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NON-LABOUR PLATFORMS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON WORK IN SPECIFIC SECTORS

A Major Gap in Recent Research on Work and Employment[1]

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Introduction

Digital platforms have become pervasive across many areas of society, including work and employment. Researchers on work and labour have responded by devoting much attention specifically to "labour platforms"; be these remote ones organising clickwork, that is relatively small jobs carried out at-a-distance on a freelance basis (such as Amazon Mechanical Turk) or geographically tethered ones providing in-person services (such as Uber or Deliveroo). However, the term "platform" covers a vast array of phenomena, including the following:

- Operating system platforms for smartphones and other connected devices, like Android and iOS
- Payment platforms like PayPal
- Crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter
- Accommodation platforms like Airbnb
- Consumer rating platforms like TripAdvisor and Yelp
- Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter or Weibo
- Games hardware platforms like PlayStation
- Video, audio and games streaming platforms like Netflix or Spotify

While it is understandable that scholars of work prioritise study of labour platforms specifically, other platforms also have important implications for working lives. Here, we challenge researchers on work to reflect more expansively on the range of interlinked phenomena that are often (simplistically) described as the "platform economy". We prioritise looking beyond "labour platforms"; here denoting any platform which permits "individuals, families or companies in need of a service to hire a worker who is willing to offer the relevant activity" (Aloisi and De Stefano, 2018: 10). Non-labour platforms (i.e. any digital platform not meeting this definition) often have profound implications for labour, which have not attracted sufficient attention in research on work. Such research, while it has extensively investigated the conditions facing platform workers on labour

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platforms, may also need to focus more on how *non-platform work* is being impacted by, and interacts with, *non-labour platforms*. We seek to catalyse this discussion.

We argue, against the monolithic idea of the "platform economy", that the impacts of platforms are pluralistic and variegated. We are sceptical of supposed macro-level shifts towards "platformisation" or "platform capitalism", and advocate a sharper focus on the logic of specific industrial contexts. Digital platforms have particular applications in particular sectors, with different consequences. This variation is obscured partly by platform economy narratives, but also the narrow interest in labour platforms among researchers of work. Hence we observe a gap between two literatures: the literature on digital platforms documents the broad range of platforms but has little to say about work; research on work and employment (one would hope) has much to say about work, but only engages with a small slice of the platform world.

By addressing these gaps, we add our voices to emerging scholarship which has cast a critical eye over current research on labour platforms. Recent interventions have argued that labour platforms have been over-studied by scholars of work (Azzellini et al., 2022b); and also that this over-focus has gone hand-in-hand with a narrow conceptual repertoire concentrated overwhelmingly on the limiting theme of "algorithmic control" (Joyce et al., 2023). Our argument, that the empirical focus of studies of platforms and work has been too limited and requires expansion, builds further on these interventions.

Our chapter proceeds as follows. First, we examine critically the concept of platforms and underline its heterogeneity, arguing research on work should examine a wider range of the phenomena than currently included in the platform concept. We propose that the application of platforms should be understood through a closer focus on sectoral context, questioning the narrative of a monolithic shift. Next, we support this claim by reviewing literature on two industries: retail and hospitality work and the cultural and creative industries (CCIs). In both cases, non-labour platforms have a significant impact, but in sector-specific ways; though particular platform mechanisms may indeed permeate across sectors. Thus, we contribute to understanding the implications of digital platforms as a whole for people's ability to live flourishing lives in and through their work. How are digital platforms tied to old and new forms of exploitation, alienation, and control in work, and how might they enable old and new forms of autonomy, independence and resistance? These questions will often be most effectively addressed by engaging with the digital platforms most apparent in to particular sectors, rather than (overly broad) analyses of "platform capitalism", or an (overly narrow) focus specifically on labour platforms.

Neglect of Work in Platform Research

Partly, this chapter is motivated by some reflections based on our own experiences in Higher Education. Particularly as educators, we have observed quite concretely the role of platforms in our industry. However, it is notable that the most impactful platforms, which have had substantial implications for Higher Education workers, are not "labour platforms".

IT corporations have been heavily involved in education for many years, and various digital technologies and software systems have long been present in schools. But as van Dijck et al. (2018) point out, their presence has now gone far beyond the sale of hardware and software to a "next generation of data-driven, platform-based tool sets", covering "content production and distribution, student performance tracking, class communication, and administrative organization" (119). van Dijck et al. recognise the potential for these technologies to make education "more efficient, accessible, and affordable" (122) but highlight an intensification of managerialism and teacher surveillance, and an erosion of fundamental principles of academic autonomy and independence.

