# ECONOMIES OF THE INTERNET II: AFFECT

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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 generation of affective intensities is arguably central to the internet economy and a key source of value. Social media relies on the interactions between users and the

investment in those interactions to generate consumer lock-in and facilitate the on-going contribution of taste-identifying data that is appropriated and sold to internet advertisers and marketers. However, the value generated by these exchanges cannot be reduced to only the monetary. The labor of users and the products this work generates also circulate in other economies, where value is socially embedded and which refuse the formal alienation associated with the fiscal. The studies in this panel engage with these other economies, investigating their internal dynamics and the socially meaningful mechanisms by which resources are produced, distributed and valued in digital media.

The first speaker begins with an exploration of personal and intimate connections in social media, offering musicians as the exemplification of the contemporary trend towards self-branding in the way they use online relationships with fans as a professional strategy. This paper explores this demand to connect with audiences as a form of work, specifically as "relational labor". Drawing on interview data exploring how musicians understand their relationship with their audiences, the speaker explains this concept, emphasizing the ongoing communicative practices and skills required to sustain this affectively rich economy.

Continuing the focus on the processes through which affective states become valued, the second speaker engages with virtual content distributor Distractify, conceiving it as more than a site exploiting the audience commodity. Instead, the speaker notes the entanglement of distraction, attention and affect in its model of value production. Conceptualizing the cognitive and affective work involved in the user experience, the speaker argues for a move from investigating a binary between distraction and attention towards investigation of the rhythms and tempos of user engagement in order to understand this economy.

The third speaker also focuses on the dynamics of distraction and attention but this time in the use of smartphones. Combining psychoanalytic methods and political economy approaches, this speaker identifies the phone as a transitional object integral to the negotiations between Self and Other. The centrality of our relationships to the smartphone and the individuation enacted there is then linked to a culture of narcissism emerging from conditions of political, social, economic and environmental precarity. In this speaker's argument, the distracted use of the smartphone is of value individually and socially, providing a bulwark against the insecurities of the contemporary context.

The final speaker also explores the valorization and distribution of quotidian information exchanges on the internet, offering a postphenomological analysis shaped by feminist ethics of care. The speaker describes the moral intuitions that we attach to asymmetrical information flows, offering a theoretical account of what it is to be a "lurker" or a "creeper," and of how these commonly-used terms of disapprobation do indeed meaningfully identify common ways of failing to act in an appropriate and caring fashion in the conduct of personal relationships online. The argument is then extended to a variety of case studies including targeted advertising, the right to be forgotten, predictive services, and brand-user interactions, to explore how the ethics of care can also help us better understand the significance of asymmetrical information exchanges in internet economies.

**Paper 1: The Relational Labor of Connecting to Audiences**
**Author: Nancy Baym**

One outcome of social media has been that in a variety of fields, people are now expected to build public profiles and connect with audiences to demonstrate and achieve marketability. Social media figure centrally as sites through which individuals can acquire and display the markers of status that make them attractive hires or entrepreneurs worthy of investment (Marwick, 2013). Employers in diverse fields recruit based on LinkedIn connections and how many friends, followers and retweets job applicants have. Companies like Klout aggregate everyone's presence across social media platforms to assign them a numerical "influencer" score, which some employers consider in hiring. Millions of people who never thought of themselves as having audiences now find themselves trying to "self-brand" in hopes it will help them follow their dreams, live their passions, or maybe get a paying gig to cover rent. Even people who aren't thinking of their social media use as a way to help their careers may nonetheless find that what they say to their Facebook friends and other online contacts can impact their career both positively and negatively. Personal and work lives become intertwined in ways more complicated than they once were.

