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Creativity, Labor, and Citizenship

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Platform Practices in the Cultural Industries: Creativity, Labor, and Citizenship

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Abstract

The rise of contemporary platforms—from GAFAM in the West to the “three kingdoms” of the Chinese Internet—is reconfiguring the production, distribution, and monetization of cultural content in staggering and complex ways. Given the nature and extent of these transformations, how can we systematically examine the *platformization* of cultural production? In this introduction, we propose that a comprehensive understanding of this process is as much institutional (markets, governance, and infrastructures), as it is rooted in everyday cultural practices. It is in this vein that we present fourteen original articles that reveal how platformization involves key shifts in practices of *labor*, *creativity*, and *citizenship*. Diverse in their methodological approaches and topical foci, these contributions allow us to see how platformization is unfolding across cultural, geographic, and sectoral-industrial contexts. Despite their breadth and scope, these articles can be mapped along four thematic clusters: continuity and change; diversity and creativity; labor in an age of algorithmic systems; and power, autonomy, and citizenship.

Keywords

cultural production, platformization, creativity, labor, citizenship

In the wake of a string of allegations issued against YouTube in the first half of 2019, including charges that the company failed to protect its creator community from targeted harassment, tech journalist Alexis Madrigal called out the video-sharing site’s “rhetorical sleight of hand” (Madrigal, 2019). By deploying the buzzy-yet-elusive term “platform,” Madrigal argued, the Alphabet-owned network was concealing its role as a *broadcaster*, thus deflecting responsibility for the content posted and circulated among its sprawling user base. Indeed, what Madrigal aptly labeled “the platform excuse”—one that perhaps all Silicon Valley social networks have deployed to evade liability and downplay their pivotal role in shaping society’s news, information, and entertainment agendas—could no longer be unquestionably delivered.

To be sure, Madrigal’s polemic echoed those put forth by members of the academic community. Nearly a decade ago, Gillespie (2010) contended that the term “platform” is an astute discursive device that belies structures of power propelling the tech industry. More recently, scholars like Napoli and Caplan (2017) and Hesmondhalgh (2017) have argued that Big Tech companies’ vehement denial of their role as *media* allow them to systematically shirk social responsibility

while circumventing those regulatory structures that govern traditional media industries. Such academic critiques—amid more widespread concern about the impact of technology on contemporary social, economic, and civic life—are a testament to the profound impact of digital/mobile media on the people, processes, and products of the cultural industries.

Indeed, contemporary platforms—from GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft) in the West, to the so-called “three kingdoms” of the Chinese Internet (Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent)—are reconfiguring the production, distribution, and monetization of cultural content in staggeringly complex ways. Given the nature and extent of transformations in cultural industries across genres and geographies, and spanning individuals and organizations, how can we think about the transformed nature of cultural production in a

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systematic way? While both academics and cultural critics have offered various frameworks to address these shifts, we argue that a focus on *platformization* is an especially useful way to understand these changes and their implications for the wider social world.

Given the just-mentioned ambiguity in nomenclature, it seems worthwhile to briefly unpack the term “platformization.” Helmond (2015, p. 1), in an article published in this journal, offered a definition rooted in software studies that emphasized “the extension of social media platforms into the rest of the web and their drive to make external web data platform ready.” Expanding on this, two of us sought to broaden the scope of inquiry by introducing a framework that foregrounds the political-economic dimension of platformization (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). The article, moreover, aimed to make more explicit how the processes of platformization are relevant for understanding the reconfigurations of cultural production. Bringing recent work in software and platform studies into dialogue with business studies and critical political economy, we argued that the platformization of cultural production involves the “penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries” (p. 4276). Thus, the article contributed an expressly *institutional perspective* to theorizing platforms’ reconfiguration of cultural production.

Yet, in assembling the papers for the two special collections of *Social Media + Society* (the second of which will appear in 2020), as well as through a productive year-long conversation with the contributors, we realized the need to account for the wide variety of *cultural practices* that shape the platformization of cultural production. Building on and engaging with the ideas put forth in some of the key texts in media/cultural industries and media industry/production studies to emerge over the last decade—including monographs and edited volumes by Deuze and Prenger (2019), Havens and Lotz (2012/2017), Hesmondhalgh (2012/2019), Holt and Perren (2009), Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell (2009), McRobbie (2016), among others, we acknowledge that institutional structures are mutually articulated with the lived social experiences of producers and consumers in particular contexts. In the case of platforms, individual social media creators or “complementors” who develop professional-quality media content shape platforms just as much as the other way around. Without rehearsing the now-tired debate between political economy and cultural studies, it seems significant to note that any understanding of the platformization of cultural production should acknowledge such recursivity between institutions and cultural practices.