The implications of new educational platforms for teachers as workers are explored by Selwyn (2019) in a study of two Australian high schools. Selwyn shows how the extensive use of a school management system, Compass, brought various advantages, in terms of consistency, error reduction and communication between staff. But it also brought significant standardisation, including widespread use of cut-and-paste in assessment of students and their work. The availability of standardised lesson plans made preparation less intense, but diminished teacher creativity (with Compass, "there's no creativity whatsoever", one teacher observed). The platform also intensified monitoring or surveillance of teacher performance and, as is familiar from various other studies of the spread of digital technologies via the smartphone and laptops, to an intensification of student work and "presence bleed" (Gregg, 2014) beyond established working hours, and a severe difficulty in disengaging from work. Above and beyond teacher experience, van Dijck et al. argue that platformisation of education has catalysed a commodification of education, on the basis of "the processing of learning data by large data hubs that render big data streams monetizable and potentially profitable" (121). Detailed data about the learning habits of young people is potentially gold for advertisers. We observe that the debate on platforms in the sociology of work, given its focus on a relatively narrow set of labour platforms, is unable to tell us a great deal about these developments. Arguably, these developments are closely embedded in sectoral context, meaning the wider "platform economy" narrative is also of limited utility.

These limitations alerted us to the need for a wider view on the relationship between platforms and work, including a reflection on the historical evolution of "platform" terminology. From around the 1980s, the term platform, based on its original meaning of a raised surface on which people or things are placed, began to be used in computing, referring to "an infrastructure that supports the design and use of particular computing applications", e.g. "computer hardware, operating systems, gaming devices, mobile devices or digital disc formats" (Gillespie, 2010: 349). So the 1980s saw "platform wars" between IBM's personal computer (PC) and Apple's Macintosh (Gillespie, 2010: 349). Gradually, the term also began to refer more specifically to "online environments that allow users to design and deploy applications they design or that are offered by third parties" (Gillespie, 2010: 349), like eBay, which from 2000, made public its API (Application Programming Interface), allowing other businesses to gain detailed insights about eBay's users. The idea of "open APIs" spread, and Facebook made its API open in 2009, spreading the term further, so that "platform" is now often used to mean something as general as "a service made available via computers". While the term is unlikely to disappear any time soon, the diversity of phenomena described as platforms raises concerns over the term's validity and coherence.

Nevertheless, a meaningful core remains, and some analysts have sought to go beyond casual and clumsy uses. "At the most general level", Srnicek writes, platforms are "digital infrastructures that enable two or more groups to interact", positioning themselves as intermediaries, and providing tools enabling users to build their own products, services and marketplaces (Srnicek, 2017: 43). van Dijck et al. (2018: 4) provide a fuller delineation: a platform is "a programmable digital architecture … designed to organize interactions between users… geared toward the systematic collection, algorithmic processing, circulation, and monetization of user data". They identify key elements constituting any platform's anatomy, arguing platforms are fuelled by *data*; are automated and organised through *algorithms, interfaces* and *protocols* which shape *usage* in particular ways; are characterised by certain *ownership* relations; adopt certain *business models* and govern usage through *user agreements*.

Platforms have sometimes been welcomed as ways of achieving greater business efficiency (McAfee and Brynjolfsson, 2017). Other writers hail the datafication that is crucial to their

operations as having enormous potential for business, science and culture (Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier, 2013). However, research also identifies various dangers of digital platforms, and of associated processes such as datafication and the extensive use of recommendation algorithms.

Some of these critical writers have contextualised these developments within a wider narrative of capitalist transformation. The catchy title of Srnicek's (2017) *Platform Capitalism* has been widely cited. However, its suggestive analysis has rarely been scrutinised, although some recent contributions in studies of work and employment have sought to more explicitly critique the platform capitalism narrative (Azzellini et al., 2022b; Joyce et al., 2023). Srnicek saw the rise of platform companies as a response by capitalists to the economic crises afflicting rich countries from the 1970s onwards. For Srnicek, platforms developed as ways for capitalist firms to take advantage of new opportunities for profit afforded by data, and thereby to become the means by which other businesses sought to gain competitive advantage. Similarly, though in more detail, Zuboff (2018) argued that Google played a crucial role in bringing together various technologies to use data to develop personalised advertising, thus generating "click throughs" whereby viewers of an advertisement (or other online content) opt by clicking to purchase a product or service or to learn more about it, or undertake some other interaction, thereby providing data that the company might, in turn, use for future product development. For Zuboff, this enabled a new type of capitalism (with Google playing an equivalent role to Ford's transformation of manufacturing systems in the twentieth century) based on the collection and analysis of massive amounts of user data, with significant implications for surveillance by corporations and states.