This talk focuses on musicians as forerunners and exemplars of this trend. It's not surprising that musicians were the first to turn to social media platforms in hopes of building their careers. Music is a predictive social science (Attali, 2014), a harbinger of the future (Benkler, 2006). What manifests first in music spreads widely for years afterwards. Music led the world toward individualism, as soloists began to take center stage in orchestral performances rather than blending in with a unified chorus. Music led the way toward artificial scarcity through copyright. Assembly-line manufacturing produced gramophones before Henry Ford made it famous with automobiles (Attali, 2014). Music has also led the transition to an internet-networked economy (e.g. Benkler, 2006). Now music is leading the way toward a world where developing personal connections through social media is an essential professional strategy and social connections are increasingly appropriated for economic markets.

It is stunning how quickly the idea that musicians would interact directly with audiences online flipped from being the geeky anomaly it was in the 1990s to a widely-shared expectation. MTV's survey of music listeners between the ages of 15–29 found that "artists are expected to be constantly accessible, especially on social media, offering unique and intimate moments to their fans" (Hillhouse, 2013). Digital music pioneer Dave Kusek (2014) describes social media as the "cornerstone" of a music career. In fostering audience relationships, artists must balance their own sometimes-competing economic and social needs with their audiences' needs to connect with them and with one another. It is a radical departure from the recent past, when, as Roger O'Donnell of the Cure put it, "bands could disappear for four years and live in a mansion somewhere, and people were just happy when they did come down from their Ivory Tower and release a record and allow you to go and buy it."

Yet the demand that musicians connect with their audiences is rarely unpacked to see the kinds of work it entails, nor identified as a mode of labor in the contemporary economy. This paper draws on several years of research into how musicians

understand their relationships with their audience to articulate the concept of "relational labor" and trace its relation to larger social and economic trends. I interviewed nearly forty musicians in a variety of genres. I focused on professionals who had built audiences before MySpace and who would be able to reflect on changes over time. Some were in bands that sold millions of albums. Most had been able to earn a living primarily as a musician, at least for a while, but many worked other jobs as well. I also read musician biographies. I followed musicians on social media. I followed entertainment news closely for years, collecting examples of artist-audience interactions that drew attention in music and other creative fields.

Ever since Arlie Hochschild (1983) described "emotional labor" in her seminal book, *The Managed Heart*, we've been able to see how workers in many fields – flight attendants, sales people, real estate agents, home health care workers – have had to sublimate their own feelings in order to create particular kinds of emotional experiences in interactions with their customers and clients. Now that social media are ubiquitous, and direct interaction is structurally easy, people are not just expected to engage in emotional labor when they are on the clock, they are supposed to do it wherever and whenever they are able. And they are supposed to connect often, so often that interactions become relationships. When musicians feel the need or desire to create "unique and personal" relationships with their audiences, it's not just emotional labor, it's relational labor. The concept of "relational labor," abuts "emotional labor," "affective labor," "immaterial labor," "venture labor," and "creative labor" but offers something new by emphasizing the ongoing communicative practices and skills of building and maintaining interpersonal and group relationships that is now so central to many careers.

The relational labor expected of musicians exemplifies contemporary work. Optimistically, culture workers like musicians are seen as models for a future of fulfilled creative laborers and cities. What could be better than spending a career building relationships with people who care passionately about your work? Less optimistically, they are seen as exemplifying insecurity, informality, discontinuous employment, bearing of individual risk, and as "poster boys and girls of the new 'precariat'" (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 2). Cultural work is temporary and intermittent, work/play boundaries are collapsed, the pay is poor, and people must be mobile. The mindset of the cultural worker is "a blend of bohemianism and entrepreneurialism; informal work environments and distinctive forms of sociality; and profound experiences of insecurity and anxiety about finding work, earning enough money and 'keeping up' in rapidly changing fields" (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 14).

The demands for ongoing relationship building and maintenance emerge as a strategy against this precarity. Building bonds that bear greater resemblance to friends and family than to customers and clients affords some protection against the cruelties of pure market economics. What musicians must do to connect with their audiences is indicative of labor shifts that have already begun and points to a future in which even those not oriented toward producing creative works feel compelled to connect with customers and clients through means both social and sustained. Cultivating audiences is the future of work.

