

## **Virtual Production Networks: Fixing Commodification and Disembeddedness**

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to develop a new model of ‘Virtual Production Networks’ (VPNs), building on the Global Production Network (GPN) approach. We argue that the manner in which embeddedness has been utilized within the GPN paradigm is possibly ill-suited to arenas of virtual production in which commodification is heightened. To better account for virtual production we thus extend and reformulate the GPN model. At the core of our VPN model is an original account of the distinctive manner in which online outsourcing platforms organize, commodify and disembed labor. Drawing upon detailed empirical research we conceptually map VPNs providing an original typology and highlighting the ways in which online outsourcing platforms are engineered and framed in an effort to disembed labor from existing laws, institutions and norms. Although VPNs are disembedded they are not immaterial or operating in some kind of ethereal alternative dimension. We elucidate the manner in which disembedded and specifically highly commodified virtual production is fixed within regional, nation and local social networks. Spatio-temporal fixes, the notion that contradictions inherent to economic activity are spatially and temporally pinned down through the production of geographical and social formations, provide an alternative lens to the existing GPN use of embeddedness. We argue that these spatio-temporal fixes enable the overcoming of a number of contradictions created by commodification. We conclude by considering the implications this has for social upgrading.

### **Key words**

Embeddedness, digital labor, global production networks, GPN, online outsourcing, online labor markets, spatio-temporal fix, virtual production.