Such research makes only passing reference to implications for workers. Equally importantly, the admirable macro-historical scope of these sources leaves little room for analysing how platforms are embedded and used in particular sectors. Research undertaking this humbler sociological strategy has mainly developed within media, communication and information studies, where analyses of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have explored "the construction of these digital spaces, user activities on them, and the political economy of data within them" (Ajunwa and Greene, 2019: 63). van Dijck et al. (2018: 101), for example, see mechanisms of datafication, commodification and selection as essential to how platforms translate information into value, and show these mechanisms at work across many sectors, including news, urban transport, healthcare and health research, and education. In health, for example, they highlight the multiplication of platforms, from personal fitness apps to medical apps for self-diagnosis, symptom monitoring and illness management. These platforms collect abundant data given freely by users and purport to offer public health benefits by doing so (see also Chamakiotis et al., 2021). van Dijck et al. also stress the importance of understanding any one platform as part of an ecosystem of related platforms rather than seeing platforms as operating autonomously from each other.

van Dijck et al.'s normative focus is on how digital platforms favour private convenience and corporate power over the common good – focusing not only on privacy, safety and consumer protection concerns (values that do receive abundant if inconsistent attention from within the tech world behind platforms), but also "fairness, equality, solidarity, accountability, transparency and democratic control" (van Dijck et al., 2018: 3). They and other critical analysts of digital platforms have little to say about platforms' implications for workers. Some media, communication and information research *has* paid attention to implications of digital platforms for workers, but mainly in terms of one important but particular group of platforms, social media, which we discuss further below. Next, however, we discuss scholarship specifically focused on work and employment, considering how platforms figure in this literature.

Neglect of Platforms in Research on Work

It may seem counterintuitive to suggest that scholars focused on work have neglected platforms, since there has been huge growth in studies of labour platforms and platform work. At sociology of work conferences, personal experience suggests that sessions on platform work are often among the most well-attended. However, there is growing recognition that this scholarship is often rather narrow, being strongly concentrated on a rather specific set of labour platforms (what might be termed the Uber or Deliveroo models of platform-mediated in-person service work) (Azzellini et al., 2022b; Joyce et al., 2023).

To this emerging critique of scholarship on platform work, we add another line of argument: platforms are neglected insofar as this narrow focus on labour platforms overshadows study of non-labour platforms. To study *platform workers*, we need to focus on labour platforms. However, to study the wider category of *non-platform workers whose jobs are affected by platforms*, a focus on labour platforms is inadequate.

We should clarify that our discussion is distinct from the issue of how digitalisation more broadly is transforming work and employment (Neufeind et al., 2018; Howcroft and Taylor, 2014), since platforms represent a particular (though currently crucial) manifestation of digitalisation. We are also less concerned with the labour undertaken behind certain prominent platforms (Gray and Suri, 2019), though this is clearly important too.

Research on work and labour has extensively typologised platforms and forms of platform work. Typically, however, these typologies are divisions *within* an implicit or explicit broader category of the "labour platform". In many cases, the starting point is distinguishing between platforms enabling people to buy and sell labour, and other kinds of platform, where it is then assumed that the former is primarily or even exclusively relevant (Aloisi and De Stefano, 2018; Ilsøe and Larsen, 2020; Vallas and Schor, 2020).

Once the labour platform is singled out and other platforms sidelined, the next step for researchers on work and labour is often to distinguish where platforms involve work done online, from cases where platforms involve arranging offline services. Aloisi and De Stefano (2018), for example, distinguish between online "crowdsourcing" platforms and, platforms enabling on-demand in-person services. Wood and Lehdonvirta (2019) similarly distinguish between the "offline service gig economy" (mainly food delivery ride-sharing) and the "remote gig economy" (e.g. clickwork). Schmidt (2017) differentiates between "cloud work" and "gig work": the former corresponding to Wood and Lehdonvirta's "offline service economy" and the latter to their "remote gig economy". Hence a conventional analytical starting point appears to be distinguishing between online and offline types of labour platform.