**Paper 2: Affective economies of distraction**
**Author: Susanna Paasonen**

Launched in 2013, Distractify, "the cure of the common Internet", is a media startup aiming to generate and distribute viral content, similarly to its competitors such as Upworthy, Buzzfeed, BoredPanda or ViralNova. All these sites are crucially about spreadable media (Jenkins, Ford & Green 2013) that want to capture the users' attention and make them further circulate their content. 2013 *Business Insider* interview with Distractify CEO Quinn Hu explains that "The idea is to bring people closer through a shared experience. Hu says he wants to make people feel an emotion that's universal. 'There's no agenda outside of that,' Hu says."
(http://www.businessinsider.com/distractify-media-startup-2013-11?IR=T). This apparently simple statement is in fact anything but, pointing as it does to the complex entanglement of distraction, attention, affect, value production and social media. This entanglement is also where the focus of this paper lies.

When browsing through Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Tinder, Facebook, Buzzdeed or Distractify, attention quickly moves and shifts. Distraction refers both to pleasurable entertainment and dissatisfactory disorientation: it is both an affective and a cognitive state, both desired and undesired, both chosen and difficult for an individual to control that signifies rupture and reorientation of attention. When distracted, attention shifts, comes to a halt and perhaps fails to come into focus at all. As perception is constantly split and experience fragmented between different media technologies, screens, apps and impulses, the capacity to capture attention has become a matter of value production. As discussed and debated in the framework of attention of economy, attention itself has taken the shape of valuable commodity (see Webster 2011; Crogan & Kinsley 2012).

At the same time, distraction and attention are often difficult to tell apart. Both attention – as fleeting as it may be – and distraction involve intensity of experience, the opposite of which would seem to be boredom. However, as I argue in this paper, the issue at stake is one of a form of experience – an emergent structure of feeling of sorts – where boredom, distraction and interest are patterns in the same fabric. Rather than conceptualizing distraction as the polar opposite of attention, it is therefore be more productive to examine their rhythms, tempos and affective intensities in order to figure out how they work and move. According to Raymond Williams' (1977, 133–134) classic definition, structures of feeling are social experiences "*in solution*" related to emergent formations rather than more readily available and tangible social formations: they are a matter of "particular linkages, particular emphases and suppressions … starting-points and conclusions." The question then is, what kind of linkages and emphases might distraction involve.

While distraction may seem acutely specific to contemporary media culture of ubiquitous connectivity, similar diagnoses have been a key concern in cultural theory for over a century, from Georg Simmel's (1903) and Siegfried Kracauer's (1926) analyses of mass cultures of distraction to the more recent diagnoses of media culture as generative of sensory and cognitive overload (Crary 2001; 2014; McCullough 2013; Andrejevic 2013), neurological re-wiring of our brain (Hayles 2012) and even "digital

dementia," the loss of cognitive capacity (e.g. Hassan 2014; Stiegler 2008; 2010). As different as these analyses are, they involve analysis of media technology as contributing to, and shaping, forms of experience, feeling and thinking. The structures of feeling they point towards are ones where media saturation, multi-tasking and ubiquitous connectivity generate distraction as scattering attention.

Early 20th century diagnoses of distraction focused on industrial capitalism whereas contemporary analyses have examined the specific ways in which labour, commodity formation and value production operate (e.g. Thrift 2005; Boltanski & Chiapello 2005). Building on the example of Distractify as a highly successful startup, this paper inquires after the value of distraction in social media. If distraction is in fact an emergent structure of feeling particular to contemporary late capitalist culture, there is value to investigating its ways of operation. According to OED definition, "value" refers to importance, worth and usefulness; to material and monetary worth; to principles of behaviour and judgements over what is important. The value of distraction then refers to the generation of monetary value – for example, for Distractify as a startup and Facebook as it's main engine of traffic through the constant provision of sticky content. In terms of the users, the target audience of the sticky stuff, the value of distraction involves a different kind of worth, that which Hu referred to as shared emotional experience.

