Emiliana Armano, Marco Briziarelli, and Elisabetta Risi (Eds.), **Digital Platforms and Algorithmic Subjectivities**, London, UK: University of Westminster Press, 2022, 268 pp., Open Access.[1]

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This wide-ranging collection, edited by Emiliana Armano, Marco Briziarelli, and Elisabetta Risi, brings together 30 scholars from Europe, North America, and Australia and explores the social and economic implications of platforms and algorithms in contemporary life. **Digital Platforms and Algorithmic Subjectivities** is written by scholars, for scholars. Few of its chapters will be appropriate reading assignments for the undergraduate classroom, but academics interested in digital media, platform economics, labor, workers' rights, Marxist thought, or datafication will find something of value within its pages.

The book is presented in two parts: *Theoretical Foundations* and *Case Studies*. The first half argues that platform economics "[extend] the ethos of the enterprise form to all aspects of subjective existence" (p. 8) and interrogates the ways that algorithmic computing shapes social life and selfhood with a neoliberal bent. The second half presents eight case studies drawing from a variety of European contexts (including Belgium, Italy, France, and The Netherlands) and digital contexts (social networks, remote learning technologies, recommendation algorithms) to examine selfhood, work, and social relations in digitized environments. The book takes a generally Marxist stance and foregrounds issues of labor, value extraction, and neoliberal subjectivity.

The theoretical foundations section opens with "The Californian Ideology Revisited," in which Hasmet M. Uluorta and Lawrence Quill return to Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron's (1996) influential essay, "The Californian Ideology," after 25 years (p. 21). Uluorta and Quill trace two parallel transformations in the intervening time: the emergence of unregulated social media and the movement from a sharing economy into neoliberal surveillance capitalism. Then, in chapter 2, "Platform Politics and a World Beyond Catastrophe," Ned Rossiter and Soenke Zehle urge a forward-thinking perspective that turns away from critiques of capitalism—"as if there might be other options for the taking" (p. 41)—and instead focuses on designing "platforms of care" (p. 41) that eschew exploitation. Two chapters centering COVID-19 follow: "Domus Capitalismi: Abstract Spaces and Domesticated Subjectivities in Times of Covid-19," in which Marco Briziarelli and Emiliana Armano argue that during the COVID-19 pandemic, knowledge workers' homes were colonized by capitalism as "the intimate sphere [was] mobilised to become a productive sphere" (p. 55); and "Platforms in a Time of Pandemic," wherein Niccolò Cuppini, Mattia Frapporti, and Maurilio Pirone explore the accelerating effects of COVID-19 on the platform economy, using Airbnb and Deliveroo as examples of

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[1] Available at https://www.uwestminsterpress.co.uk/site/books/e/10.16997/book54/

a general push toward automation and digitalization. These first four chapters situate the collection in its time; their currency contributes to discourses of the moment, but they may have limited longevity.

The second half of the theoretical foundations section turns its focus to platform labor and algorithmic management, and it is here that the collection shines. In chapter 5, "Black Box Power: Zones of Uncertainty in Algorithmic Management," Heiner Heiland likens the self-surveillance of the subjects of algorithmic management—platform workers and laborers in the gig economy—to a kind of panoptic discipline, in which uncertainty about how algorithmic decisions are made leads workers to self-police and attempt to guess which actions will lead to positive evaluations by the algorithm. Then in chapter 6, "Algorithmic Management in Food Delivery Platforms: Between Digital Neo-Taylorism and Enhanced Subjectivity," Emiliana Armano, Daniela Leonardi, and Annalisa Murgia argue that algorithmically managed gig work that purports to give workers more freedom actually forces them to work at times or in ways demanded by the company, lest they suffer a drop in platform rating that could severely limit their earning potential. In chapter 7, "Extracting Free Labour," Patrick Cingolani contends that on digital platforms, "the *freedom to do something* appears in certain instances to be *working free of charge*, subject to appropriation and even extortion" (p. 99; emphasis in original). The theory section closes with chapter 8, "On Value and Labour in the Age of Platforms," in which Andrea Miconi reviews the theories of Tarleton Gillespie (2010, 2017, 2018); Nick Srnicek (2016); and José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal (2018) and critiques them from a Marxist perspective (pp. 107–119). Miconi cautions that each theory misses a critical component—labor issues for Gillespie, varied forms of value production for Srincek, and nuances of commodification for van Dijck et al.—and thus needs deeper engagement with Marxist theory. These four thematically linked chapters offer some of the clearest arguments in the collection, and Heiland's and Cingolani's contributions are standouts.

