The Social Meaning of Extra Money
Capitalism and the Commodification of Domestic and Leisure Activities

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Dynamics of Virtual Work

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Technological change has transformed where people work, when and how. Digitisation of information has altered labour processes out of all recognition whilst telecommunications have enabled jobs to be relocated globally. ICTs have also enabled the creation of entirely new types of ‘digital’ or ‘virtual’ labour, both paid and unpaid, shifting the borderline between ‘play’ and ‘work’ and creating new types of unpaid labour connected with the consumption and co-creation of goods and services. This affects private life as well as transforming the nature of work and people experience the impacts differently depending on their gender, their age, where they live and what work they do. Aspects of these changes have been studied separately by many different academic experts however up till now a cohesive overarching analytical framework has been lacking. Drawing on a major, high-profile COST Action (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) Dynamics of Virtual Work, this series will bring together leading international experts from a wide range of disciplines including political economy, labour sociology, economic geography, communications studies, technology, gender studies, social psychology, organisation studies, industrial relations and development studies to explore the transformation of work and labour in the Internet Age. The series will allow researchers to speak across disciplinary boundaries, national borders, theoretical and political vocabularies, and different languages to understand and make sense of contemporary transformations in work and social life more broadly. The book series will build on and extend this, offering a new, important and intellectually exciting intervention into debates about work and labour, social theory, digital culture, gender, class, globalisation and economic, social and political change.

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The Social Meaning of Extra Money

Capitalism and the Commodification of Domestic and Leisure Activities
This ground-breaking book shines a welcome light on an issue that has up to now been very much neglected in sociological scholarship: the way in which everyday practices provide the raw material for new economic activities through commodification and marketization. In doing so it does not just open up for serious consideration economic activities that are often dismissed as trivial, but also illuminates the very dynamics of how capitalism develops: generating new forms of value from small, unobserved phenomena which, as time goes by, become the basis for important new occupations and industries.

These processes have begun to be theorized by feminist political economists, but this book goes beyond this: it actually observes them in a nuanced bottom-up way. In an approach that brings together both class and gender analysis, and hence draws both on mainstream sociological and feminist theory, the book goes beyond these theoretical insights, peering into the cracks between work and leisure through a qualitative lens.

In detailed ethnographic case studies, using examples as varied as selling personal belongings online, sexcamming, blogging, selling homemade food and craft objects and providing private tutoring, it explores the social meaning of the ‘extra money’ that is so generated. In doing so, it reveals major differences between people of different social classes, genders, and migration statuses.
While avoiding technological determinism, it highlights the role of digital technologies, and especially the Internet, in expanding and bringing to visibility these new forms of marketization and commodification. The book thus makes an important contribution to technology studies, in particular the expanding field of digital labour studies, as well as to sociological and feminist scholarship. It seems destined to become a classic that will be consulted for many years to come.

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Ursula Huws
The source of inspiration for this collection sprang from the editors’ frequent discussions on the subject, starting back in 2015. The idea took shape at two annual conferences of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE) in Berkeley (2016) and Lyon (2017), and at regular workshops with the contributors. We would like to thank all the participants in the Marketization of Everyday Life stream at the SASE conferences and especially those who have contributed to this book.

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1 Capitalism and the Commodification of Domestic and Leisure Activities

Thomas, a 25-year-old unemployed musician, buys and sells secondhand guitars locally on a web platform. Elisabeth, aged 42, quit her job as an IT engineer to sell home-sewn items on her online Etsy shop and to take care of her young children. Delphine, a 30-year-old middle-class civil servant earns freebies and money from advertising and partnerships with food brands thanks to her food blog. Deborah, aged 22, pays her rent from her paid activity as a camgirl performing erotic and pornographic online shows from home. Kolia, a 55-year-old intermittent low-skilled
worker, and his 60-year-old pensioner wife Natalia sell their household-farm produce to supplement Natalia’s pension.

All these individuals commodify their personal belongings or the products of their domestic and leisure activities. This book explores the marketization of practices previously considered to be recreational or domestic, such as blogging, cooking, craftwork, gardening, knitting, selling secondhand items, sexcamming, and, more generally, the economic use of free time.