Hence, in revisiting our initial framework, we propose that a comprehensive understanding of the platformization of cultural production is as much institutional (markets, governance, and infrastructures), as it is rooted in the practices of people. As the contributions to this special issue, and more generally, research in production and cultural studies

demonstrates, platformization especially involves key shifts in practices of labor, creativity, and citizenship. Thus, we define *platform practices* in the cultural industries as the *strategies, routines, experiences, and expressions of creativity, labor, and citizenship that shape cultural production through platforms*.

Owing to this dynamism, the 14 papers in this first special collection interrogate the platformization of cultural production across cultural, geographic, and sectoral-industrial boundaries. The collection brings together original research on such diverse sectors and genres as live streaming, book-tubing, game development, music streaming, podcasting, social media content creation, and webtooning, among others. Together, the articles cover instances of cultural production across Australia, Canada, China, Columbia, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Poland, Sweden, Spain, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The contributors are equally diverse in their approaches, drawing on interviews and ethnography, software and platform studies research, cultural and historical approaches, textual and discourse analysis, and (political) economic analyses. Despite the wide range of topics, disciplines, cultural contexts, and methods, there are a number of consistent themes that resonate across these papers.

Continuity and Change

One recurrent theme involves the temporalities of platform-based modes of cultural production, and, more specifically, the nature and extent of their ostensible “evolution.” Following from Hesmondhalgh (2012/2019), we wish to make clear at the outset that digitally wrought transformations in the cultural industries are as much about *changes* as they are about *continuities* (p. 3). When researching the platformization of cultural production, we need to be especially attentive to change and continuity at the levels of industry, platform, and producer. Thus, most *industries* have longer institutional histories, which inevitably shape professional routines, governance frameworks, distribution and monetization strategies, genres, and audience expectations in the platform environment. Second, the evolution of *platforms* themselves needs to be taken into account. Far from stable entities, platforms should be thought of as dynamic infrastructures that continuously change their user (front-end) and application programming (back-end) interfaces, algorithms, terms and conditions, developer resources, and business models, all of which impact how cultural production unfolds. Finally, *cultural producers* are themselves mindful of institutionally ingrained traditions and routines, while expected to respond to emergent modes of production, content formats, and revenue opportunities. The contributions to this collection provide vital new insights into these complex processes of change and continuity.

Some of the papers in this collection speak to the former by highlighting the novel markets and institutional practices

engendered by platform-based cultural production. Mark Johnson and Jamie Woodcock, for instance, provide a comprehensive overview of the profoundly diverse set of “monetization strategies and features” introduced by Twitch—the Amazon owned live-streaming platform that *Digiday* recently dubbed “a favorite new platform for publishers” (Flynn, 2019). Not only does content on the platform tend to eschew the slickly produced aesthetics of legacy media in favor of live footage, it provides a direct, immediate channel of communication between streamers and their audience. This interactivity allows streamers to solicit on-platform donations directly from viewers via novel features such as “cheering” (i.e., a public form of real-time donations), revealing an intimately more complex revenue stream than the traditional model of advertising-supported broadcasting. By drawing upon an analysis of Twitch streamers across four countries—the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Poland—Johnson and Woodcock produce a typology of seven different monetization strategies. Because of the novelty and the constant tweaking of these strategies, Twitch effectively functions as a monetization laboratory of sorts for emergent entertainment cultures.

Other forms of digitally enabled cultural production can be situated on a much longer historical timeline. For instance, while “webtoons,” “booktubing,” and “podcasting” appear to be radically new modes of cultural production, the works of Ji-Hyeon Kim and Jun Yu, José Tomasena, and John Sullivan reveal continuities with the respective legacy comic, book publishing, and broadcasting industries within particular cultural-geographic contexts. John Sullivan’s contribution on the history, present, and potential future of the U.S. podcasting industry provides, much like Johnson and Woodcock’s piece, a wide-frame institutional angle on the diverse economies of platformization. While the roots of podcasting can be traced to a variety of formats that took shape in the late 20th century, the recent history of audio blogging is, as Sullivan shows, more closely hitched to discrete platform markets. Apple iTunes has been a driving force in shaping the podcasting ecosystem and, more broadly, serves as an archetypical case of “platform enclosure,” wherein podcast content—which was previously available via a decentralized distribution architecture—is pulled back into Apple’s “walled garden.” One of the implications of this case is that platform operators, beyond merely intervening in an existing site of cultural production, reassert their control over the means of distribution and marketing.

