

Call for Proposals: DIGITAL LABOR: SWEATSHOPS, PICKET LINES, AND BARRICADES

Call for Proposals

DIGITAL LABOR: SWEATSHOPS, PICKET LINES, AND BARRICADES

To be held at The New School, a university in New York City

NOVEMBER 14-16, 2014

#dl14

The third in The New School's Politics of Digital Culture Conference Series

Sponsored by The New School and The Institute for Distributed Creativity

DIGITAL LABOR: SWEATSHOPS, PICKET LINES, AND BARRICADES brings together designers,

labor organizers, theorists, social entrepreneurs, historians, legal scholars, independent researchers, cultural producers — and perspectives from workers themselves — to discuss emerging forms of mutual aid and solidarity.

Over the past decade, advancements in software development, digitization, an increase in computer processing power, faster and cheaper bandwidth and storage, and the introduction of a wide range of inexpensive, wireless-enabled computing devices and mobile phones, set the global stage for emerging forms of labor that help corporations to drive down labor costs and ward off the falling rate of profits.

Companies like CrowdFlower, oDesk, or Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk serve as much more than payment processors or interface providers; they shape the nature of the tasks that are performed. Work is organized against the worker. Recent books included *The Internet as Playground and Factory* (Scholz, 2013), *Living Labor* (Hoegsberg and Fisher) based on the exhibition *Arbeitszeit* that took place in Oslo in 2013 and *Cognitive Capitalism, Education, and Digital Labour* (Peters, Bulut, et al, eds., Peter Lang, 2011). In 2012, the exhibition *The Workers* was curated by MASS MOCA in the United States. Christian Fuchs' book *Digital Labor and Karl Marx* is forthcoming with Routledge.

Several events have been organized in the last few years to focus on these developments: Digital Labor: the Internet as Playground and Factory conference (The New School, New York City, 2009 <http://digitallabor.org>), Digital Labor: Workers, Authors, Citizens (Western University, London, Ontario, Canada, 2009), Invisible Labor Colloquium (Washington University Law School, 2013), Towards Critical Theories of Social Media (Uppsala University, Sweden, 2012), Re:publica (Berlin, 2013), and the Chronicles of Work lecture series at Schloß Solitude (Stuttgart, Germany, 2012/2013).

We would like to continue and elaborate on these discussions by raising the following questions:

BROAD ISSUES:

Who and where are the workers and how do they understand their situation?

How and where do they act in political terms?

How can we analyze digital labor as a global phenomenon, pertaining to issues like underdevelopment and supply chains?

Which theories and concepts can help us to frame our thinking about the gridlock of digital work?

How do waste, repair, and disposal play into the debate about labor?

Are there artistic works that respond to contemporary labor?

GENDER, RACE, CLASS, ABILITY:

How do gender, race, ability, and class play out in the diverse fields of digital labor?

How are laboring capacities, also in the digital realm, sustained and maintained by maternal labor, or the labor of care workers, domestic workers?

Alternatively, how do we conceptualize digital work that is underwaged and often coded as feminized?

What are the postcolonial tensions arising between digital workers in different locales?

ORGANIZING:

How relevant are unions to the millions of crowdsourced workers?

How can we resist the all-too-common “the labor movement is dead” narrative?

Which concrete projects might offer us a critical foundation upon which to build broader strategies for “digital solidarity”?

What can be learned from the history of organized labor when it comes to crowdsourcing and lawsuits like Otey vs. CrowdFlower?

What are possibilities and tensions that arise with projects aiming for solidarity among people in global labor systems?

POLICY:

What are the reasons for withholding legislation that would allow for an enforcement of the Fair Labor Standards Act in the crowdsourcing industry?

Are there new forms of contracts or widened definitions of employment that would better address today's work realities?

What policy proposals might be developed and put on the table now?

FORMATS:

In addition to traditional conference structures,

DIGITAL LABOR: SWEATSHOPS, PICKET LINES, AND BARRICADES also aims to experiment

with creative presentation formats and novel venues. We welcome applications for the following formats:

- experimental lectures (e.g., "theory tapas," pecha kuchas, collaborative presentations, or formats not using spoken language)
- lectures or panels
- keynote dialogues
- design fiction workshops for those interested in design storytelling and envisioning alternative futures (3 hours)
- performance lectures in the places where some of this work is taking place: the living rooms of participants (20 minutes each)

SUBMIT a 300-word abstract or a link to short video, and a one-page curriculum vitae to [digitallabor2014 at gmail.com](mailto:digitallabor2014@gmail.com) by March 21, 2014.

Please state clearly which format you are applying for and do emphasize how your proposal speaks to the questions above.

Confirmation of participation: March 31, 2014.

If you have any logistical questions, please contact Alexis Rider
[digitallabor2014 at gmail.com](mailto:digitallabor2014@gmail.com)

We are planning an open access digital work notebook that documents and expands the discussion leading up to, during, and after this event.

Contributions will emerge from the iDC mailing list.

<https://mailman.thing.net/mailman/listinfo/idc>

Conference editor: Trebor Scholz with (Advisory Board): Lilly Irani, Frank Pasquale, Sarah T. Roberts, Karen Gregory, McKenzie Wark, and Winifred Poster. Producer: Alexis Rider.

Join the discussion:

<https://mailman.thing.net/mailman/listinfo/idc>

@idctweets

@trebors

iDC — mailing list of the Institute for Distributed Creativity (distributedcreativity.org)

IDC@mailman.thing.net

<https://mailman.thing.net/mailman/listinfo/idc>

List Archive:

<http://mailman.thing.net/pipermail/idc/>

iDC Photo Stream:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/tags/idcnetwork/>

RSS feed:

<http://rss.gmane.org/gmane.culture.media.idc>

iDC Chat on Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2457237647>