The uses of social media can be seen as driven by a search for intensity; a desire for some kind of affective jolt, a moment of interest, amusement, empathy, anger or disgust (Dean 2010; Paasonen 2015). This desire for intensity provokes the interest and curiosity of users; it grabs their attention, and drives their movements across platforms and apps. At the same time, the promise of intensity is elusive, contingent and often fails to deliver. As Michael Petit (2015) points out in his discussion on disaffect, the search for thrills, shocks, and jolts continues despite, or perhaps because of, the boredom involved in browsing from one page to another. While Distractify may aim at the production of a shared universal emotion that would grab people independent of their mutual differences, its attempts at "transmission of affect" (Brennan 2004) are much more volatile and disjointed. At the same time, distraction is explicitly the company's mean of generating profit.

**Paper 3: The 'mastery' of the swipe: Smartphones and precarity in a culture of narcissism.**
**Author: Sharif Mowlabocus**

In this paper I seek to establish a dialogue between two discrete critical methodologies in order to consider the role of 'distracted' smartphone use within a socio-political context. By 'distracted' I am referring to the banal, everyday interactions we have with our smartphones throughout our day; the processes of swiping, tapping and gazing at our handheld devices, which occur dozens, if not hundreds of times a day, and which have taken on the appearance of a habit or social 'tic' (see also Caronia, 2005; Bittman et al. 2009).

Drawing on the work of Winnicott (1971) Lasch (1991), Silverstone (1993), Ribak, (2009) and Kullman (2010), I commute between psychoanalytic and political-economy

methods in order to connect an analysis of distracted smartphone use to a broader discussion of social, political and economic *precarity*. Such an approach allows me to explore the relationship between the individual and society in order to identify how contemporary digital media practice is both a product of, and a response, to political, social and economic uncertainty.

I begin my discussion by conceptualising the smartphone as a form of 'transitional object' (Winnicott, 1971); an intermediary object that serves as a negotiating point between Self and Other (see also Herdt, 1989). In classic psychodynamic theory, transitional objects enact both an illusion (of undifferentiated wholeness) and a *dis*illusion (the reality of the external world). As such, the transitional object is the first 'not-me' object that facilitates the awareness of self and other. Importantly, in the context of my argument, it achieves this by providing *an ongoing site of trust, security and comfort particularly during times of stress, anxiety and uncertainty*.

The concept of the transitional object has been deployed in discussions of digital technologies of communication (see, for example, Dovey, 2006; Ribak, 2009; Kullman, 2010). Building on this work, I posit the smartphone as a transitional object in order to identify the methods by which this technology has become integral to what Lasch terms a 'culture of narcissism' (Lasch, 1991).

The culture of narcissism here refers not to a specific pathology, but to the identification of a particular personality (or aspect of personality), which Lasch (and others) identify as having becoming central to our sense of self since the mid-1970s. For Lasch, a 'normalised' level of narcissism has become the overriding personality trait of our time;

> 'the narcissist depends on others to validate his [sic] self-esteem. He [sic] cannot live without an admiring audience. His apparent freedom from family ties and institutional constraints does not free him to stand alone or to glory in his individuality. On the contrary it contributes to his insecurity, which he can overcome only by seeing his "grandiose self" reflected in the attentions of others'
>
> (Lasch, 1991: 10)

From reality television to YouTube videos, to selfies, 'snapchatting', Twitter and Facebook updating, it is not difficult to maintain the argument that 21st century society has continued to be defined by this culture of narcissism. In this paper, I draw upon aspects of Lasch's thesis in order to conceptualise smartphone use as a narcissistic investment in the transitional object. In our phones we become consumed by the recognition of ourselves through the eyes of others (tagged comments, liked posts, other forms of phatic communication) that become mediated, brought to our attention, by these technologies. At the same time, in securing our sense of self, these transitional objects serve as a defence against the stresses, anxieties and uncertainties that constitute the world in which we live, and which we seek to escape by directing an increasing amount of our attention towards our screens.