Tomasena’s research on the Ibero-American “booktubing” community also offers a historically contextualized treatment of platform-dependent creativity. As members of the Spanish-speaking booktubing community, reading aficionados take to YouTube to furnish networked audiences with book recommendations, reviews, commentary, and even unique expressions of fan fiction. But, as Tomasena shows, booktubers are beholden to many of the same industry logics and hierarchies that structured the traditional

“field” of book publishing. One such stratum relates to the much-vaunted ideal of online ranking, which is configured by what Van Dijck (2013, p. 21) has aptly described as the “popularity principle,” namely “an ideology that values hierarchy, competition, and a winner-takes-all mindset.” Accordingly, in defiance of upbeat narratives of diversified expertise, the practices emerging across the (new) publishing industry seem to—in the words of Tomasena—“reproduce the inequalities of online popularity.”

Diversity and Creativity

The glib assurance of content diversity—bound up with the ideal of innovation and the well-worn but problematic “long tail” hypothesis—is another theme that the papers in this contribution help to address. Indeed, among the resonant narratives about cultural production in the digital age is the promise of flourishing creativity and, consequently, the supplanting of mass customization with niche taste cultures (Burgess & Green, 2018). In a characteristic summary of this perspective, U.S. media industry exec Michael Rosenbaum offered his assessment of the so-called “democratisation of creativity and production” in online video:

“It doesn’t cost anything to make broadcast quality video, all you need is talent. The tools out there are so cheap and easy to use that any nine-year-old can operate them . . . Ten years ago if you wanted to create a TV network you needed to have a billion dollars to invest . . . Today, we have this explosion of platforms on the internet in general but also it’s the amount of screens that are out there today. As screen technology becomes less expensive and streaming and compression algorithms improve, it means that every screen is going to be populated with video. (Smith, 2012)

While Rosenbaum’s assessment of the diversification of content channels in the platform ecosystem is optimistic (and presumably self-serving), it fails to account for the nuanced meanings of “diversity” within the culture industries.

Indeed, diversity can be considered at the level of platforms, cultural content, and cultural producers, all of which can—and often do—overlap. Within discrete cultural industry segments, competing *platforms* have emerged with the aim of attracting end-users, cultural producers, and advertisers. The question then becomes whether or not such increased competition between platforms will lead to a multiplicity of offerings: will we see monopolization, as can be observed in the markets for search and apps? Or, is there room for a variety of platforms? Similar questions can be asked at the level of *cultural content*. In traditional media markets, as Havens and Lotz (2017) argue, regulatory decisions are structured to uphold “both a diversity of voices and localism in media industries” (p. 87). With the proliferation of platforms and the creativity of cultural producers generating new genres of content, it seems worthwhile to examine whether dominant platforms truly facilitate unbridled creativity and diversity, opening up new spaces for expressions of citizenship. And,

do audiences embrace novel forms of cultural expression? Finally, it is equally important to consider diversity among *cultural producers* themselves. As the quote by Michael Rosenbaum illustrates, platforms are often cast as public stages that empower users to express themselves and become cultural producers in their own right. While we would argue that such a mass empowerment has not materialized fully, a crucial question remains whether platformization enables more diversity in cultural producers in terms of gender, sexual identity, race, ethnicity, age, and social class/location (Cunningham & Craig, 2019, pp. 184-187). These various dimensions of diversity are deeply interwoven, owing to the reality that the implications of systematic inequality and discrimination go well beyond the devastating effects on individual workers' self-worth. Without a diverse pool of talent, the scope of cultural, symbolic, and informational products is inherently limited.

Maxwell Foxman's mixed-methods analysis of the cross-platform game engine Unity—a "platform tool" that witnessed a profound uptake among the augmented and virtual reality (VR) communities—probes a related promise of platforms, namely the persistent myth of technological democratization. To Foxman, the case of Unity helps to foreground the role of platforms as *tools* that promise—superficially at least, to engender new forms of creativity. Platforms may afford new modes of production to a larger, but not automatically more diverse pool of creators. As Foxman concludes, "cultural producers are encountering an increasingly rule-bound set of tools with which they must construct content. Those rules flow from the top down, rather than the bottom up, creating a path dependence for creativity." This path dependency, Foxman argues, does not necessarily have negative outcomes for either content or workforce diversity. Rather, there is a discernible nuance in the various instances of "platform lock-in," which transcends simple economic dependency to include the lock-in of content genres, the future of technologies such as VR, as well as the identity and education of industry professionals.

