gambling worldwide (Statista 2014). Moreover, it has also played a significant role in the development of computer technology, including computer networks; in enabling synchronous international interactive media experiences, including financial transactions; in transmitting information to and from dispersed sites; and in using media to adapt to social and economic change.

In fact, horse racing's use of communication technology has helped shape the economies of contemporary media, entertainment, and leisure. With the beginning of the modern era of horse racing in Britain in the early nineteenth century and the establishment of enclosed racecourses, racetracks became leisure destinations. This trend continued in the United States, and accelerated with the appearance of glamorous and lucrative spots for racing late in the 1800s and in the early 1900s, like Hialeah Park in southern Florida and Del Mar in southern California. These racetracks were frequented by the wealthy, but also by ordinary people, who enjoyed seeing the rich and famous, and who also enjoyed the spectacle of racing and the excitement of rooting for the horses on which they had bet. Several tracks, including Churchill Downs and Gulfstream Park, have undergone renovations to make themselves more attractive as destinations in the modern leisure economy, offering many entertainment options.

A study of the economies of horse racing links the establishment of leisure destinations and the leisure industry to the early development and use of information and communication networks. The "horse rooms" or "pool rooms" of the nineteenth century depended on live horse racing, the telegraph, and mutual financial participation in betting pools. In poolrooms, people gathered in dedicated urban spaces to be entertained by "breaking" sports media news in the form of the race calls enabled, and results transmitted, by telegraph. Customers might also eat and drink at the poolroom while they bet. And as is almost always the case with media products, a few corporate entities vied for control of the "race wire" that provided results to poolrooms, with control eventually ending up in the hands of a monopoly or near monopoly. In the case of the race wire, the monopoly was first held by Western Union, then Payne Telegraphic Service, and both monopolies limited choice and raised prices for all who ran poolrooms, as monopolies and near-monopolies of in information economies, whether held by Microsoft or Google or the Bell System or Western Union, inevitably do.

Another late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century horse racing development that has explicit links to modern information technology and its economics was the invention of the totalizator machine, and with it, the ascendancy of pari-mutuel wagering. The early twentieth century totalizator was a computing machine, and totalizators became linked in what were mechanical, and then electrical, computer networks. Totalizators and the pari-mutuel system made possible near-instant data processing based on individuals' actions. The electrical totalizator machine paved the way for the first commercially available computer; indeed, an investment from American Totalisator helped make production of that computer, the UNIVAC, possible. Further, in the 1970s as the internet's precursor, the ARPANET, was being established, in New York City another important computer network that was groundbreaking for its time, operated by New York City Off-Track Betting, handled large-scale financial and information flows, and made calculations based on that data.Yet for all of its innovation in the development and use of media, the horse racing industry has often proven less than adept at competing in the broader leisure economy.

Still, an examination of horse race wagering forces us to think about presence and interactive media in new ways. Traditionally, internet studies has imagined virtual presence to be the kind of presence one experiences when emailing, participating in virtual worlds, taking part (or lurking) in online discussion forums, texting, and belonging to social network sites. Indeed, horse racing and its participants have been present in these online forums. But like other financial markets, horse racing requires us to think about virtual presence as something that exists in information and communication networks where not explicitly communicative, but technology-enabled, actions of others make us aware that they are present in the same time and space that we are. The continual movement of money in pari-mutuel wagering pools in horse racing and the odds that change as a result are palpable signs of others' presence as much as the changing list of trending topics on one's Twitter feed, and it is not necessarily a more subtle one, given the effect that changing odds and pool sizes have on what are essentially short-term financial decisions.

A study of horse racing and media also makes us think in a very tangible way about age, gender, class, race, and their role in imagining media economies and publics. We are reminded of the project of Annales School and Marxist historians, to look at the histories and lives of ordinary people and their practices, and the fact that horse racing as entertainment and employment is rooted, although not exclusively, in the lower and working classes. Horse racing's public settings, at least in the popular imagination, and particularly with senior citizens and men. As a case study, horse racing makes us think about how all people engage in interactive media economies, even, or perhaps especially, groups whose media use has not been viewed as innovative or interesting.

