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Jacob Matthews, Vincent Rouzé

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CHAPTER 4

Participatory Cultural Platforms and Labour

Jacob Matthews and Vincent Rouzé

Our relationship to work, culture and knowledge seems to have been significantly altered by the rise of digital communications technologies. The neologism ‘Uberization’, derived from the web platform Uber, has become an apt term for the movement toward a so-called ‘collaborative’ economy in which salaried jobs no longer exist. At the same time, many of today’s platforms encourage the valuing of individual ‘creativity’, something that reshapes the definition of the artist and creative work.

In this chapter we examine the impact of these platforms on our relationship to labour, its reorganization and the shift toward a project-based model of work (Jaillet-Roman 2002). It seems to us that these platforms and the apparatuses they deploy raise broader issues about ‘creativity’ and the collaborative economy, as well as the type of labour involved both inside and on the platforms. As Fuchs (2014), Scholz (2012), Cardon and Cassilli (2015), and Simonet (2015) have shown, the activities conducted on digital platforms belong to the category of *digital labour*, and as such are subject to new forms of labour organization and exploitation (Dujarier 2014), including forms of ‘free’ labour (Terranova 2000) that may constitute a ‘cybertariat’ (Huws 2003 and 2014). In addressing the platforms from this perspective, we hope to enrich the existing literature,

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which largely focuses on the supposedly unprecedented ways these platforms operate (Divard 2013; Boyer et al. 2016), on their capacity to act as tools for ‘liberation’ and ‘value sharing’ (Lemoine 2014) in the name of technological and socio-economic innovation (Kuppuswamy and Bayus 2013) and cultural diversity (Fohr 2016), and on participants’ motivations and the benefits they receive (Brabham 2009; Céré, Roth and Petavy 2015). We take a critical stance, examining platforms, players and their accompanying discourses in terms that go beyond gauging their functional effectiveness. To do so, we adopt a ‘dynamic holistic’ stance which pays attention to the way in which individual and collective behaviours are determined by structures and institutions, but also to social actors’ proactive capacities (Vercellone 2008: 7). From a structural point of view, it’s important to recognise that the platform economy relies not principally on commercial revenue deriving from the production of goods and services, but on a model stemming from the fields of advertising and finance; ‘commissions’ are justified by their ability to link up individuals and/or groups with commercial entities, brands or investment opportunities. And from an etymological point of view, the platform is indeed a space dedicated to the stationing of carriages that are to be unloaded or loaded with goods or persons: the platform constitutes a locus of transaction and translation – an instrument of ideological convergence.

In enthusiastic accounts, the platform economy is based on a worldwide market, open to a multitude of player of all sizes, linked together by digital networks. The regular emergence of new markets and conversion of users into economic players gives this project an allure of realisation – as long as one ignores the fact that a powerful oligopoly has emerged (Smyrnaio, 2017), and that even fringe players objectively dominate individual users. Moreover, we have shown that web platforms innovate mainly by reducing costs and allowing for an ‘alteration of perceptions’ that the various players have of the capitalisation process and the internal organisation of economic sectors (Matthews and Vachet, 2014).

Kenney and Zysman (2016) identify as privately generated platform-based ‘ecosystems’, companies which fundamentally ‘are not delivering technology to their customers and clients—they use technology to deliver labour to them’ (Smith and Leberstein 2015, 3). Moreover, it is apparent that the ‘bargaining power of workers is undermined by the size and scope of the global market for labour; the anonymity that the digital medium affords is a double-edged sword, facilitating some types of economic inclusion, but also allowing employers to discriminate at will’ (Graham, Hjorth and Lehdonvirta 2017: 16). And as De Stefano points out ‘the possibility of being easily terminated via a simple deactivation or exclusion from a platform or app may magnify the fear of retaliation that can be associated to non-standard forms of work, in particular temporary ones’ (De Stefano 2016: 10).

These perspectives in turn us to consider the phenomenon of crowdfunding in the light of the constraints and opportunities it presents for the productive

activities of the artist as ‘project creator’—a version of the ‘artist as labourer’ figure proposed by Menger (2002)—as well as the characteristic of the other players involved, and in particular the work of those who manage platforms. Our hypothesis is that both emerge as ‘polymorphous entrepreneurs’. At the intersection of multiple, often contradictory players and logics, their work consists fundamentally in trying to synthesize them so as to optimize the economic value extraction upon which their livelihood depends. This hypothesis converges with that of Marine Jouan who, following the works of Bergeron, Castel and Nouguez (2013), introduces the notion of a ‘border-entrepreneur’, defined by their position ‘on the border of many worlds in tension’, and their strategic reshaping of these into a ‘new world of which they will be the centre’ (Jouan 2017: 335).

This chapter is divided into three complementary parts. In the first we analyze the structural modifications of labour carried out by and on these platforms, and the representations they produce. In the second, we focus specifically on the forms of labour organization deployed within platforms, and examine how the work of project creators and members of their ‘community’ is framed and optimized, before considering how this process echoes platform managers’ efforts to optimize their own projects and communities. