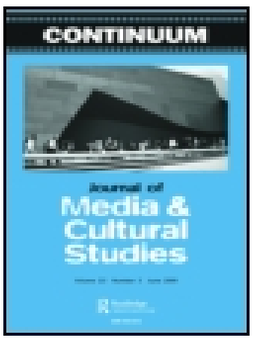

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Platforms and public participation

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ABSTRACT

The concept of the 'platform' has recently received extensive analysis in media studies and urban planning. This paper explores the platform's contemporary emergence as an expression of a new archival logic that questions the possibility of a democratic politics of participation. 'Public participation' in the platform invokes the individual in the form of a consumer with a profile rather than as a citizen of a state. This paper returns to Claudio Ciborra's 1996 work on the 'platform organization' to diagnose a 're-architecting' capability which we argue is integral to platform politics. Since this capacity for re-architecting is generally reserved from participants, we highlight the potential of 'de-participation' toward the emergence of counter-platforms.

The 'platform' is one of the most prominent recent concepts to describe the operations of networked electronic media. As new media come to decompose the distinctions between previously discrete spheres of social and economic activity, the platform is an architectural metaphor that is widely deployed to describe contemporary infrastructure, recomposing domains of public and private, and the relation of the citizen to the collective. The most visible platforms are those in social media and personal computing: Twitter, Facebook, Google, Apple have all been described as platforms. The material dimensions of gaming platforms have been given the most substantial analysis in new media theory and gaming studies (Bogost and Montfort 2007; Gillespie 2010: for critical accounts see Apperley and Parikka 2015; Leorke 2012). However, the platform concept has also been extended to describe the city (Hill 2012), and even government in general (O'Reilly 2010). Now applied to both the polis and the polity, the platform has become a powerful force in understanding the public sphere.

Focusing on digital media, Gillespie (2010, 349) draws upon Keating and Cambrosio to group four different uses of the term 'platform' (from the old French 'flat form'): the architectural, the political, the figurative and more recently the computational. He notes that the contemporary use of the term 'platform' draws on all four semantic areas of his typology simultaneously, and condenses the crucial ideology of neutrality that connects these definitions and shows how this is discursively produced:

> All point to a common set of connotations: a 'raised level surface' designed to facilitate some activity that will subsequently take place. It is anticipatory, but not causal. It implies a neutrality with regards to the activity, though less so as the term gets specifically matched to specific functions (like a subway platform), and even less so in the political variation. A computing platform can be agnostic about what you might want to do with it, but either neutral (cross-platform) or very much not neutral (platform-dependent), according to which provider's application you would like to use. Drawing these meanings together, 'platform' emerges not simply as indicating a functional shape: it suggests a progressive and egalitarian arrangement, promising to support those who stand upon it. (ibid.)

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In his previous analysis of the 'end-to end' principle, Gillespie showed how a disputed technological principle could become popularized through its capacity to act as a metaphor. Like O'Reilly's use of the term 'platform', these 'principles' are 'deliberate glosses on the technology, symbolic representations of the very shape of the thing in question' (Gillespie 2006, 429). Gillespie demonstrates that Internet companies such as Google and Facebook appeal to the neutrality of the term platform as a 'legislative strategy' – sometimes asking for increased regulation (e.g. net neutrality) and sometimes to evade regulatory agendas (e.g. broadcasting rules), but all the while linking technical economic and cultural discourse while disclaiming any specific set of relations (Gillespie 2010, 356).

When considering the forms of mediation at work in the platform, two questions emerge: firstly, if both governments and private corporations in media and technology today view themselves as platforms, how does this differ from historical metaphors and institutions of public sociality, such as states and markets? What is at stake in this transition? Secondly, if the role of the platform is to provide an architectural grid on which people participate, what are the enablers of and barriers to participation in networked platforms as new public spaces?

To explore these questions, this paper critically assesses the discourses of the platform, as part of a broader project on the transformations in the city and the potential for contingent, self-assembled publics to appropriate platforms for their own uses. It provides an account of the stakes of debates on the politics of interfaces and algorithms that underpin platforms, and proposes Ciborra's (1996) neglected analysis of the platform's 'rearchitecting' capabilities as a critical lever to think contests over platform power. We propose that public sphere discourses of inclusion and participation no longer hold an unambiguous liberatory potential when applied to commercial platforms. In fact, participation in networked publics is now so routinely co-opted for commercial ends that any alternative agendas must utilize the evident power of platforms to autonomously generate new forms of relation, and open a space for non-commercial ends before effective collective power can be exerted in the networked sphere.