The final eight chapters comprise the case study section. Readers interested in European contexts (or those who are looking to broaden their knowledge beyond North America) will appreciate the variety of work presented here. In chapter 9, "The Digital Traces of Crypto-Finance," Alberto Cossu reviews the origins and history of cryptocurrencies and the discourses around them. Cossu argues that through cryptocurrency investors, "a new subjectivity, a sense of collective belonging is created in the realm of finance" (p. 128). Then, in chapter 10, "Labour Control and Commodification Strategies Within a Food Delivery Platform in Belgium," Milena Franke and Valeria Pulignano outline a cycle of empowerment and disempowerment facilitated by food delivery platforms. Chapter 11, "Algorithmic Prosumers," turns from workers to social media users as Elisabetta Risi and Riccardo Pronzato argue that algorithms domesticate users through datafication; users, by monitoring visibility and feedback of their posted content, adopt algorithmic selves. Then, in chapter 12, the focus shifts again, this time from users to networks. In "Emerging Forms of Sociotechnical Organisation: The Case of the Fediverse," Jacopo Anderlini and Carlo Milani discuss centralized, decentralized, and distributed network infrastructure and the implications of technological design for human interaction. They argue that the object of their case study, a distributed network on the Mastodon platform, "offers greater degrees of freedom compared to corporate social media" (p. 178).

The next chapter jumps back to labor relations; in "A Workers' Inquiry into Canvas and Zoom: Disrupting the Algorithmic University," Robert Ovetz offers a blistering critique of the pivot to remote instruction in higher education, calling it a de-skilling of academic labor and a shift away from student learning and toward

surveillance of student work habits. Online learning, Ovetz argues, produces a workforce best suited for highly monitored task completion—the hallmark of the gig economy and precarious platform labor. Then there is a return to platforms in chapter 14, "Plat-Firming Welfare: Examining Digital Transformation in Local Care Services," wherein Davide Arcidiacono, Ivana Pais, and Flaviano Zandonai demonstrate that digital platforms for delivering welfare occupy a space between private platforms and nonplatform welfare services; because the welfare platforms refuse automation and algorithmic control of key processes, they avoid the machinic dispossession and commodification that can accompany platformization. In chapter 15, "Performed Subjectivities in Ranking and Recommendation Systems," Tatiana Mazali and Nicoletta Gay compare Facebook's algorithm for serving posts, which pressures digital creative workers to invest time and effort into tailoring their posts for maximum visibility, with Netflix's recommendation algorithm, which enlists the work of human "taggers" to categorize media. Mazali and Gay frame digital creatives' visibility work on Facebook as empowering, despite its costs, while Netflix's taggers are "machinised" (p. 220) in service of its algorithm. The collection closes with chapter 16, "The Social Costs of the Gig Economy and Institutional Responses: Forms of Institutional Bricolage in Italy, France and the Netherlands." Here, Maurizio Franzini and Silvia Lucciarini ask how the precarity faced by self-employed workers can be mitigated through mutualistic cooperatives (MCs) or state action. They found that while MCs did provide workers with some support, the needs of the fast-growing precarious work sector outpace solutions.

In a crowded field of books on platforms, algorithms, and their social and economic implications, this book's niche is its focus on subjectivity. This focus is at its clearest and most effective in the chapters that foreground labor relations, of which there are many. Where the collection falls short is in its organization. The arrangement of the chapters is confusing, and neither the sections nor the book as a whole build to an overall thesis or narrative. Chapters that engage with similar topics, such as food delivery platforms (chapters 4, 6, and 10) or digital creative work (chapters 7 and 15), might have been more effective side by side. The themes of chapters in the case study section are so disparate that only the general focus on platforms and algorithms connects them, which makes it hard for the collection to offer new insights. While there are some throughlines here, the organization has not made them easy to grasp.

Platforms and algorithms continue to be timely topics, and many of the chapters here offer insight into their shaping of labor relations and their implications for the self. However, *Digital Platforms and Algorithmic Subjectivities* is perhaps best approached as a menu of related work from which to choose, rather than a book to read from cover to cover.