Meanwhile, Ji-Hyeon Kim and Jun Yu's analysis of the Korean webtoon industry considers the heterogeneity of cultural *products*. Crucially, webtoons have witnessed a staggering ascent in recent years, a trend that can be understood against the backdrop of Korea's top worldwide ranking in smartphone ownership and Internet penetration (Ji-young, 2018). Yet webtoons draw upon a much longer tradition in the Korean culture industries, namely *manhwa*—the Korean term for print comics and cartoons. Contrasted with their precursors, Kim and Yu argue, webtoons are much more diverse, in part because creators are not forced to conform to the same culturally embedded expectations about content quality and standards. Moreover, these new digital platforms don't just increase the range of content; they also, the authors contend, provide greater diversity "in terms of genres, methods of production, and even the demographic and educational backgrounds of the artists."

To this end, several other pieces in this collection—especially the contributions of Sophie Bishop and Stefanie Duguay—offer a detailed treatment of *producer* diversity. Amid growing recognition of the pervasive inequalities that structure the media and technology industries, there is a noteworthy—and long overdue—uptick in studies of digital cultural production that foreground issues of identity and representation. Stefanie Duguay's analysis of queer women's micro-celebrity and self-branding practices sheds light on how marginalized communities utilize social networking sites for improved access to the means of cultural production, or, perhaps more aptly, cultural promotion. Through the process of platformization, creators' sexual identity becomes, in Duguay's words: "a form of intimacy, a self-branding aesthetic that conveyed authenticity, and as a common ground from which to form relationships." Accordingly, her paper allows us to see how emerging creative practices become more intricately entangled with commercial logics.

Labor in an Age of Algorithmic Systems

Duguay's paper also underscores the new laboring subjectivities that have emerged in a platform-centric cultural economy. And, indeed, owing to a wider "turn to cultural work" within the academy (Banks, 2007), a number of papers in this collection address an interrelated series of transformations in work and labor unfolding across the platform economy. For one, cultural workers across cultures and contexts are encouraged to be entrepreneurial, self-directed, and adaptable to the whims of the wider commercial, platform, and neoliberal logics (see, for example, Baym, 2018; Duffy, 2017; Gandini, 2018; Gill, 2011; Hearn, 2010; Marwick, 2013; McRobbie, 2016; Neff, Wissinger, & Zukin, 2005; Zhang, Xiang, & Hao, 2019). The command for workers to engage in online self-branding, moreover, exacerbates the *precarity* of career fields that are characteristically unpredictable and individualistic. While workers were formerly stirred by "the promise of one Big Job being right around the corner" (Neff et al., 2005, p. 319), they are now assured they're just an app-tap away from monetizing their side hustle.

At the same time that platformization has transformed traditional work regimes across the news, information, and entertainment sectors, the platform ecosystem has also given rise to *new categories of creative laborers*—including social media entertainers (Bishop, 2018; Cunningham & Craig, 2019), influencers (Abidin, 2016; Duffy, 2017; Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2015), and a sprawling class of value-generating albeit unpaid digital laborers (e.g., Terranova, 2000). Whether professional or amateur (a line that is fuzzy, at best), contemporary cultural laborers are beholden to platform governance frameworks and must consequently adapt to their recurrent "tweaks," including to their algorithmic systems. It is in this vein that a number of contributors in this collection examine the role of algorithms in the production,

circulation, and monetization of cultural products. Such empirical insight, with an emphasis on labor, is a testament to Napoli's (2014) argument that the so-called "algorithmic turn" is among "the most visible and potentially significant transformations currently affecting media industries" (p. 34).

Jian Lin and Jeroen de Kloet's analysis of Kuaishou—the immensely popular Chinese social networking app that boasts more than 700 million registered users—explores an instance of labor on an algorithmically driven platform. By presenting the "real lives of real people" ("Kuaishou: The Lens to a Different China," 2018), Kuaishou is chock full of content that defies traditional genres: exotic depictions of country life, seemingly mundane recordings of family life and pets, and short fiction films—all of which offer new depictions of Chinese citizenship. By enabling amateur content creators to pursue skills-building and monetization opportunities, Kuaishou is a creative catalyst for what the authors describe as an "unlikely" class of creative workers. More broadly, their article reveals how platformization can allow for unexpected class mobility among creative aspirants who reside outside traditional urban hubs of creative innovation.