The structure of this paper is as follows: Firstly, we review the theoretical conception of the platform proposed by Ciborra and extended by Keating and Cambrosio, to show how the platform is not simply a technological innovation in media but reflects a broader reconfiguration of social infrastructure through the market. Secondly, we consider the operations of the algorithm in the platform and consider its effect on democratic society. Thirdly, we reconsider the liberatory potential of participation, and propose instead de-participation as a central ethic in platform politics. The website AAAARG is used as a case study of a counter-platform that highlights the difference between grass-roots platforms and those architected by corporations for profit maximization. Finally, drawing from Derrida's analysis of the democratic function of the archive, and Stiegler's analysis of the shift from democracy to telecracy, we advocate for the grass roots re-architecture of platforms toward genuinely inclusive spheres.

The platform as re-architecture

Italian organizational theorist Claudio Ciborra was one of the first to adopt the term platform in the analysis of the changing nature of the firm. In 1996, he proposed the 'platform organization' as an emergent model that better reflects the operations of large technology companies than the 'functionalist', 'matrix' or 'network' models. Using Olivetti as his example, Ciborra outlines the relation between the platform and the network, two spatial and horizontal models of organization (see Borgatti and Foster 2003). The network is 'a flexible cluster of specialized units coordinated by market mechanisms instead of a vertical chain of command' (Ciborra 1996, 113), while the platform is a 'system of schemes, arrangements and resources' (114). The platform organization incorporates the network model of routines and transactions, but also has a higher level or layer where the 're-architecting of structures is played out'. It is this 'recombination of bundles of routines and transactions' that matters more than the specific properties of the network (113). Ciborra's organizational analysis provides a useful corrective to what Leorke (2012) describes as contemporary platform studies' 'laborious' emphasis on technical rigour and technological materials. The platform integrates a range of technological components, to be sure, but this is less through analysis of the substitutable material-technical affordances than the platform's overriding aim to attempt to capture profits at all points of the value chain.

For Ciborra (1996, 114), the 'decoupling of process know-how' from the more mundane generation of product-specific innovations leads to a dualistic system, where 'strategic management mainly consists in placing bets about what will be its next primary task; all the other choices such as alliances, vertical integration and so on, follow the provisional outcome of such bets'. One example would be the search engine Google's development of the Android mobile operating system. Apple's transition from computing into consumer electronics and media content distribution is another hugely successful example of platform-style betting. A third is Samsung's recent investments in 'biosimilars', copies of proprietary biopharmaceuticals (Samsung Biologics 2011). Since Ciborra's analysis (based on fieldwork 1989–1991), the tools for the platform's re-architecting have become clearer, and include: financial engineering techniques that generate leverage unavailable to smaller platforms; integrated chains of production and distribution; high levels of brand visibility; and the development of an archive of intellectual property and proprietary data as the core archival capability of the firm, rather than more traditional product-specific skills or techniques of any specific activity in that firm.

Keating and Cambrosio's (2000) discussion of 'biomedical platforms' remains one of the most rigorous extensions of Ciborra's 'platform organization', and their work highlights the new configurations of economy and society inaugurated by the platform. For Keating and Cambrosio, hospital platforms integrate technical, economic and epistemological arrangements, such as in biomedicine's new 'transversal' multi-disciplinary activities (genetics, oncology and molecular biology) that come to sit alongside and then displace traditional specialists in 'pavilion-medicine' (e.g. hematology, dermatology and nephrology) (351):

> As opposed to a passive and transparent infrastructure, platforms are active, generative, and opaque. As opposed to infrastructures that show or are supposed to show some sort of historical continuity, platforms are made for contingencies: they are only for the time being. Platforms extend beyond the walls of the clinical or diagnostic laboratory, but this does not transform them into technological objects: neither science nor technology, they are a way of articulating the two. They are a bench upon which conventions concerning the biological or normal are articulated, or placed in connection, with conventions concerning the medical or pathological, and they define the standards according to which biomedical actions are evaluated. (Keating and Cambrosio 2000, 359)

Biomedical platforms are characterized by a few major firms who produce the relevant technology and who are also active in forming the 'motley of regulatory activities that establish and maintain interlaboratory and interclinical links and that allow platforms to function as platforms' (Keating and Cambrosio 2000, 374). Analysing the infrastructure of flow cytometry (cell sorting and engineering technology) as a platform, Keating and Cambrosio note that

> it is not simply a question of the instrument following 'needs' as determined by an independently defined clinical or research market: manufacturers and their clients constantly extend and redefine the market, while simultaneously renegotiating the relation between the electronic and biological components and thus the potential uses of the device. (ibid.)