Market expansion into areas not previously commodified is a longstanding phenomenon (Polanyi 1944) which creates new professions. For example, care workers are professionals who live off the commodification of traditionally free domestic activities. Similarly, artists and sportsmen make a living from the commodification of leisure activities. This book addresses the expansion of capitalism into domestic and leisure realms with a focus on the non-professional side of these markets.

Why are ordinary people who used to engage in domestic and leisure activities for free now trying to make a profit from them? How and why do people commodify their free time? Commodification and marketization are considered as synonymous here. These terms refer to taking an unpaid activity conducted in an individual’s free time, and transforming it into a market product with a price tag. People who set out to make money from activities previously considered outside of the realm of paid work are not necessarily looking to “professionalize” their domestic or leisure activity or try to make a living from it. This then lends different meanings to the “extra money” generated by the commodification process.

“Extra money” can mean “pin money” to middle- and upper-class individuals with additional sources of income, who are just looking to finance the cost of their domestic or leisure activity. “Extra money” can also be seen as “savings” by people who commodify domestic and leisure activities as a form of “side job.” This applies to people from the lower classes struggling to make ends meet, but also to middle- and upper-class workers anticipating a drop in income and wanting to maintain their social status by developing a side job. Lastly, “extra money” can also refer to the income from a main activity in the process of being professionalized. These distinct meanings of “extra money,” which echo the “social meaning of money” depicted by V. Zelizer (1997), correspond to different amounts of
money and different types of commitment to commodification. Meaning varies by the social class and gender of the people who commodify their domestic and leisure activities. The particular focus in this book is on gendered and/or popular domestic and leisure activities. There tends to be a lack of academic studies on these activities, which are seen as trivial and demeaning. Our aim is to show that commodification pervades even the most mundane social activities and that it takes on different meanings depending on the individuals’ social characteristics and life histories.

1.1 Market Expansion

Two competing sets of theories analyze the overall social effect of commodification. On the one hand, some theories condemn the “moral contamination” of growing commodification in social relations. These belong to what V. Zelizer calls the “hostile worlds” theories based on the idea that “Such a profound contradiction exists between intimate social relations and monetary transfers that any contact between the two spheres inevitably leads to moral contamination and degradation” (Zelizer 2000: 817). This common assumption is shared by Marxist theory of “commodity fetishism” (Marx 1992), the Frankfurt School’s criticism of the global commodification of culture (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002), anthropological thinking on commoditization versus singularization (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986), and even social theories observing a disconnect between profit-maximizing large-scale production and pure production based on the rejection of the economy (Bourdieu 1980, 1996). Applied to the case of the marketization of domestic and leisure activities, these theories see commodification as a form of “denaturing” everyday activities. Rather than conducting domestic and leisure activities for themselves, they are seen in an instrumental light as work to meet the needs of customers outside the domestic sphere. This consequently changes their meaning for the people conducting them. On the other hand, another body of theories points to the positive social impact of marketization. Economic theories see commodification as positive for consumers, since it helps consumers make choices by displaying prices that capture the quality of the goods.
Commodification is also positive for producers. It can economically empower subordinate social groups, especially women, by means of the commodification of their activity. Feminist scholars have long argued that access to the labor market releases women from the household burden and their subaltern position (Delphy 1977). Putting a price on domestic work and traditional feminine leisure is said to secure social recognition of their “invisible work” (Kaplan Daniels 1987) and potentially access to welfare. It is also argued that it empowers women and low-skilled individuals by granting them access to their own earnings. From these angles, marketization is considered as a form of valuation, both for the products and the producers, and both economically and symbolically. This book draws on these different research fields to answer the empirical question of the economic and social effects of the marketization of everyday life.

Three factors can explain the current shift toward the marketization of domestic and leisure activities by ordinary people. First, the development of digital technologies has lowered the cost of access to markets. Virtually anybody with an Internet connection can now become a market supplier. Digitization of society can thus be considered as an enabling factor for the marketization of domestic and leisure activities. Second, the global economic crisis has driven a move to take advantage of every opportunity to make money, in particular among the job-insecure lower and middle classes. Third, the contemporary values of capitalism and neoliberalism in a post-Fordism era (“be an entrepreneur,” “be creative,” “be yourself,” “achieve a work-life balance,” etc.) can also explain the current importance of the marketization of everyday life, in particular among middle-class women. Conversely, it can also explain a growing demand for “homemade” products and services.

