



Intimate Form of Work in Neoliberal Marketplace

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Abstract. This article examines the process by which individuals and labour become more intimate in the context of neoliberal governance. Discuss the changes in the working space and form of the workers as the platform economy develops, using the workers in the self-media platform as the research subject. Analyze how creativity coordinates individuals in precariousness by incentivizing individuals to become “self-entrepreneurs” through the incentive of creative work content. Finally, under Neoliberalism’s governance, visible labour exploitation has given way to expectations for happiness, class mobility, and ideal careers, as well as individuals who are more actively participating in market-oriented competition.

Keywords: work · creativity · governance · precarious labour · feminism

1 Introduction

The background of neoliberal governance that encourages free competition and the development of the Internet digital economy and platform economy, the diversification of work forms and places has broken the traditional boundaries of personal and professional identities, as well as the limitations of individuals and enterprises. Work appears to replace the traditional labour alienation discussed by Marx with an intimacy accepted by the individual. In the 1980s, Hochschild focused on the topic of private and public spheres, and put forward the concept of “emotional labor” [1] from the perspective of observing the service industry. Some scholars believe that Hochschild’s “emotional labor” discusses more about the one-way control relationship between capital and labor, and neglects to discuss the neoliberal market-oriented interaction between labor and consumers. Based on these reflections, scholars expanded their discussions on the concepts of affective labour, precarious labour, creative labour, and intimate labour. Using online platform content producers as the primary research object, this essay will examine the concept of the intimacy between individuals and work from three perspectives within the discourse of neoliberal capitalism. The first section will discuss the labour environment and market environment provided by the network platform, then analyze the performance of emotional labour in the video platform. The second section will define creative labour in terms of power relations and subjects in neoliberal governance, as well as investigate the relationship between instability and care work. The third section,

focusing on the relationship between feminist development and new forms of labour, considers gender issues in social labour before reflecting on the relationship between creative work, which is mostly practiced by women, and the market.

2 Individualization and Flexible Network Platform

Working on free online video platforms has become a popular choice for many young workers in the context of Post-Fordism development. From the perspective of objective historical development, on the one hand, the emergence of economic crisis, social welfare system, and other issues will inevitably reduce traditional linear job opportunities. On the other hand, traditional cultural industry companies are gradually exhibiting an outsourcing trend. Online video platforms provide a form of outright outsourcing by delegating content decisions to participants. “New media technology has been marketed as giving us the freedom to work where we want, when we want, in flexible arrangements that apparently suit the conditions of the modern office” [2]. This flexible employment system appears to increase the possibility of countless employment opportunities; anyone can become a media person, regardless of professional field; does this imply that the media industry is developing a grassroots culture trend? Considering the current situation, whether the way of platform’s operation has alleviated the crisis of the traditional work environment. Gregg believed that network culture allows for greater flexibility in terms of working time and space, as well as a more intimate integration of personal and professional lives [2]. Workers’ labour time would be occupied in a more reasonable manner. The majority of bloggers involved in the self-media industry are not members of the media profession, but rather practitioners and proletarians from all walks of life. That is to say, whether society has a proclivity to develop multi-skilled labour subjects. Furthermore, platform users are a form of “playbour” [3] that combines play and labour to produce content for the platform, which is neither hired nor complete recreation, obscuring platform capital’s control and exploitation of creative labour. For example, people share interactive videos of interesting life stories on TikTok, and bloggers who reach a certain number of followers on YouTube and Bilibili are awarded individual achievement medals to encourage their work enthusiasm. What is more important to consider, however, is what it means to encourage innovation in this ostensibly risk-free industry. Therefore, the emergence of the platform economy blurs and organically combines the boundaries between work, individuals, and life. It is an economic necessity and an unavoidable market development trend for young people to choose a new form of liberal work.

The increasingly emerging self-media content platform has attracted a wide range of freelance workers, changed the pattern of the traditional media entertainment service industry, and became an important place covering mass entertainment and culture. The platform’s content producers interact with the audience more closely than practitioners in the traditional media industry. In front of the camera, they express their personal views on facts, personal lifestyle, and knowledge sharing, which directly generates emotional resonance with the audience to get internet traffic. By observing the working state of flight attendants on the plane, Hochschild believed that this kind of labour requires individuals to maintain external expressions by guiding or suppressing their own feelings,