We can see here that, contrary to an ethnographic mode that would read the politics of the platform in a technological interface with users, it is attention to the 'market-making' components that can yield detail on the constitutive rules that underpin genres of use.

Algorithmic politics at the interface

Gillespie (2014, 181, 182) posits new media platforms as enacting an algorithmic logic of proceduralized choices that is posed against or supplants an editorial logic based on subjective choices of experts built on market or institutional authority. Referencing the work of Rieder on relational databases, he notes that the structure of unspecified relations shifted 'expressive power from the structural design of the database to the query' (171). This shifts editorial labour from producers to end users, even as the flow management of the network is the 'authorizing context' that gives any individual acts their force (Mackenzie 2005). Goldberg (2011, 745) foregrounds the growth in content that algorithms manage in the age of big data, noting 'a shift of economic constraints from relations of exchange to relations of transmission; from economically managing discrete units of culture to managing their flows on a

massive scale'. The seemingly simple act of searching on Google triggers an algorithm to examine over 200 signals which it uses to sort its massive archive into 'relevance' (Gillespie 2014, 175). The vantage point from which one might engage the politics of the search platform is nebulous as there is no independent 'search ranking' that can be understood outside the automatic customizations made by the algorithm. Presentation algorithms determine how much we see of other users' material in a social network, as well as what advertising will be placed alongside or in between content. This removes editorial labour from distinguishing between content and advertising in each instance, and locates both personal and corporate profiles in the same format. This focus on shared formats for content transmission dissipates the media provider as an entity 'responsible' for content and brings it into the more 'neutral' mode of the platform that can aggregate disparate signals into a database.

These dynamics raise a number of interesting questions about the way algorithms govern and what forms of regulation might be possible in the public interest. While Lessig (1999) has suggested that code begins to effectively function as law, 'legal scholars and judges have argued persuasively that legal interpretation does not entail straightforward textual analysis … if algorithms were to render decisions, would the locus of legal reasoning shift to the coding of those algorithms?' (Barocas, Hood, and Ziewitz 2013). How regulatory algorithms can themselves be regulated has become a pressing question for public culture in the twenty-first century. How can new modes of democratic accountability appropriate to the expansive logic of digital platforms be determined and engineered, if at all? This will require a formal analysis that links historical analysis of the technical archives of representative democracy to these emergent modes of governing. While expressive freedom in an interface culture may be gained through Wark's (2004) notion of the 'hack', our assertion is that these 'front-end' freedoms must be supplanted by 'back-end' mechanisms to achieve public benefits more like those historically fulfilled by democratic states.

Participation in the platform

The widespread panacea to Deleuze's (1992) identification of a 'control society' has been to promote digital platforms as enabling participation. Indeed, one of O'Reilly's key recommendations for government as a platform is to 'design for participation'. Jenkins et al. (2009, 5, 6) diagnose four types of participation: 'affiliations, expressions, collaborative problem solving, and circulations'. For them, a 'participatory culture' is

> a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices; members who believe that their contributions matter; and members who feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, they care what other people think about what they have created).

The language of participation focuses on individual contributions to a social network, an emergent public that does not necessarily coincide with the historical public of the nation state. These networked publics are largely imagined as instrumental, a collection of individual users working consensually and rationally toward goals that mirror the core values of neoliberalism – innovation, competitive enhancement, financial autonomy – rather than reimagining the form of social and political life through the elaboration of multiple singularities.

Participation in a platform based on the market model, as discussed above, differs from participation in the historical juridical public sphere in both the form of that participation and its accountability. Jenkins, boyd and O'Reilly's accounts of participatory culture devolve critical analysis away from the platform's 're-architecting' capabilities and down into the subjective experience of specific users and networks. The focus on cases of subjective expression (heightened individual choice of content, affinities and alliances that are short-term and volatile) neglects the larger social forces that drive the 're-architecting' of platforms. As Morozov (2013) characterizes the open source model of participatory transparency, 'citizens are invited to find bugs in the system, not to ask whether the system's goals are right to begin with'.