1.2 The Role of the Internet

The development of the Internet has made it easier for newcomers to commodify their domestic and leisure activities. Today, 87 percent of European households have an Internet connection. The development of web platforms (Craigslist, eBay, Etsy, etc.) and social media networks
(Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) has further smoothed the commodification of personal belongings, products, and services. These platforms provide both easy access to virtual showcasing, including for people with relatively low information technology (IT) skills, and a large customer base due the visibility they offer. They reduce search costs and transaction costs, and their network effects are designed to make them profitable for both suppliers and consumers. Web platforms hence contribute to the marketization of domestic and leisure activities. There are two dominant theoretical schools of thought regarding the impact of digital capitalism on markets and labor. The optimistic view argues that the digital economy, more specifically the sharing economy, is empowering for workers (Botsman and Rogers 2011) that it creates new business opportunities and new jobs (especially in the form of self-employment) and consequently fosters economic growth. The pessimistic view, however, protests that the revolution is an illusion and stresses the negative effects of digital capitalism. Web platforms are accused of adding to the weight of financial and market centricity, acting as a new form of exploitation (Huws 2003; Scholz 2012), promoting poor-quality jobs (flexible, fragmented, and low paid) (Ravenelle 2017), sustaining and increasing inequalities between workers (Schor 2018; Casilli 2019), and undermining workers’ collective social protection. The question could therefore be put as to how far the marketization of everyday life supports each of these views. Most of the case studies presented in this book concern Internet platforms. In some cases, the activity could not have been commodified without the Internet. Such is the case with the online camgirl shows and blogger activities. In other cases, the Internet acts merely as a facilitator, for example, for people selling their old belongings or homemade arts and crafts. In yet other cases, marketization is mostly independent of the Internet. Such is the case with rural couples who commodify their domestic food production from home. These different situations show that, although the development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has clearly driven forward commodification, it was also around before the growth of the digital economy and still exists outside of it.
1.3 The Economic Context

Although the commodification of domestic and leisure activities can be explained in part by the new opportunities opened up by the development of ICTs, it can also be linked to the global economic situation. For a decade, the enduring economic crisis has driven a combination of high unemployment rates in Europe and deteriorating employment and working conditions, for low-skilled workers in particular (Méda and Vendramin 2017). This situation can prompt the lower classes to look to any means to try and earn extra income, including the commodification of domestic and leisure activities. Their profile is similar to that of “crowd workers” who “shift constantly between different forms of casual work regardless of whether it is digitally managed” (Huws et al. 2018: 158). Indeed, “Crowd work must […] be regarded as part of a broader spectrum of casual work, carried out, by and large, by the working poor, seeking any form of income they can find” (2018: 156). For people in a more secure situation, making money from their free time may be a way to forestall a future deterioration in their situation in a context where employment security and social protection are at risk. The need to work and earn money may also concern groups of people traditionally excluded from the job market. Students, retirees and stay-at-home mums are indeed encouraged to “be productive.” As L. Adkins and M. Dever put it, there is the presumption in today’s world that “all adults should be in the labor market or, if not in employment, should be seeking employment actively, indeed, they should be in a permanent state of ‘work-readiness’” (Adkins and Dever 2014: 5). This situation might explain the marketization of domestic and leisure activities.