Both public and private spaces are linked to, Edward Soja notes, wider and multiple systems of social power (1989, 152). The domestic sphere in the United States, for example, has been the site of much contestation over meaning and

commerce, including over what is properly masculine and what is properly feminine in relation to , information, communication, and entertainment technologies. Communication technologies have challenged the idea that a pristine middle-class domestic haven, untouched by the instrumental machinations of capitalism, has ever existed. In the internet age, the lucrative gambling and pornography industries have been central to public discussions about threats to the home and family, but they are marginalized in internet studies, even though their respective industries have been pioneers in the development of online technologies and uses, and in monetizing content. (For example, the pornography industry was at the forefront of innovations in online video content, and in profiting from that content.)

Individuals who engage in the economies and technologies of horse racing are part of a broader cultural narrative that treats the sport in some ways as an anachronism. Still, the social and cultural resonances of racing and its technologies tells us that we, as digital media scholars, need to pay attention to how all sorts of people engage in online economies in all kinds of places, even if these users and sites are not often made visible in scholarly and popular discourse.

Paper 2: Sport, Twitter and the public sphere: Creation of an informational economy
Author: Brendan O'Hallarn

After a long Christmas Day argument about his sporting hero, Kobe Bryant, a Twitter user named @MyTweetsRealAF had had enough. Fed up with criticism of the Los Angeles Lakers star guard, @MyTweetsRealAF threw out a challenge to an online enemy — meet him in Temecula, CA, for a fistfight. He live-tweeted his 35-mile journey, with pictures. His would-be combatant did not show (Ley, 2014). This episode represents, in a snapshot, the potential downside of the disproportionate importance placed on sport in society (Amaechi, 2012; Banschick, 2012) combined with the ready access to online tools to amplify and radicalize any debate (Suler, 2004; Sunstein, 2007). This risk to societal comity has been examined by sport and media scholars (Frederick, Lim, Chung, & Clavio, 2013; Kian, Clavio, Vincent, & Shaw, 2011).

At the same time, this admittedly oddball episode serves as a demonstration of the power of sport as a connective device, and Twitter as a real-time accelerator of an informational economy. Though this particular online discussion involved a threat of physical violence, the medium and the subject, sport, presents an opportunity for classic public sphere generation. Envisioned as a space for deliberative democracy by Habermas (1989) and Arendt (1958), the public sphere also has demonstrated the power of the information being shared itself. With the rise of bourgeois public spheres described by Habermas in post-Reformation Europe, the "traffic in commodities and news" (p. 15) generated real, commodified value. Arendt noted that this informational economy fosters an orderly discussion of matters essential to the function of democracy. Today, this sphere has come to life in virtual form, starting with the first message sent through a computer network in 1978 ("The BBS Corner," n.d.). While

many have argued that new media may create a new or revitalized public sphere, one which can promote and enhance an informational economy (Castells, 2008; Papachrissi, 2002; Shirky, 2008), others are pessimistic about its ability to engender transformative change. Fuchs (2014) in particular, laments that public sphere idealism is rendered impossible by the corporate control of the levers of content dissemination.

Study of social media's role in creating a Habermassian informational economy through public spheres has been studied in emerging democracies (Hoskins, 2013), through analysis of White House Facebook and YouTube posts (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013), and through analysis of thousands of politically-themed tweets, which determined that "social media would have a potential as a public sphere, supporting arguments in political deliberation" (Waldhauser, 2014, p. 13). For a few reasons, articulated below, it is noteworthy to study sport within the intersection of public spheres and new media, and their potential to generate informational economies.

Most remedially, sport and social media have merged to create economies of many types, from self-presentation and image-building (Pegoraro, 2010), to social movements (Clark, 2014), to pure monetary economies (Watkins, 2014). Also, Twitter's chronological display of most recent post first, along with the popularization of hashtags (Turner, 2012) as editorial comment (Smith & Smith, 2012), organizing function (Khondker, 2011), community construction tool (Sharma, 2013), or folksonomy (Glassey, 2012), suggest utility for the potential role of Twitter hashtags in the creation of online economies. The real-time experience of following sports (where everyone consumes sporting events and news at the same time) creates an ideal forum to study the public sphere in creating an informational economy, a field of academic study currently not occupied. As proof, the most-tweeted event in the site's history — the 2014 World Cup soccer semifinal between Germany and Brazil (Chase, 2014).

Critics would argue, rightly, that a popular sporting contest is not a classic public sphere. Mindful of sport's outsized place in society, this theoretical study seeks to examine sport issues extending beyond the field of play, such as the 2011 revelations of serial sexual abuse by a football coach at Penn State, or the suspension of Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice, for the potential that Twitter could provide a forum for public sphere activity. Both events received mainstream media coverage, but also created a flurry of social media activity. With Penn State, Twitter was a multipronged, interactive tool used by journalists (Sanderson & Hambrick, 2012) and led to online expressions of identity (Grandey, Krannitz & Slezak, 2013). The Ray Rice suspension, then ban, then reinstatement was accompanied by a running conversation on Twitter about domestic abuse, notably through the use of the hashtag #WhyIStayed (McManus, 2014). This analysis will seek to extend research of the public sphere into a new realm, specifically, the potential for issues in sport to create spheres of deliberative democracy on social media. The combination of society's passion for sport, and the unique tools of Twitter architecture, provides an opportunity for enlightened discussion that can unify, inform and advocate.

Paper 3: "Like the Buffalo:" Tribal Cryptocurrency, Affective Capitalism, and Rhetorics of Sovereignty

Author: John Carter McKnight and Cindy Tekkobe

In February 2014, mazacoin, a bitcoin variant, was launched along with claims it would be the "official tribal currency" of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. While alternative-currency and -payment systems are becoming commonplace, mazacoin was among the first to combine the technology of cryptocurrency with the support of a sovereign governmental body. Mazacoin is also unusual in its attempt to align a digital technology steeped in the rhetorics of conservative libertarianism and capitalist innovation with the communitarian and traditional values of a tribal community. This work analyzes the rhetorical boundary work performed on online forums by mazacoin supporters, situating it in a global discourse of alternative finance which elides traditional divisions of left and right, first world and developing world, innovation and tradition.

Financial systems have long been early adopters of novel communications technologies, from cuneiform writing to the telegraph to the internet, so the current proliferation of digital applications for personal finance – transfers and holdings of value – are unsurprising. However, in an era of "the financialization of daily life," (Martin 2002) economic value and personal and cultural values are mutually entangled in bounds of affect which are created, shaped, and sustained by rhetorical practices ranging from text-based discourses to user experience design of financial websites. While the role of affective communications in personal finance has received attention from both the sociology of finance and the interdisciplinary study of affect, mazacoin provides a unique case of multiple digital technologies and rhetorics aimed simultaneously at profoundly different audiences: tribal leaders, cryptocurrency aficionados, and, on occasion, mainstream finance and regulatory authorities.

In this environment, cryptocurrencies have been inseparable from critiques of governmental "fiat currencies," advocacy of the gold standard, and the concept of replacing social trust with algorithmic software systems. Advocates tend to be white, male, middle-class, with technical training in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields. In contrast, personal and community finance for tribal nations within the United States has been entwined with issues of sovereignty and dependency, the effects of revenues from casino gambling, and a legacy of confrontation with US Federal authorities.

Activist and digital currency trader Payu Harris, spokesperson for mazacoin, has made the case for a technologically complex, electricity-intensive cryptocurrency as one solution to tribal political and financial problems by likening cryptocurrency to the buffalo….. [situating Pine Ridge as among the poorest communities in the US]

Meanwhile, mazacoin has received substantial support on cryptocurrency forums, where the notions of challenging the US Federal currency regime and attempting to solve longstanding political and social problems by means of software tools have resonated in a community about as far removed from that of Pine Ridge as possible. Comparing the scant public discourse of the Oglala Lakota to the more prolific online discussions of cryptocurrency advocates, it seems the notion of a cryptocurrency as a technological solution to communal poverty is an easier "sell" outside of Pine Ridge than within it. A close reading of this discourse exposes the boundary work and identity work

of cryptocurrency stakeholders and their relatively positionality as they re/make and re/purpose bitcoin variants in service of the construction of individual and communal identities, values, and ideologies.

Panel 4: Digital Strategists, Professional Imaginaries, and Social Media Value
Author: Tamara Shepherd and Jeremy Shtern

The digital strategist represents a new form of cultural intermediary that combines the functions of advertising, marketing, branding, and public relations in an attempt to negotiate new economies of social media. As part of monetizing social media platforms whose market valuations often rest on ephemeral ideas of value rather than empirical profits, the digital strategist performs essential work of framing taste publics while also shoring up the belief in social media's significance for promotional culture. In the process, digital strategists work to legitimize their own profession as part of position-taking within what is perceived as a seismic shift in promotional strategies given the continuously shifting landscape of social media platforms. This paper presents the results of a qualitative study of such digital strategists working across agencies and in-house within different industries. The way that digital strategists imagine their roles offers some important insights into this emerging profession, how it embodies a new kind of cultural intermediary, and how economic value gets constructed in networked promotional culture.