Further distinctions can be drawn within these types. Schmidt (2017) divides each type into three sub-types. "Cloud work" includes freelancer markets; microtasking crowdwork; and competition based creative crowdwork. "Gig work" includes transport and delivery; household and personal services; and counterintuitively, accommodation (e.g. Airbnb). Howcroft and Bergvall-Kareborn (2020) have a different approach, identifying four sub-types of "crowdwork". These are situated on a 2 × 2 matrix where the axes are worker-initiated versus requester-initiated; and paid work versus "non-paid or speculative work". This method cuts across the remote-online/offline services distinction. Requester-initiated paid work is "online task crowdwork"; requester-initiated non-paid/ speculative work is "playbour", where requesters post jobs which people do out of passion (e.g. creating modifications for games), or as part of a competition; worker-initiated paid work involves "asset based services" like Uber, TaskRabbit or Airbnb; worker-initiated speculative work is professional freelancer crowdwork (such as the development of mobile apps or providing photos for

iStockphoto). Notably, their third category (worker-initiated paid work) brings together services other authors would tend to separate.

As noted, all these typologies introduce further classificatory divisions into the category of the "labour platform". The latter is the starting point, designating non-labour platforms as of less interest. There are partial exceptions to this. Maffie (2020) encourages scholars of work to distinguish between the "gig" and "sharing" economy. The gig economy largely corresponds with the labour platform, while the sharing economy (e.g. Etsy, where individuals can sell their own craft products) denotes situations where platforms' centralisation of information is less problematic for users, facilitating wider exchange of assets rather than a subordinate labour relationship. Both centralise and organise digital markets, but the latter expands, rather than constrains, user choices. Maffie's work is important in addressing the industrial relations implications of certain types of non-labour platform. However, his contribution remains unusual in this respect. Moreover, we will later highlight less benign characteristics of non-labour platforms. Another case where scholarship on work engages with non-labour platforms is debates about social media usage. These discussions interrogate whether individuals' social media activity can be considered a form of labour from which value is extracted (Hesmondhalgh, 2016; Fumigallie et al., 2018). Nonetheless, such debate remains relatively confined to Marxist debates on value and has not made wider inroads into research on work and labour.

Vallas and Schor (2020) take a slightly different approach, categorising five types of *platform work*, rather than platform model, which includes phenomena outside strictly defined labour platforms:

- technologists and instigators of platforms
- professionals and freelancers who do professional work over platforms such as UpWork and Freelance
- gig workers who provide offline services arranged through a platform
- clickworkers
- those who carry out often-unpaid "aspirational labour", like social media influencers.

Schor and Vallas arrange these types of work into a 2 × 2 matrix, along axes of spatial dispersion and task complexity. The distinctive feature of their account is that rather than examining types of platform, they are identifying types of platform work. This enables them to acknowledge other platforms beyond the labour platform – such as content producers seeking to monetise output over sites like YouTube. However, despite this exception, the focus overall remains on labour platforms and those who work for them.

What points should be taken from this discussion of platform (and platform worker) typologies in research on work, labour and employment? A first comment is that it reveals a strong focus on labour platforms, which is a relatively narrowly defined segment of platforms. From the perspective of researching work, this is a limitation, because studying work on labour platforms is a much narrower research agenda than the effects of platforms on work. Hence, a second comment is that while research on work and platforms tells us much about *different types of platform* and *different types of platform work*, it is unable to provide a more complex picture of the multifaceted role of platforms, particularly how their role is variably embedded in different sectoral contexts. The focus on the labour platform risks overlooking other types of platforms which are reshaping work, and the way their effects vary depending on context.

To reiterate, the deficiencies of the wider platform literature include not only its neglect of work, but its need for a more sociological focus on sectoral context, in contrast to broader platform

economy narratives. Next, we will look at two sectors (retail/hospitality and CCIs), examining their specificities, to show the importance of non-labour platforms among working populations way beyond platform workers themselves.

Platform Effects in Different Sectors

In this section, we develop our earlier claim that other kinds of platforms often have as much relevance for work and employment as labour platforms, having major implications for working conditions in some sectors. To properly address implications of non-labour platforms for work, a detailed sectoral focus is required, since platforms reshape sectors in specific ways that cannot be grasped with a wider focus on the platform economy (Azzellini et al., 2022a). We examine two sectors to make this point: frontline service work in retail and hospitality; and the cultural and creative industries.

Frontline Service Work in Retail and Hospitality

At the broadest level, the transition from bricks-and-mortar retail to online retailers, most notably Amazon, is well-documented. Moreover, the seismic implications of the Amazon model for industrial relations are attracting a much wider literature, particularly concerned with authoritarian forms of work organisation in the warehousing sector (Delfanti, 2021), and with casualisation and work intensification in distribution and delivery work (Moore and Newsome, 2018).