It is at this point that I perform a critical pivot in my paper, allowing me to explore the political-economic dimension of this intimate psychodynamic relationship. This pivot

relies on the Durkheimian claim that 'personality is the individual socialized' (Lasch, 1991: 34). Such an assertion allows me to connect the pyschodynamic dimension of everyday smartphone use to a broader discussion that considers the social, political and economic contexts of such use.

I argue that our relationship with our smartphones is a response to an environment characterised by political, economic, environmental and biomedical *precarity* (see Neilsen & Rossiter, 2005, Butler, 2009, Allison, 2012). Such precarity can be seen at an economic level, where permanent contracts (university tenure, for instance) are increasingly being replaced by a zero-hour, zero-benefits contract culture that offers little to no stability. It can be seen at a social level, where employees are required to be flexible, agile and mobile in order that they can service the diverse needs of multinational companies at short notice and with little regard to (for instance) kinship ties and other social responsibilities (see Bauman, 2001). And precarity can be seen at the level of the political, where 'radical' fringe parties and organisations (UKIP, Australia First, Pegida, Front National, and to a lesser extent Golden Dawn) are increasingly shaping the policies, legislation and ideologies of elected ruling parties.

Finally, identifying the precarity that characterises our social world today draws attention to the lack of self-determination and autonomy many of us face, in a world where decision-making increasingly becomes deterritorialised, opaque and incomprehensible to the individual, who nevertheless feels the effect of such decisions. Put bluntly, you may have had nothing to do with the causes of the global financial crisis in 2008 but standing in the queue at the local food bank in 2015 you continue to feel its effects.

Having moved from the level of individual to the social, I conclude my paper by returning to the individual in order to argue for an understanding of smartphone 'preoccupation' as an individualised response to such insecurity and uncertainty. Acting as a (temporary) disavowal of this landscape of uncertainty I argue that our smartphones (purveyor of selfies, liked statuses, tagged comments, text messages, calls and pokes) allow us to search out familiarity, stability but most importantly, *validation* (see Miller, 2009) Thus, when we swipe our screens we are seeking out a sense of our own futurity. When we swipe, we temporarily cast aside doubt and invest in potentiality. When we swipe we are trying to suture together the reality of the social with our illusion of autonomy and freedom.

**Paper 4: Asymmetrical Information Exchange and the Latent Virtue of Interactivity Author: D.E. Wittkower**

This presentation presents a portion of a large research project—a postphenomenological analysis, oriented by feminist ethics of care, of everyday online life on social networking sites (SNS). Postphenomenological analysis, grounded in traditional phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962; Husserl, 1998; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Sartre, 1992) as modified by Ihde's refocusing on small-scale structures of experience (Ihde, 1990), seeks to describe the 'what-it's-like' of human experience in its most basic terms. A postphenomenological analysis oriented by feminist ethics of care seeks out to describe the 'what-it's-like' of everyday processes in the conduct of personal relationships through a focus on the moral particularity of activities of care. Feminist

ethics of care (Cf. Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2006; Noddings, 1984) is based on the observation that traditional ethical theory—based on objective, universal, public concerns of justice—fails to appropriately recognize and reflect significant and indispensible aspects of our moral lives including family and friendship relationships, which are subjective rather than objective, particular rather than universal, and private concerns of care rather than public concerns of justice.

I hold that a postphenomenology of care is able to provide a novel and valuable perspective on informational exchanges online, allowing us a useful alternative mode of addressing privacy issues—useful both in refining and motivating appropriate interpersonal and policy concerns, and also in providing best practices for information exchange to persons and businesses.