Theoretically, our approach is anchored in Pierre Bourdieu's account of "new cultural intermediaries" as those professions concerned with "presentation and representation (sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration and so forth) […] in all the institutions providing symbolic goods and services in cultural production and organization" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 359). Beyond their mediating role in cultural gatekeeping work that contributes to the creation of a normative taste habitus, cultural intermediaries simultaneously engage in explicit position-taking within an indeterminate niche in the socio-economic order, where "jobs and careers have not yet acquired the rigidity of the older bureaucratic professions" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 151). The dynamic between intermediaries' shaping of cultural consumption and shaping of their own legitimacy has since been applied broadly to a number of creative fields, moving away somewhat from Bourdieu's initial concern with the way intermediaries occupy the boundary space between low and high cultures (Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Negus, 2002). In fact, many of the contemporary applications of Bourdieu's framework focus on professions enacting symbolic mediation of consumption patterns within "promotional culture" writ large (Wernick, 1991).

As such, this study follows from recent investigations of cultural intermediaries in fields such as advertising, marketing, branding, and public relations (Cronin, 2004; Edwards, 2012; Hodges, 2006; McFall, 2002; Moor, 2008). We ask how digital strategists imagine their profession in order to update and amend the concept of cultural intermediaries to account for social media's prominence as a contemporary promotional platform. Specifically, our study presents findings from a series of 32 in-depth interviews conducted from 2012 to 2014 with people working as digital strategists in Toronto and Montreal. In asking these respondents to detail how they view their work and position in the social media economy, we sought to provide additional context to the ways that they

imagine their work as cultural intermediaries in a contemporary context. As Jennifer Smith Maguire and Julian Matthews have argued, it is crucial "to put context (back) into considerations of cultural intermediaries. Context may be a useful analytical device, but it is also an empirical, lived reality" (2012, p. 553). Our study thus seeks to consider cultural intermediaries as contextualized market actors, engaged in the pursuit of creating cultural legitimacy for their clients' products, themselves, and the social media platforms they work within.

The key findings of this investigation thus revolve around digital strategists' generation of economic value through three interrelated pursuits of cultural legitimacy. The first is to create consumer engagement with branded products and services through social media. Respondents framed the function of engagement as adding value both for clients, who gain consumers as "brand ambassadors," as well as for consumers, who acquire informational as well as affective, social capital from receiving targeted promotions. Second, digital strategists frame their own roles in this value generation as fundamentally creative, tapping into the cultural intermediary conceit of a feigned aesthetic disposition (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 54). The fundamental creativity involved in creating emotional engagement through narrative was evoked as part of the cultural legitimacy of digital strategists, while also serving to justify their authority in a social media advertising landscape that is often considered to be more about the use of data for targeted marketing than for promotional storytelling. And third, digital strategists implicitly work to establish the legitimacy of social media platforms. The value of social media platforms themselves – in market terms, somewhat fictitiously measured through ephemeral qualities such as brand equity – is reinforced by digital strategists' positioning of social media as the key interface for promotion as cultural gatekeeping (Featherstone, 1991, p. 5).

Through the respondents' articulations of their professional imaginaries as crucial cultural intermediaries in contemporary networked society, we conclude that the economic value of social media platforms owes something to the habitus of the emerging category of digital strategist. Digital strategists' primary work of creating engagement through social media reflects their "practitioner lifeworld – the totality of practitioners' thought, concepts, values and assumptions about their occupation (referred to collectively as "habitus") and their occupational experiences and identities that guide their behavior" (Hodges, 2006, p. 84). This habitus, as partially imagined space, gets expressed through the ways in which respondents position themselves and deploy digital strategy as professional imaginary. Digital strategists as cultural intermediaries thus maintain existing cultural capital and acquire additional symbolic power within social media ecologies marked by "the reciprocal inter-relationship of what are often thought of as discrete 'cultural' and 'economic' practices" (Negus, 2002, p. 504). It is in this sense, we argue, that ephemeral, imagined constructions of cultural legitimacy underlie supposedly empirical economic valuations of social media platforms in contemporary promotional culture.

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