Participation, therefore, has no chance at affecting the re-architecting right of the platform, as the existence of participation is induced by a structure that holds users outside architectural authority by definition. In Foucault's (1980, 57) terms, participation can be seen as a 'new mode of investment which presents itself no longer in the form of control by repression but that of control by stimulation'.[1] Participation in this sense means not simply participating in phatic relations of co-presencing with others but being 'doubly articulated' into the technical-economic database of the platform (Langlois and Elmer 2013). One result is that older modes of public participation – from accessing information and government services to expressing one's opinion, navigating public space or organizing events in public through social media – are 'enabled' by the new platforms, but this comes at the cost of submitting increasingly intimate social relations to intense management by platform operators. As the operation of commercial communications platforms are fast becoming a precondition for exercising civic agency, the capacity for critical pressure to be applied to platforms' architectures is paramount.

Counter-platforms: AAAARG

Insofar as the language of the platform has developed out of a corporate information technology agenda, it is not surprising that content-sharing platforms have been dominated by U.S.-based firms who are financially engineered through venture and public capital to globalize their 'reach'. This reflects the neoliberal agenda under which all forms of public infrastructure are progressively privatized and financialized. Platforms for distribution and sharing have been initiated at odds with dominant forces of commercialization, but these perhaps necessarily do not appear as generically replicable in the mode of the commercial platform. One instructive example is AAAARG, an unmoderated website for the sharing of texts and PDFs of social theory, fiction, poetry and other works. Initiator Sean Dockray, an artist now based in Melbourne, describes it as 'really a library', but notes that the infrastructure also supports reading groups, a self-organizing educational project (The Public School), and an online publication (Dean et al. 2013). In other words, it functions as a civic platform. Forged in the imminent redundancy of the book as a dominant form for knowledge dissemination in the age of the internet, yet responding to the nostalgia for the book and the new possibility of their electronic archiving and distribution, AAAARG according to Dockray is 'definitely not a futuristic model' (Fuller 2011) but located very much in the now as a mechanism for 'explor[ing] and exploit[ing] the affordances of asynchronous, networked communication' (Dean et al. 2013, 167).

Dockray specifically locates AAAARG within a critical evaluation of platform politics, as something which 'anticipates future action without directly producing it':

> A platform provides tools and resources to the objects that run 'on top' of the platform so that those objects do not need to have their own tools and resources. In this sense, the platform offers itself as a way for to externalize (and reuse) labor. Communication between objects is one of the most significant actions that a platform can provide, but it requires that the objects conform some amount of their inputs and outputs to the specifications dictated by the platform. (Dockray 2013, 187)

Elsewhere, Dockray neatly characterizes the 'platformness' of his projects in noting that 'the duration not specified in advance and what's going to happen with them is not specified in advance' (Sollfrank 2013). Contrasting the liberatory potential of these platforms to corporate platforms, Dockray interrogates the development of 'user-friendly' interfaces as a critical mechanism for the suppression of antagonisms in cultural production. Adopting the language of the historical commons, he describes commercial platforms as 'new technological enclosures' that operate on all levels to protect against loss (Dockray 2013, 193). But the noise in the system points at cracks in the interface that can be exploited or hacked – 'riots break out on the factory floor; algorithmic trading wreaks havoc on the stock market in an instant; data centres go offline; 100 million Facebook accounts are discovered to be fake' (ibid.).

Adopting an architectural model in concert with Ciborra's analysis of the platform, Dockray uses the image of 'scaffolding', 'describing an orientation with respect to institutions that was neither inside nor outside, dependent nor independent, reformist or oppositional, etc.' (Dean et al. 2013, 166). In deconstructive terms, this could be seen as adopting the logic of the supplement, an independent

addition that seeks to 'take the place of the default' inside the building by appearing alongside it, as if it 'should already be within the inside' (Derrida [1974] 2016, 234). This logic is a way of thinking through the differences in scale between the architectural exigencies of the platform architects vs. the improvisatory needs of users. The scaffolding metaphor suggests the 'the possibility of the office worker who shuts her door and climbs out the window' (ibid.). One imagines Dockray's office worker dismantling the scaffolding behind her on departure, donning some overalls and a fake ID, and travelling on to the Apple campus to start renovations, enabling new exits. And then perhaps taking this 'platform' to the city square, to support others occupying spaces in the name of the public.