1.4 Commodification in Post-Fordist Societies

The commodification of domestic and leisure activities may finally be encouraged by the development of post-Fordist or neoliberal values such as the social upgrading of the figure of the entrepreneur in contemporary societies. As L. Adkins writes, breaking with the Fordist model of long-term employment, “the figures of the independent contractor and the
entrepreneur have emerged as the ideal workers of post-Fordism” (Adkins 2016: 2). Those values would particularly concern the middle and upper class, but also extend to the lower class, as shown by the literature on “subsistence entrepreneurs” (Delacroix et al. 2018; Viswanathan et al. 2010). They are shared by some of our interviewees, especially those who consider commodification as a professional opportunity that gives rise to the creation of a micro-business, sometimes paired with an exit from inactivity, unemployment, or wage labor. From this point of view, commodification alters the forms of employment—and associated social protection—by fostering the development of self-employment. It contributes to the rise in own-account working (International Labour Organization 2015). Whether self-employed or not, commodifiers act as entrepreneurs when they set out to sell their products or services. In effect, they need to become salesmen and saleswomen working for the economic profit of their activity. The book hence explores the “entrepreneurialization” of society through the lens of commodification.

The rhetoric of entrepreneurship is increasingly associated with another narrative regarding creativity and passion, which also fosters the marketization of everyday life. The figures of maker and creative entrepreneur have become new ideals (Taylor and Luckman 2018), especially for women. Self-fulfilling creative jobs are often placed in contrast to “bullshit jobs” in the media (Graeber 2018). In keeping with these ideals, people are encouraged to earn money from their passion, and commodification is even supposed to intensify their passion. This type of rhetoric about passion is common in the art worlds, sports fields, and even political spheres (Le Roux and Loriol 2015). Many scholars have pointed out that it is usually used to justify insecure forms of work and employment (Banks et al. 2013; Mensitieri 2018; Simonet 2015). Insecurity is fostered in part by the associated “normalizing of connections between work and non-work, professional life and formerly personal aspects of people’s lives” (Taylor and Luckman 2018: 4). Indeed, creative work consists mostly in emotional and affective labor (Conor et al. 2015; Gill and Pratt 2008; Gregg 2011; Hochschild 1983; Taylor and Luckman 2018), which is based on invisible gendered and domestic skills. For this latter reason—and in keeping with earlier feminist lessons on the invisibility of mostly feminine “domestic work” (Delphy and Leonard 1992; Kaplan Daniels
—this labor has been conceptualized by post-feminist studies as “women’s work” (Jarrett 2014) regardless of the worker’s gender. The commodification of domestic and leisure activities relies on this emotional and affective labor since it is especially a “commodification of the relational” (Mirchandani 2010), as described in this book. In this sense, the development of commodification contributes to the general “feminization of work,” which also comes with the “platformization” of work (Huws et al. 2017; van Doorn 2017): “the feminization of work thesis […] suggests that the working conditions historically experienced principally by women, and by formerly colonized and ethnic minority workers, [i.e. vulnerability, invisibility, availability, flexibility, low wage…] are increasingly representative of all workers’ lives” (Webster and Michailidou 2018: 13). This book studies how and why people engage in the commodification of domestic and leisure activities, and hence in the economic recognition of their creative, emotional, and affective labor. Despite the general feminization of work, the social role assigned to women by today’s capitalism still differs from that ascribed to men. That is why our examination also draws on the analysis of “the post-Fordist sexual contract” (Adkins and Dever 2016). With the end of Fordism (associated with the family model of the male breadwinner and dependent housewife), the social roles of men and women have been redefined and “middle-class women are now being directly interpellated as entrepreneurial subjects” (Luckman 2016: 91–92). The “post-Fordist sexual contract” (Adkins 2016: 2) has come to articulate new ideals for these women: “domesticity, familism, entrepreneurship, boundless love, heteronormative femininity and intimacy, excessive attachments to work, indebted citizenship and financial literacy” (Adkins 2016: 3). Many women see the commodification of domestic and leisure activities as a means to balance those ideals and gain social recognition. This book examines this aspiration to female empowerment and its social effects.

1.5 The Expansion of Labor

The commodification of domestic and leisure activities—whether on the Internet or elsewhere—contributes to the expansion of labor under
today's capitalism. It blurs the boundaries between work and non-work (leisure, domesticity, and free time), leading us to reconsider the nature of work. In recent years, the development of web platforms has been the subject of many academic and media debates on the moving boundaries of work (Flichy 2017), many of them centering on the notion of “digital labor” (Cardon and Casilli 2015; Scholz 2012). Drawing on a Marxist reading grid, this notion defines the creation of digital content and data (on web platforms such as Facebook and Google) as labor since it generates economic value, even when the activity is individually perceived as recreational. Most of this economic value is appropriated by the digital platforms, hence the association of “digital labor” with “free labor” (Terranova 2000). Such debates are particularly stimulating, even though this book focuses mainly on people who are keen to monetize their activity and not on people who are totally unaware of the value they create. The commodification of leisure and domestic activities echoes more traditional debates on the boundaries of work. First, the boundary between amateurs and professionals has long been a point of discussion for the sociology of art and culture and sports sociology (Eitzen 1989; Moulin et al. 1985; Stebbins 2007; Weber and Lamy 1999). This literature is particularly useful to build typologies of commodification commitment, based on income level and the legal status of the activity. Second, the sociology of work has investigated the notions of “non-work” (Godechot et al. 1999; Parker 1965) and “side work” (Weber 1989), helping to conceptualize some logics of commodification and their connections with main occupations. Third, feminist gender studies have largely contributed to the question by labeling as “work” that which was not previously understood as work, that is, women’s domestic activities. Referring to the notion of “domestic work,” feminists criticized the invisibility and exploitation of women’s actions in capitalist, patriarchal societies (Delphy and Leonard 1992; Kaplan Daniels 1987), much the way today’s digital scholars view the notion of digital labor (Jarrett 2015; Simonet 2018). This feminist literature helps explore the porous boundary between work and leisure by conceptualizing it as a divide between production and social reproduction. Production work used to be masculine and social reproduction work feminine. The commodification of traditionally feminine and domestic activities such as knitting, crafts, and cookery helps
turn reproductive work into productive work. As J. Webster and M. Michailidou put it, “the marketplace has entered traditional sites of reproductive labor, rendering them also arenas of value creation” (2018: 9). This book explores this movement and its social effects. In particular, it looks into the social upgrading that can be expected with the commodification of previously invisible and demeaned feminine activities. More generally, our book sets out to link these separate bodies of literature and the abovementioned socioeconomic literature, since the expansion of the market sphere is connected with the extension of the field of labor. In so doing, our purpose is to shape a fresh approach to the effects of commodification processes on women’s and men’s activities and lives in contemporary societies.

1.6 An Empirical Approach to the Marketization of Leisure and Domestic Activities

The ambition of this book is to address these theoretical questions by observing the social reality of commodification using sociological methods. Each contribution draws on an extensive field survey covering a number of years and generating rich, original, empirical results. Data are both qualitative and quantitative. They are based on ethnographic observations, semi-structured interviews, quantitative surveys, web scraping, and analysis of documentation and archives. We believe that empirical sociology is necessary to develop well-founded theories, but also to provide implications for public policymakers working on economic and labor regulation.

One of the strengths of this edited book is found in the social variations presented in its eight chapters. The first variation concerns the different kinds of activities that are commodified: knitting, crafts, cookery, blogging, selling personal items, gardening, writing about TV series, and sexcamming. These different activities involve different types of monetization in the form of direct monetary transactions and indirect economic returns generated by the audience secured by the activity (essentially on the Internet) by means of advertising, for example. Academic studies tend to be thin on the ground on many of these
activities, seen as trivial and demeaning because they are feminine and/or popular activities. Gender and social class are precisely two important social variations to an analysis of the different meanings of extra money today. Women from the lower classes who engage in the marketization of their everyday lives are not working with the same logic as middle- and upper-class men who develop a side business. Even though some chapters are more focused on women and others on men, the general purpose is to compare the expectations and experiences of female and male commodification. In keeping with sociological work on digital media industries and platforms (Gill 2008; Gregg 2008), we draw particular attention to the persistence of gender inequalities, even when the commodified activities are traditionally seen as feminine. Moreover, class-related variations appear to be extremely important to understanding the social meanings of extra money. Our case studies are able to examine these variations—since they run the gamut of the lower, middle, and upper classes—and hence analyze the spread of the middle- and upper-class ideals of post-Fordist values—and their limitations—to the lower classes. One major question is whether the commodification of domestic and leisure activities has an empowering effect, or whether it sustains class and gender domination. Lastly, most of the data come from France, but two case studies concern the Comoros and Russia, taking the focus beyond Europe to help understand global capitalist transformations.