Sophie Bishop's exploration of YouTube's creator community offers a less auspicious take on the possibilities for marginalized groups—in this case, young women vloggers—to self-fashion careers on social media. Though the inner-workings of algorithmic systems are concealed—or "black-boxed" (Pasquale, 2015)—to user-creators, cultural producers tend to construct and share "algorithmic imaginaries" (Bucher, 2018) in pursuit of the ever-elusive ideal of "visibility." Increasingly, as Bishop shows, prominent members of creative communities are projecting themselves as "algorithmic experts" in hopes of monetizing what amounts to "algorithmic lore," which she notes is a heady brew of "experiment data, theorisation, assumptions. . .into a narrative on how algorithms work, and used as advice on how to successfully produce content." The patterned deployment of such lore, she shows, falls along historically rooted gender lines by reproducing problematic assumptions about male-coded expertise and, more broadly, rendering the digital narrative of "meritocracy" profoundly superficial.

Caitlin Petre, Brooke Erin Duffy, and Emily Hund, meanwhile, highlight a different mode through which algorithmic systems are implicated in wider structures of power and inequality. Their article probes the capricious meaning of "gaming the algorithm": that is, though cultural workers attempt to optimize platforms' algorithmic systems to ensure the visibility of their content, tech companies publicly denounce such practices as cheating, fakery, or even indexes of immorality. The demarcation that companies like Google and Facebook invoke between legitimate and illegitimate algorithmic strategy—spurious as it is—nevertheless shores up their own moral authority. The authors describe this power exertion as an expression of "platform paternalism," wherein tech companies issue "rules, pronouncements, and punishments that purport to be in the best interest of their networks

of users." Ultimately, though, such pronouncements are in the service of the platforms' own financial gains.

As fraught discourses of algorithmic-gaming make clear, cultural laborers do not uncritically accept platform rules and governance. Victoria O'Meara's case study of Instagram "engagement pods"—networked communities of creators trying to strategize against the platform's incessantly evolving algorithm—shows how frustration over platform transformation can mobilize workers. Through the lens of labor process theory, O'Meara considers how content creators' reciprocal acts of commenting and liking—largely undertaken to challenge Instagram's algorithmic ranking and filtration mechanisms—can be understood as a form of collective organization. Though she notes how the individualist orientation of digitally enabled workers represents a marked distinction from earlier, union-models of worker collectives, the case of engagement pods can inform understandings of worker resistance amid platformized cultural production.

Thus, by exploring seemingly discrete shifts in work and labor brought about by platformization, we can observe a complex transformation in creative labor markets across the globe. While there is a strong demand on laborers to be entrepreneurial—exacerbating the individualistic, competitive, and largely unpredictable nature of creative work—there is also unexpected class mobility, worker resistance, and instances of solidarity. In other words, the story of platformized cultural labor is not one of precarisation versus emancipation. Transformations in creative labor markets are fundamentally shaped by the continuous strategic positioning and discursive framing on the part of platforms in their efforts to govern cultural production, as well as on the part of cultural workers to get ahead in the game.

Power, Autonomy, and Citizenship

The above discussions of inequality, democratization, and resistance are a testament to our overarching concern with the potential redistributions of power and autonomy engendered by the platformization of cultural production. In an earlier paper, we stressed that the mounting dominance of major platform corporations in the cultural field "warrants sustained and relentless critique, as power continues to shift in a constantly evolving ecosystem that, for complementors, is fraught with a loss of autonomy, risk, and uncertainty" (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p. 4289). While platform dominance continues to be a central concern of this collection, the contributions that follow reveal that the relations of power and dependency are multilayered and by no means unidirectional. Put differently, platforms can be a site of profound political-economic authority while giving rise to forms of resistance, collective citizenship, and strategic maneuvering on the part of cultural workers.

To Sarah Banet-Weiser and Alison Hearn, the ideals of resistance and empowerment promised by platformized cultural production often amount to window dressing—a

dynamic that is especially discernible in the case of popular feminism. The notion of glamor, they argue, is a productive heuristic through which to see the disparities between contemporary rhetorics and structural realities of power in cultural production—from Instagram feeds promising body positivity to metrics functioning as proxies for social approval us to wider assurances of “purity” and “neutrality” promised by platform’s computational logics. Glamor, according to the authors, represents a “superficial form of allure involving technological magics.” The work of glamor, they conclude, is “done to enhance the affordances, data extraction practices, and profit of the major platforms,” all of which have significant social and political consequences for citizen-consumers.