However, other forms of retail and customer service work are also being reshaped by platforms, including by non-labour platforms which are less well-documented in research on work and labour. An important example is the implications of customer review platforms such as TripAdvisor and Yelp. While customer-driven ratings systems have received much attention from scholars of work and labour, the focus has been on labour platforms that have their own in-house customer ratings systems, such as Uber's star ratings and similar (Rosenblat et al., 2017; Prassl and Risak, 2015). It has also been examined among "Uberised" legal professionals who offer services over platforms (Yao, 2020) and in relation to online crowdwork platforms (Schörpf et al., 2017). However, these are all cases of platform enterprises using their own rating systems to discipline platform workers. TripAdvisor and Yelp differ, because they are not integrated into labour platforms. They are separate platforms where users can submit reviews of third party businesses. In many cases, these are bricks-and-mortar businesses, meaning that platformisation here has implications for management and workers who, ostensibly, are completely separate from "the platform economy" (Paul, 2018; Sperber, 2014). So the issue here is not platform labour firms disciplining platform workers, but non-labour platforms disciplining non-platform workers. Intriguingly, much of the literature examining these implications emanates from other fields dealing only tangentially with work and labour issues (Bradley et al., 2015; Jeacle and Carter, 2011; Sahin et al., 2017; Prayag et al., 2018; Ranard et al., 2016).

These types of platform are increasingly relevant for working conditions and the employment relationship in retail and hospitality work. Local retailers and small-scale hospitality businesses are increasingly dependent on sites like Yelp. Evidence from the US restaurant sector shows that their profitability appears connected to reviews on platforms, with favourable Yelp reviews enabling independent restaurants to develop a profile, even re-gaining market share against chains (Luca, 2016).

Moreover, evidence also reveals that one of the most important influences on the feedback provided on consumer review platforms is customer perceptions of staff performance. Perceived

deficiencies in staff performance are one of the most frequent causes of negative TripAdvisor feedback, and managers have increasingly implemented "recovery plans" (such as training or performance management and warnings) in response (Sahin et al., 2017). Importantly, while consumer review platforms are most obviously and immediately applicable to retail and hospitality work, consumer ratings platforms have sought to extend their influence. For instance, Ranard et al. (2016) study Yelp's influence on frontline healthcare work.

Hence, there are numerous implications of consumer ratings platforms of relevance to scholarship on work and labour. First, they may cause work intensification and increased emotional strain. Negative ratings may have a deep affective impact both on small business owners and on staff within them (Bradley et al., 2015; Prayag et al., 2018). Bradley et al. describe this as a particularly insidious threat to well-being which evades containment within designated working hours. While, of course, retail workers have long had to deal with complaints, the difference is that review-based platforms facilitate and publicise grievances and criticisms. Responding to such criticism is not only labour-intensive, it may also, as Bradley et al. (2015) point out, involve the kind of "emotional dissonance" discussed by Hochschild (1983) in her famous study of the emotional labour of (mainly female) flight attendants. Notably, these studies of the affective and well-being-related consequences of consumer review platforms for workers stem from hospitality and tourism management, rather than critical scholarship on work and labour.

Second, consumer review platforms constitute an additional third party "stick" with which workers can be threatened. Sperber (2014: 69), one of the few critical scholars of labour to study consumer review platforms, writes:

> Yelp reviews are frequently read by restaurant owners and have been invoked to discipline, and even fire, restaurant employees who have been criticized on the site. In this way, Yelp contributors not only enrich Yelp but function as unpaid managers, or "secret shoppers," for the restaurant industry.

Thus they might act as a kind of free, outsourced provider of labour discipline. Sperber argues that these sites are inherently dangerous for workers since criticism voiced on them tends to focus on what is immediately visible, and ignores less obvious power structures and imbalances:

> For instance, a long wait for one's lunch is more easily blamed on the server, not on ownership's decision to reduce the afternoon staff, and thus lower costs by giving servers more work than they can handle… Similarly, it is easier to blame a disappointing meal on the cook, not the cook's accelerating workload that produces burnt omelets or the dubious ingredients purchased by a parsimonious owner. In short, online consumer criticism encourages people to critique merely what is apparent, obfuscating the less visible societal and historic relations undergirding society's effects.
>
> (Sperber, 2014: 70–71)

Sperber also notes that workers have little recourse against criticisms voiced over consumer review platforms. They are also vulnerable to customer biases which are less constrained by institutional and legal protections (Paul, 2018). Hence, while the danger of customer bias is well-documented in relation to labour platforms themselves (Rosenblat et al., 2017), the threat of the same problem affecting non-platform work is potentially more diffuse and extensive, but less well-understood.