2 The Social Meanings of Extra Money

The collective research presents three main results regarding the commodification of domestic and leisure activities in contemporary societies. First, commodification generates small amounts of money which may be perceived as pin money, savings, or labor income. Second, the benefits of commodification are mainly non-economic. Third, commodification is work-intensive and time-consuming, which we propose to conceptualize as “extra work.” We discuss these results and their social implications.
2.1 Pin Money, Savings, and Low Labor Income

The extra money generated by the commodification of domestic and leisure activities generally comes in small amounts. Although the media and occasionally academics highlight successful individuals who have managed to earn a living from commodification, especially in the digital economy, those cases represent the “happy few.” Our statistical data find that the vast majority have to make do with modest economic benefits. This finding is consistent with other academic results on the gig economy (Huws et al. 2017). Our qualitative data show that the “happy few” are role models for some other committed commodifiers, explaining their commitment, and occasionally frustration, when they do not sell as much as they would have liked. Moreover, the economic profitability of commodification depends on social class and gender. According to quantitative results, the “happy few” are more educated than the rest of the population and, even in feminine activities such as handicrafts and food blogging, men are proportionally more successful than women (Jourdain and Naulin, Chap. 3). Gender analysis shows that women generally enjoy less free time than men because of domestic constraints, and they often choose to commodify less profitable activities (Lambert, Chap. 7). Moreover, this lower profitability of feminine commodified activities can be explained by gender itself: U. Huws shows that “skills that women exercise unpaid in the home […] tend to have a low value in the labour market” (Huws 2018: 3). As a consequence, the social meaning of extra money—no matter how small—differs by social class and gender. Three main commodification logics are differentiated, forming the book’s three parts: extra money perceived as pin money, as savings, or as (temporarily low) professional earnings.

Pin money concerns mostly middle- and upper-class individuals who have other sources of income, and especially women in our book. Extra money is seen as a way to supplement income by knitters who spend leisure time on the Ravelry website (Zabban, Chap. 2), creative crafters who enjoy selling their bags, jewelry, and baby clothes on the Etsy web platform after their hours working for large companies, and food bloggers who monetize their audience and services (Jourdain and Naulin, Chap. 3). They do not need the money to live and, at best, reinvest it in
their leisure activity, which can be quite expensive, in keeping with a traditional use of pin money (Zelizer 1997). In some cases, especially students with low incomes, this money might be a means to improve their everyday lives.

The lower classes, but also surprisingly middle- and upper-class individuals, may see extra money as economic savings intended to maintain or improve their social situation in a context of uncertainty. For people in insecure situations—unemployment, temporary employment, part-time employment, and, more generally, insecure jobs—the commodification of domestic and leisure activities is usually perceived as an essential “side job” that reduces their insecurity. This logic of commodification has developed with the economic crisis and growing global economic inequalities (Piketty 2014). It is particularly exemplified by the case of female Comorian migrants living in the South of France, in Abdoul-Malik Ahmad’s chapter. For these women, trading clothes, shoes, and fashion accessories in their expatriate community is a way to save money in order to upgrade their social status in the long run. Members of the upper class display a similar logic of using commodification for social standing and economic purposes. Anne Lambert, in her chapter, shows how male pilots monetize their free time by means of tax planning and leisure activities that pay (e.g. as flying club instructors) in order to make extra money and to maintain their social status in the long run. She also analyzes the case of male flight attendants who resort to commodification in order to prepare a forthcoming career change, but also to improve their current working conditions by experimenting independence and productive work. More generally, her chapter reminds us that far from being marginal or new, these side job activities may be significant in terms of social and economic returns, and constitute the very essence and the core of the upper-class identity (Bourdieu 1989): “multi-positioning” is part of a dominant and male ethos.

The commodification of domestic and leisure activities can also be part of a professional logic, especially for the middle and upper classes. In this case, marketization is considered as a “main job,” and the money earned—irrespective of amount—is seen as professional earnings. Many digital platforms encourage such professional logic: “the sharing or ‘gig’ economy claims to bring the romance of entrepreneurialism to the masses”