The articles on the music industry, meanwhile, offer insight into the struggle between different power players in the cultural field, as well as the potential space for autonomy and creative independence. Tiziano Bonini and Alessandro Gandini show how music streaming platforms function as “new gatekeepers” of the industry with “proprietary algorithms and human curators” supplanting the industry’s former curatorial actors: radio programmers, disk jockeys, and journalists, among others. Drawing upon interviews with key players in the music industry, they show how the exhortation to be ever more attuned to ranking systems challenges popular understandings of music curation. Instead, platformized cultural fields are increasingly structured by what the authors call “algo-torial” power—a dynamic hybrid of algorithmic and editorial influence that is as much cultural as it is technological. Different players, moreover, “struggle” to wield authority over streaming; the output of this struggle, they show, is a playlist in which these power relations are finally “coded” in.

David Hesmondhalgh, Ellis Jones, and Andreas Rauh offer a quite different way to conceptualize the power and curatorial logic of music streaming services, namely through the typology of “consumer-oriented” versus “producer-oriented” platforms. The former describes mainstream streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music; the latter, which includes services like Bandcamp and SoundCloud, refers to platforms “designed in such a way to encourage producers of music to upload content.” On the surface, at least, producer-oriented platforms seem to grant musicians greater degrees of agency and autonomy. Yet the authors’ analysis reveals a much more nuanced dynamic at play, wherein SoundCloud becomes drawn deeper into to the platform ecosystem through funding rounds, as well as by adopting platform functionalities. Bandcamp, on the other hand, manages to remain independent by keeping finance capital and datafication at a distance. More broadly, the authors show how difficult it is for cultural producers to develop economically viable businesses without succumbing to the dynamics of platformization.

Cunningham and Craig, finally, offer a rejoinder to narratives that platform behemoths wield complete control over

individual content creators. Drawing upon interviews with a global network of what they call “social media entertainers,” they highlight the emergence of new economic models that defy the power dynamics underpinning traditional creative industries. As they argue, “The same network effects that accord platforms enormous power also enable better connected, networked possibilities for horizontal, grass roots peer-to-peer connectivity and communicative and organizational capability.” The authors also highlight new actors emerging within this space—including talent agencies and the Internet Creators Guild (ICG)—revealing how social media entertainment is being transformed from both the bottom-up and the top-down.

Conclusion

While the articles in this collection are richly nuanced in their breadth, foci, and analytical approaches, such diversity does not belie their productive points of overlap which, together, reveal the potential for a systematic examination of the platform practices of the cultural industries. First, the authors foreground the importance of exploring potential transformations in the *creative* process. Returning to queries raised earlier: Do platforms enable new modes of production, novel content genres, and more diverse cultural and symbolic expressions? Collectively, the contributors are ambivalent. Although newfangled genres and hybrid business models are emerging, platforms simultaneously exert constraints that steer the creative process. Second, key shifts are occurring in the nature of creative *labor*. The consequences of platformization are equally contradictory here as cultural workers are finding new routes to audiences and visibility, but many of these paths exist within spaces still-wrought by the structural realities and inequalities of traditional labor markets. The breakneck pace of change within the platforms themselves, moreover, exacerbates the precarity of highly unpredictable, “always on,” career fields. Finally, the contributions broaden the ways through which to interrogate notions of *power*, *autonomy*, and *citizenship* in the platform economy. This is a particularly complex issue: while platforms are becoming central nodes in virtually every cultural industry, their power is based on mutual dependency. Consequently, as the articles in this collection demonstrate, platforms also open up spaces for negotiations, contestation, and even acts of resistance.

Studying the transformations in cultural production wrought by platforms thus requires an appreciation for the mutual articulation between institutional changes and shifting cultural practices. Returning to the example that opened this chapter, concerns about YouTube’s lackluster protection of its creator community both reflect its institutional structure (e.g., markets, infrastructure, governance) *as well as* the creative practices of its laborers as they engage with context-specific understandings of citizenship. Hence, we certainly agree with Alex Madrigal’s clarion call for all of us to

challenge the idea that Facebook, YouTube and the likes are *just platforms*. It is crucial that we take seriously not just *what*, but *how* these platforms are fundamentally impacting the cultures, technologies, and political economies of cultural production.

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