Finally, it is possible that consumer review platforms may qualitatively alter important aspects of the labour process itself. This is potentially a profound process requiring detailed investigation,

which is so far lacking among scholars of work and labour. While this effect may be pronounced in retail and frontline service sector work, the most detailed treatments of it emerge once again from other fields. For instance, Chen (2018), a health economist, investigates the consequences of Yelp reviews on doctors' performance. Chen asks whether the need for favourable reviews leads to perverse incentives and short-termism; for instance, accelerating treatment to impress patients, to the detriment of clinical quality. Although Chen's study of US clinicians rejects this hypothesis, suggesting a positive correlation between clinical quality, measured by other indicators, and Yelp reviews, we cannot exclude that these dynamics may have traction in other circumstances. However, at this stage scholars of work and labour can only speculate on this question. A broader theoretical consideration here relates to the assessment of value and expertise. Jeacle and Carter (2011), in an accounting journal, reflect on the question of how trust is created in industries, arguing that it has "come increasingly to be placed in lay opinion over expert knowledge" (307). This issue is potentially of deep and multifaceted interest for scholars of work and labour, particularly as consumer ratings platforms are extending their influence. What does it mean when the "quality" of work is assessed by laypeople whose understanding of a job stems from their role as customers? Does this undermine workers' ability to do their work as they see fit, or in line with their professional and ethical frameworks, or is this threat overstated? We currently have little systematic answer.

We can therefore see how platforms which have thrived in specific industries (in this case retail and service/hospitality work) have wider implications, including for theory, and that these implications remain poorly understood in the absence of closer scrutiny of the sectoral contexts in which specific platform technologies may become embedded. Concepts such as platformisation and the platform economy are too broad to capture these dynamics, and the focus on labour platforms is too narrow.

Cultural and Creative Industries

Another sector where non-labour platforms are affecting working conditions is the CCIs.[2] When studying work in the CCIs, the need for an approach rooted in a sociological understanding of sectoral context is underlined, because in doing so we quickly see the dangers of over-focusing on labour platforms, and that non-labour platforms often have a bigger impact on the nature of work. Indeed, in some parts of the CCIs, such as live music, evidence suggests that more authentic "labour platforms" that organise offline service provision remain stunted and ineffectual (Azzellini et al., 2022a; Greer and Umney, 2022).

CCI labour markets are notoriously precarious, and it is notable that the very term "gig economy" derives from a major CCI, the live music industry. Numerous studies confirm that work is often carried out on a project basis, with high levels of freelance work, with many workers compelled to hold multiple jobs (Towse, 1992). Where more secure work is available, it is often in less prestigious and creative sectors (e.g. public relations rather than journalism). Yet despite the exploitative conditions they potentially face, there has long been an over-supply of willing workers (Miege, 1989), and analysts have sought to explain this, often via young workers' (often unrealistic) hopes that they will be able to achieve high levels of autonomy and self-realisation through creative labour (Menger, 1999). Competition for salaried, secure and unionised positions is ferociously intense, often favouring those with high levels of economic and cultural capital (O'Brien and Oakley, 2015). This contributes to elevated class, gender and racial inequality and to occupational segregation, with less powerful groups taking less prestigious roles (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2015; Hesmondhalgh, 2019).

The project-based, insecure nature of many cultural jobs has encouraged the growth of sector-specific cultural labour platforms. However, in some cases, sociological and organisational aspects of sectors have stunted the growth of labour platforms, keeping them a relatively marginal presence. In live music, for example, developers of platforms that seek to co-ordinate bookings have not been able to displace the mix of offline and online arrangements that currently organise the higher value market segments of the live music economy (Azzellini et al., 2022a).