The question of publics goes to the heart of the political economy of platforms. In a discussion of artist-run initiative The Public School in Los Angeles, Dockray reiterates that the 'publicness' of this venture 'has nothing to do with the state, it is not about the reclamation of some lost public, but the invention of new ones' (del Pesco and Dockray 2010). The scaffold, in full public view, will never be a public sphere in the intergenerational architectural sense of historical public schools. In what reads as Californian style, Dockray's discourse suppresses state underpinnings to public freedom that are more prominent in discussions of public culture outside the United States. However, this 'lack' of grounding in the metaphor enables it to meet head-on the ideologies of today's dominant platform architects in Silicon Valley.

Dockray's inventive agenda reflects a lineage of the avant-garde that constructs an audience through the creation of what Michael Warner describes as a 'counterpublic', in a negative relation to prevailing norms. Against the totalizing public known as *the* public, which fuses corporate and governmental ambitions for scale and market share, Warner contrasts *a* public which is specifically bounded and called into being through an event (Warner 2002, 49, 50). This plural, self-organizing version of the public is the one most artists think of engaging in their work. It involves 'minimal participation' (Warner 2002, 53) which distinguishes it from being merely a crowd, but it is more the heterogeneity of available forms that invites free participation, rather than any specifically participatory format created as such in advance. The key questions that emerge in these spaces are not those of participatory efficiency or value extraction, but reconsideration of processes of communication. How can art create transversal connections across and between diverse constituencies? Can new forms of cultural translation obviate the long-standing sociological condemnation of micro-publics as 'ghettos' from Louis Wirth to Cass Sunstein?

Platform power and the democratic archive

The example of AAAARG helps demonstrate how the platform concept reflects a new status for the *archive*, and thus suggests a new politics of information with significant theoretical implications for governance and our understanding of the public. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida claimed that the archive was foundational to the political, not simply 'one political question among others':

> It runs through the whole of the field and in truth determines politics from top to bottom as *res publica*. There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation. (Derrida 1995, 11)

Derrida notes that the etymological metaphor of the archive is the Greek *arkheion*, a place of residence of 'superior magistrates, the archons'. In this (private) house, a particular mode of filing documents would be commenced, from which (public) commands would emanate (ibid., 9). As we have seen with the platform, this 'reserved' state is central to the archive's power. An archive which was simply distributed among a public that collectively developed its form would not be an archive at all. Derrida notes that 'the functions of unification, of identification, of classification, must be paired with what we will call the power of consignation', which aims to hold a single system or framework for its corpus (ibid., 10). A true 'science of the archive' must include such a theory of institutionalization of the archontic law and 'the right that authorizes it', rather than simply give an account of inclusion within the archive. The right of authorization of archontic law is close to Ciborra's 're-architecting power', a capability that is today held in predominantly private firms that control dominant platforms which retain this crucial role in

the determination of politics. However, the platform's mode of the archive differs in two ways from the archival modes that have traditionally underpinned the public.

Firstly, a governmental archive in the traditional sense is a compilation of statistical data such as a census that plots activity that has already occurred in the past. As this archival form remains relatively stable over time, the calculation of changes in populations and their activities can then function as an evidence base to underpin changes in laws. The archive of the platform, by contrast, inverts this relation to stimulate user action directly. For example, a change to a platform's interface may induce the user to contribute to the platform's archive of information through sharing or purchasing, which in turn increases the effectiveness of the platform.

This responsiveness to participatory labour power in real-time is a key feature of networked platforms. For Gillespie (2014) social media platforms do not simply deliver algorithms to users, but also deliver users to algorithms to improve the commercial platform provider's workings and profitability. We could say that the archive of the social media platform monetizes labour for its own growth, until such time as users abandon the platform or the platform abandons its unprofitable users. To borrow from Marcus (1998, 56), the platform's archive 'already knows its object, so to speak'. By contrast, the historical archive lacks the coercive power to direct behaviour except through 'residual' means. Platforms do not seek the universal documentation and inclusion of citizens, but instead generate future-oriented, productive, stimulated and attentive consumer-publics.