To provide a quick and simple example of the value and relevance of this approach, we might note that while the public is distressingly unmotivated by public, justice-related concerns about privacy and ownership of data, many, many more express strong concerns when they judge that governments and companies are "being creepy," a kind of concern whose origin is instead in the private realm of proper (and improper) care in the conduct of personal relationships.

I begin by advancing a theory of architecturally-created latent moral ambiguities, proceeding analogically from Lessig's (2006) idea of architecturally-created latent ambiguities in law. In offline architectures of conduct of personal relationships, the moral value of appropriate interactivity did not need to be affirmed, as information transfer between physically co-present persons tends to reach equilibrium through two primary mechanisms: (1) contexts of interaction tend to create a common set of informational expectations, and (2) constant recalibration and negotiation possible in synchronous one-on-one or small-group interactions as guided by microtransactions of encouragement or discouragement, such as head nods or selective disattention. On SNSs, in the absence of these contextual delimiters and cues, information asymmetries become increasingly common, and we must develop virtuous habits of conscientious interaction allowing others to see that we are attending to them in the right way, to the right extent, and in the right circumstances.

In order to further define this virtue of interactivity, we will look at its related vices: *lurking*, a vice consisting in an inappropriate lack of interaction, and *creeping*, a vice consisting in an inappropriate excess of interaction.

A *lurker* remains party to an interaction without signaling her presence within it, creating an informational disequilibrium, which results in very different affective orientations by constitutive parties of the relationship. Over time, the lurker may grow to feel quite close to the lurked-upon through experiences of ambient awareness which, in non-digital environments, are attended by significant mutual engagement, such as the day-to-day chats about ephemeral minutiae which are of so little importance that they take place mostly among close friends. The lurker may come to feel that the partners are in community in an intimate 'backstage' setting (Goffman, 1959) while the lurked-upon is, by contrast, surprised to discover that the lurker has 'been there the whole time.'

A *creeper* signals presence within too many interactions, interactions of the wrong sort, or in a way disproportionate to interactants' responses. We might imagine an uncle who "likes" all of his young niece's spring break photos—or, in a less troubling example, someone who simply comments on your posts over and over again, in the absence of encouragement or reciprocation. As with lurking, there are reasonable *prima facie* reasons for the creeper to believe that she has been invited to be a proper and welcome party to these interactions as an accepted member within the creeped-upon's network of communicants, but by failing to appropriately scale interactions to interactant reciprocation, the creeper creates an informational disequilibrium by attending to others in inappropriate ways, becoming too present, too often, and too unreservedly.

The concern with lurking and with creeping is thus not a matter of control or access, but of equilibrium and exchange: the concern we have in these moral categories does not correspond to maintaining appropriate privacy, but instead corresponds to our concern for maintaining appropriate *intimacy*. This perspective brings us to an appreciation of concerns having to do with information flows that are also not captured by discussion of contextual integrity (Nissenbaum 2004), for lurking and creeping can be transgressive even when performed by agents with relationships and within interactions fitting to the communicative intent of the lurked- or creeped-upon.

By looking at what count as proper and improper data flows within personal relationships of care, we can (a). gain a fuller understanding of the ethics of data use, (b). gain new tools for engaging with the public about ethical issues in data use, and (c). gain new tools that can better orient businesses and employees in moral use of data. In order to extend these categories from postphenomenology of interpersonal care to other categories, I consider several case studies, including targeted advertising, brand-user interactions on Facebook, Google and the right to be forgotten, EULAs, and predictive recommendation services offered by e.g. Pandora, Netflix, and Amazon.

This final case in particular may be a useful example of why a perspective of care has already been adopted by consumers in response toward companies, and why it should also be adopted by those companies in relating to consumers. Under communicative capitalism, corporations must use user data, and should be virtuously interactive: i.e. they should attend to user-customers in a way that appropriately signals their appropriate attention with appropriate frequency and with appropriate responsivity to user/consumer recognition of their attention, demonstrating moral recognition and care. Such a perspective is possible, and is not incompatible with successful conduct of business.


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