so as to produce a “appropriate” emotional state in others [4]. Such manifestations of “emotional labour” are often linked to Marx’s discourse on the alienation of labour processes. However, the self-media service industry does not appear to advocate that content producer suppress their emotions and express “pleasure in work” in one direction. Instead, “the online platforms provide the potential for endless outpourings of emotion and spontaneity” [2], and such expressions often have a positive effect on platform content creators and are considered more authentic. Does this mean that bloggers can truly be themselves without restriction? The reality is the opposite, Dowling explained that creating a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere in “Producing the dining experience” provides a reference for affective labour own intelligence [5]. If it is used to understand the reasons for the positive and negative emotions of bloggers being accepted, it actually depends to some extent on the diverse psychological needs of the audience. The couple in film *I’m Your Man* [6] are in a cafe looking for fun by watching videos on the platform of people falling down in all sorts of weird, crazy ways. As well as the featured restaurant on Twitter, which is well-known for treating customers rudely. There will not discuss it from the perspective of human nature and morality for the time being. The actual needs of the target audience are an important consideration for the scope of bloggers’ free creation. That said, the essence of the blogger still need “to manage an emotion or do deep acting” that produces a particular affect or emotion in other [4]. Clearly, the way these bloggers gain attention is comparable to how difficult it was for media pundits in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* [7] to formulate appropriate performance behaviors for celebrities in the public eye after the rise of television in the 1980s, achieving judgments about the relationship between emotional rules and social structure. But the difference is that this does not mean that they really have some kind of power, political discourse, but to change themselves according to the fan’s preferences within “technology of the self” [8]. Therefore, in the self-media, bloggers try their best to grasp their own destiny in the environment of free competition in the continuous sense of self-empowerment and the frustration of self-emotional management.

3 Governmentality of Neoliberalism Effects on Precarious Labour

The algorithm-driven cultural short video platform generates “consent” [9] from creative laborers, instill in the creative class the belief in upward mobility, and shapes and shapes the ideology of individual freedom, self-governance, self-management, and self-responsibility in neoliberal competition. According to Read’s article, “this shift in ‘anthropology’ from ‘homo-economics’ as an exchanging creature to a competitive creature, or rather as a creature whose tendency to compete must be fostered, entails a general shift in the way in which human beings make themselves and are made subjects” [10]. Then, unlike traditional companies, short video platform companies do not need to enter into labour contracts that involve welfare-related issues, but rather make every platform content creator “Homo-economics is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself” [10]. The evaluation of content producers in the algorithm technology system control takes the digital labour performance as the core of the number of clicks, reposts, and comments. In other words, the market fills the void left by neoliberalism, eradicating the fact of exploitation. The management conflict between platform capital and workers

has shifted to users and workers, as well as between technology and workers. Besides, do those successful “entrepreneurs”, internet celebrities and social media influencers represent the hope of being seen by ordinary people, overweight girls, disabled people, stay-at-home mothers, rural youth and other obviously disadvantaged groups in the job market. Dowling suggested that the essence of the service industry cannot be separated from the mainstream social values of consumers, such as women being slender and beautiful. Florida argued that “the privileged creative workers, in the hope that they work hard, pay their taxes and contribute to the well-being of the city by serving as role models for the under-privileged” [11]. That is to say, the emergence of the labor of disadvantaged groups on the video platform does not mean the possibility of more free and democratic work choices. On the contrary, whether it can be considered that it is still a process of identifying elite groups rather than pursuing true equality. Therefore, individuals in the video platform are transformed from negative subjects disciplined by power to positive ones who improve competitiveness and gain happiness and achievement through instrumental self-discipline and governance in the process of modernity, while also taking risks and pain, entrepreneur subject. In addition, neoliberalism’s abolition of the welfare security system has become the ideal pursuit of social mainstream governance of labour relations, and the role of the talent economy can maximize the exploitation of the residual value of human capital.

If biopolitics is a liberal way of governance, then precarity is regarded as the result of an individual’s moral failure under the neoliberal governance logic that encourages extreme individualism and advocates self-responsibility. According to McRobbie’s *Be Creative: Making a Living in the Culture Industries* (2016), the discussion on “creativity” is consistent with neoliberal governance discourse, and the other side of freedom is the normalcy of prefabricated parts in the workplace. “The principal management strategy, which is designed to extract as much in the way of ideas, creativity and commitment of time to projects, is to devise a mode of working that resembles that of the free spirit artist; this is what Ross means by the ‘industrialization of Bohemia’” [11]. Platform creative workers are encouraged to embrace ‘artist spirits,’ but they do not receive the freedom promised, and the platform’s ignored power determines who needs to be treated and how. For example, the Guardian once reported that “TikTok ‘tried to filter out videos from ugly, poor or disabled users’” [12], also pointed out that LGBTQ and overweight groups were included in the list of “special users”. Any video uploaded by “special users”, no matter what the content, is considered to be at risk of bullying by default, and therefore needs to be controlled. Linking to Butler’s formulation of precariousness can be related to not only precarious forms of labour in neoliberalism, but also the meaning of “care” in neoliberal logic. Lorey believed that “the possibilities of a new ‘care community’ as an organizational tool for the politics of *précarité*. parcel of what the movement of the ‘precarious’ will embark on in the course of its search for new ways of living” [11]. However, care work is also marketed as a form of intimate labour. And it is unavoidable that this sense of caring emerges at the same time as a means for power to operate, thereby creating new divisions and inequalities in the name of protection, respect, and care. As a result, the universal nature of insecure work under neoliberal governance aims to eliminate disadvantaged groups. Following the combination of technology and

capital, more subtle way to divide the self and others, defining the value and hierarchy of life.