A second transformation is in the archive of expressions in the media that could be classed as 'public culture'. Historically, governments have controlled the licensing and regulation of broadcasters and the press, ostensibly in the public interest. Such regulation has been challenged by the ubiquity of 'micro-publishing', where professional authorship is no longer the dominant source of media, and editorial dominance gives way to automated algorithmic calculations of visibility. In one way, this new 'participatory culture' enables access to the archive as Derrida recommends: the barriers to public expression have been reduced for large numbers of people. But as access to the public sphere has expanded, the effects of public speech have dissipated into an ever-expanding mass of content. The public utterance no longer holds its significance through time, but is being constantly remediated through the platform.[2]

The question of how users can 'participate' in the archive is still a central question of democracy today, but in the platform era the ability to *architect* networks is becoming increasingly withheld from a general public who merely get to *inhabit* networks. The techniques of archival authority are still 'scriptural' in the sense that they require literacy, but the globalized *executable* script of the platform differs from the written archive in both its form and institutional location. For Bernard Stiegler, commercial media platforms represent a 'grammatization' of the affects, where the 'tertiary retentions' of expressive inscription are manipulated in the interests of profit. The algorithm imagines its ideal user and creates affordances that format the *user* into the *user profile* by inviting their participation in the system as an individual to track them as a 'dividual'. For Deleuze (1992, 5), the society of control that produces the dividual displaces the 'disciplinary' society of subjects and discrete institutions with a constant modulation of data: 'The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it. […] Individuals have become "*dividuals*", and masses, samples, data, markets, or "*banks*"'.

Digitization enables the integration of traditional media industries (programming, content) with marketing, finance and logistical sectors, resulting in what Stiegler (2011) terms 'hyper-capitalism' which is inimical to the traditions of democracy. Representative democracy historically structured the 'delegation of competence' to a juridical and inter-organizational process that mediated differences in the nation state. This process is now overtaken by real-time communications in formats or genres that constitute audiences in advance. Stiegler (2010) describes this as a short-circuiting of democracy and its replacement with a *telecracy*. Stiegler's analysis can be correlated with Paul Virilio's argument that contemporary media are profoundly anti-democratic, as accelerated speed of operation demands a new paradigm of instant decision-making. Virilio (2000, 30) asks: Can one democratize ubiquity, instantaneity, immediacy, which are precisely the prerogatives of the divine – in other words, of autocracy? Even art, suggests Deleuze (1992, 6), 'has left the spaces of enclosure in order to enter into the open

circuits of the bank'. Yet, Stiegler contends, in so far as 'digitalization is a mutation of the global technical system', it inaugurates a process of 'adjustment' that 'constitutes a suspension and a re-elaboration of the socio-ethnic programmes which form the unity of the social body' (2011, 10). The synchronization of digital platforms is not simply an enclosure of existing politics, but an epochal transformation in the infrastructures of subjectivity and their means of distribution.

Conclusion

The logic of platform capitalism we have outlined in this paper reconfigures the historical relationship between literacy and archival participation that has been central to the democratic nation state. Archival authority in the historical democracy rested with sovereign power over state-managed archives. The development of universal education aimed to produce a citizenry with the capacity to read the public archive and to develop a political *intention* that could be delegated to a governmental representative for action. This democratic state ideal was never achieved, structured as it was through colonization and the well-documented race, gender and class limitations on whose participation as a citizen could be authorized. It is not the role of this paper to glorify this ideal or mourn its passing. It is simply to note that the telecratic platform, as a mechanism for harvesting user *attention*, renders the democratic mode of governance redundant. The user belongs to a commercial platform provider rather than a nation state, with the neoliberal state's role constrained to the enforcement of contracts and license agreements.

This paper's argument is that the right to participation remains an important civil right, yet when it comes to analysis of platforms it is unclear how user skill at 'reading' archival content can affect algorithmic governance based on massive user profiles of aggregated private data. We therefore suggest that alongside participation, freedom to *de-participate* is an important precursor to the development of genuinely self-organized networks. Reflecting on movements such as Occupy that have sought such freedom, Butler (2013) describes public acts of assembly as 'plural actions' where 'the idea of abstract rights vocally claimed by individuals gives way to a plurality of embodied actors who enact their claims, sometimes through language, sometimes not'. The movements claiming public space 'for the people' are seeking for themselves the right to re-architect their network in a self-organized fashion. In other words, they are publics in search of their own platform, not participation in someone else's. They call to mind the political 'platforms' of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, where agitation for women's rights and other civil liberties took place: for recognition, but also for an ability for other modes of life to have space to flourish. Butler's identification of claims that are not necessarily enacted through language points toward the dangers in imagining the democratic ideal simply through individual creative production, as we are impelled to do by participatory social media platforms. It may be that for individuals and groups to adopt platform power today, deliberate withholding of the labour of their personal expression from proprietary archives may allow them to re-architect the platforms they participate in to become genuinely public spheres.

Notes

1. See also the discussion in Pasquale (2009).
2. Facebook's automated production of 'memories' as automatic retrieval of content from a personal archive on the anniversary of its production is a paradigmatic example.

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