Although many cultural workers make use of general labour and work-related platforms (such as LinkedIn), the more significant developments for them have been new digital platforms that have changed how distribution operates, with huge implications for labour markets and potentially for working conditions. By distribution, we mean the way in which cultural products are matched with audiences: often acknowledged as the locus of power and profit in the CCIs (Garnham, 1990: 161). The best-known examples of digital cultural platforms exercising such forces of change are famous names. In the realm of video, including the vast industries of television and film, YouTube, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV+ and other platforms have transformed the way in which many people consume culture – but they are also shifting labour markets and labour conditions. YouTube is perhaps the most striking example, as it has given rise to entire new sub-sectors of production, and generates payments for vast numbers of creators. While it established itself as a site for amateurs, and it is still used to upload amateur content, it also hosts vast amounts of older and more recent content produced by media companies, as professional content produced by small groups of content makers (occasionally lone producers), usually known within the industry as "creators". An important way in which content is presented is via "channels". These are not akin to traditional broadcast channels, which presented television live in a linear flow, and were run by powerful commercial or public service networks. Instead, they are entities to which users subscribe by simply clicking on a button, so that they will receive updates, notifications and recommendations associated with that channel. Many creators work directly with YouTube via its "partner programme", which offers a cut of the revenues generated by YouTube's advertising. A new set of intermediaries has arisen around these channels, called "multi-channel networks", which offer services to creators in return for a cut of income (Lobato, 2016; Vonderau 2016).

The number of creators making a living from these sources is unclear. There are currently around two million creators in YouTube's partner programme, which is accessible only to creators (which includes companies as well as individuals) who achieve more than a thousand subscribers and 4,000 watch-hours. Income is concentrated among the biggest stars, as with previous cultural labour markets, and few creators are likely to earn a sustainable living from YouTube, or even from YouTube plus other activities such as merchandise sales. Nevertheless, YouTube represents a remarkable expansion of the ability of cultural workers to find audiences and income for their cultural productions. This is nothing like the kind of democratising participation hailed by early commentators on "user-generated content". Instead a new industry has arisen not only of creators but also of intermediaries servicing them via marketing and publicity deals and know-how. Cunningham and Craig (2019: 5) make the following claim:

> It would be little overstatement to claim that these dynamics are a huge experiment in seeking to convert vernacular or informal creativity into talent and content increasingly attractive to advertisers, brands, talent agencies, studios and venture-capital (VC) investors on a near global scale.

Yet this is also likely to increase dynamics of "reluctant entrepreneurship" (Haynes and Marshall, 2018), whereby creators who are committed to notions of cultural autonomy are compelled

to undertake self-promotional activities, downplaying the cultural aspects of their work at the expense of the economic. It is these cultural aspects that tend to offer CCI workers opportunities for the self-expression and self-realisation that many such workers value highly.

Another example of how non-labour platforms are transforming work in the CCIs is provided by music streaming platforms (Lal et al., 2023). Spotify and Apple are (outside China) the major players in terms of revenues, because of their substantial subscription revenues. Along with You-Tube (which has an increasingly popular subscription version), Amazon and others, they have brought about a partial recovery of the recording industry, devastated by the collapse of CD sales in the face of easy, "free" downloading from the early 2000s onwards (Sun, 2018). It is easy and cheap for musicians and intermediaries to upload content to music streaming platforms. However, it is very difficult to make a sustainable living from music, leading to considerable protest from musicians, fans and media commentators, many of whom blame the music streaming platforms for musicians' plight (Marshall, 2015; Hesmondhalgh et al., 2021). Much content on these platforms gets zero plays, and the vast majority get very few. Much of it is old. More successful recordings tend to be owned by the three large corporations or sizeable independents, who pay musicians a percentage based on contracts, meaning that these rights-owners are arguably as much to blame as the platforms if musicians are not paid sufficiently. Yet it is undoubtedly true that more musicians are earning money from music than ever before, even if only a tiny proportion make a sustainable living from recorded music alone (Hesmondhalgh, 2021). Moreover, it seems unlikely that significant numbers of musicians were able to make sustainable incomes from recorded music, even when CDs were generating high levels of income in the 1980s and 1990s. A vast amount of that money went to the rights-owners, and royalty rates were (even) lower back then.

What both YouTube and the music streaming platforms have done is to bring the vast sector of willing, aspiring and informal workers, who used to exist "outside" the formal industry where revenues were generated by copyright, *inside* that system, where their products become part of vast datafied systems. This is an unprecedented capture of the "reservoirs" (Miege, 1989) of creative labour that have long characterised CCIs. Moreover, the tech corporations that run the platforms have no responsibility for the welfare of workers. To be sure, the rights-holders who contract musicians for recording and songwriting have outsize power over most musicians, and there is a long history of dubious relations, often exploitative in nature (Stahl, 2012). However, the music streaming platforms produce no music of their own. Unlike video streaming platforms, they do not even commission content from production companies; they merely licence content from record companies.

Platforms such as YouTube and Spotify, then, are considerably more important than labour allocation platforms in the CCIs for understanding the conditions facing cultural workers. In some senses, they might even be thought of as the real labour platforms for the CCI sector. They are therefore indicative of what is missed in terms of the reconfiguration of working life when sector-specific platforms, seemingly unrelated to labour, are not considered as a central part of labour conditions in the platform era.

Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

This chapter began by identifying shortcomings in our understanding of the effects of platforms on work. While scholarship on platforms neglects questions of work (van Dijck et al., 2018; Srnicek, 2017), scholarship on work tends to focus on a relatively narrow range of platforms: specifically labour platforms, and their workers (the latter being what is normally meant by "platform workers"). Indeed, while there is much attention given to typologising platforms, these

attempts often take the labour platform as the starting point (Aloisi and De Stefano, 2018; Wood and Lehdonvirta, 2019; Schmidt, 2017). We have, by contrast, shifted focus to the relationship between non-labour platforms and non-platform labour. While scholars of work and employment have tentatively started to engage with non-labour platforms, as in Maffie's (2020) application of industrial relations frames to the "sharing economy", there have been relatively few systematic engagements with this issue.

The wider question of the effects of platforms on work has received less interest than the more specific issue of labour platforms and platform workers. We also argued that to properly investigate this question, a focus on individual sectors is required. *Contra* notions of "platformisation" and "platform capitalism", we suggest that specific contexts give rise to specific dynamics with regard to the implications of platform technologies within them. These dynamics mean that non-labour platforms play a vital role in reshaping questions of work and employment. They do so in ways which are not easy to generalise beyond specific industrial contexts. The development of independent consumer review platforms is a case in point. While the issue of customer-driven ratings systems is well established in research on work (Yao, 2020; Rosenblat et al., 2017; Schörpf et al., 2017), this emphasises the use of platforms' own systems applied to workers on that platform. In other words, they have been addressed as examples of labour platforms disciplining platform workers. Consumer review platforms like Yelp and Trip Advisor are cases of non-labour platforms disciplining non-platform workers, including in small-scale service and hospitality work, and potentially in professional domains like medicine and accounting. Yet the scholars investigating these potentially more widespread and insidious phenomena are largely from other fields (in this case, such as tourism and hospitality management studies) where questions of work quality and power relations in workplaces are a tangential concern, if of interest at all (Chen, 2018; Jeacle and Carter, 2011; Bradley et al., 2015). Likewise, in the CCIs, the platforms with the biggest implications for questions of work and labour *are not labour platforms*. They are platforms which define and re-engineer the way CCI outputs are circulated and in so doing alter the relationships between the "reservoir" of potential cultural workers, and their audiences or users (some of them subscribers, some of them purchasers, some of them "paying" for their consumption by being exposed to platform advertising). More creators can share their work, but their activities and relationships become prone to datafied surveillance, and the general precariousness and insecurity of cultural work are further entrenched.

Hence in each of these cases, we argued that, to understand changes in the nature of working life, non-labour platforms were more important than labour platforms. However, the kinds of non-labour platforms that mattered were radically different and could not be fit into a wider narrative of the platform economy, or "platform capitalism". This suggests the need for scholars of work and labour to be more sceptical of narrative-building about the transitions of the platform economy. To some degree, this chimes with recent contributions underlining the limits to platformisation and expressing scepticism over the prevalence of labour platforms and platform work (Azzellini et al., 2022b; Greer and Umney, 2022; Fleming et al., 2019). However, while we share these contributions' scepticism about the labour platform as a pre-eminent focus on scholarship on work and employment, we differ insofar as we want to draw attention to the importance of non-labour platforms. These comments expand Azzellini et al.'s (2022a) argument, which stresses the organisational and sociological characteristics of individual sectors in shaping platform trajectories.

Ultimately, then, our chapter is a two-pronged call, on the one hand for a wider focus on the full spectrum of phenomena grouped under the "platform" concept, and on the other, for a more defined focus on the way different aspects of these phenomena play out within specific sectors.

It will still of course be necessary for critical analysis to investigate general processes of digitalisation and platformisation. But only by undertaking this more specific work will such analysis be able to form a comprehensive picture of the effects of those processes on a wide range of workers in a way that would enrich understanding of the future of work.

Notes

2 The CCI terminology is contested, partly because of the very extensive definition adopted by the UK government in its "mapping documents" of the turn of the century, which sought to provide a way of measuring the size of the sector, its contribution to GVA and other measures, and its rapid growth (O'Connor, 2010). We focus here on music, film and television as examples, and follow the increasingly common practice of avoiding naming controversies by referring to cultural and creative industries (CCI), rather than either cultural industries or creative industries.

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