4 New Forms of Labour and Feminism

Women's reproductive labour formation shifts from the family to the market, taking into account the gender roles of social labour and the blurring of the boundaries between the private and public spheres in neoliberalism. Since the 1970s, developed countries have shifted manufacturing lines to developing countries, and the number of service workers has grown faster than manufacturing, with women accounting for the majority of service workers. Regarding the study of labour in Marxist feminism, first, these labors have not produced specific "objects" to meet people's needs; rather, these labors directly meet people's needs, so labour itself is a commodity; second, these labors are more flexible. Many places deal with people in order to meet their psychological, emotional, aesthetic, sexual, and intimate needs. These new ways of working are frequently associated with the private sphere, with a greater emphasis on female workers' soft skills. In addition, female workers are encouraged to work with passion to deal with instability, indicating that women can gain more social recognition and equality through hard work in the workplace. However, Facebook representative Sheryl Sandberg said in her book *Lean In* [13] that women are often less inclusive than men in expressing themselves in the workplace, and the workplace is biased against women, requiring women to show tolerance, gentleness, and assistance. Competitive desires that are directly expressed by men. Those women who have been successful in different fields are defined as masculine products. She emphasized the significance of women's smiles fully applied to social practice, as well as the importance of women facing their own emotions and making appropriate use of emotional value. This statement fully reflects the expectations of women's differentiation in the workplace. As a consequence, capital power uses feminism discourse to more closely combine work and women, and market-oriented labor's expectation of unequal roles for women has deepened women workers' discipline, and women continue to bear the same responsibility as family in the public sphere, emotional support of internal divisions and roles presented by the body.

Analyze the process of gentrification of young women to reflect on the image of women shaped by neoliberalism. Do the titles of fashion consultant and beauty consultant mean the improvement of the social status of workers in the service industry? McRobbie mentions "as daughters of working-class mothers dream of becoming fashion designers, or documentary film-makers" [11], the neoliberal market's promise of people's dream careers. Moreover, these occupations are, first and foremost, consistent with the new consumer-oriented market environment, which reproduces the definition of "taste" by social class status and the "habitus" formed in a specific class position [14]. Second, it shapes both workers' and consumers' imaginations of their own identity. In *Aesthetic Labor: Rethinking the Politics of Beauty in the Age of Neoliberalism*, the authors believed that in the neoliberal era, beauty is a disciplined technology, subjecting women who seem to be able to freely create their appearance to be disciplined and controlled. In their view, the creation of an individual's appearance is a person's aesthetic investment in the body, which implies the "governance" of the individual by capital and

power in the neoliberal era, and regard this as “beauty politics” [15]. In McRobbie’s view, the sense of competition reflected in “beauty politics” is “keeping themselves employable and adapt themselves and their skills for the rapidly changing demands of the labour market” [16]. For example, in recent years, the Internet has gathered a large number of beauty bloggers, fashion bloggers who have created a series of discourses about a tasteful lifestyle on various platforms. In addition, their target audience, as experts in providing advice on women’s image, is more young women, “age inequalities can compound those of class” [16]. Thus, the development of this work related to “beauty politics” shows the violence of rights against women’s bodies, and its purpose is to promote the competitive relationship between young women in the neoliberal market, and to establish a female image in line with the discourse of modern elites.

5 Conclusion

Neoliberal marketization demands the commodification of emotion and affection as part of labour production, resulting in the formation of new forms of work based on a more intimate sense of personal identity. This form of work is primarily found in the Post-Fordist service and cultural industries. It combines the oppressive relationship in traditional labour with ideologies such as freedom, flexibility, and creativity to become the worker’s imagination of a happiness, class mobility, and ideal career. However, its primary goal is to empower workers to become dynamic and innovative entrepreneurs who are self-aware, self-monitoring, self-improving, and willing to compete in the market under the neoliberal governance discourse. As a result, market-oriented precarious work forms face a slew of social inequalities, including and gender, race, and marginalized groups. Furthermore, new market demands have created more immaterial job opportunities that necessitate emotional support, transforming the main body of labour into female competitors. Also, with the advancement of digital technology, capital purchase technology has also become a tool of power for extracting the surplus value of new types of labour more efficiently, accumulating it more flexibly, and rapidly pushing capitalism toward globalization.

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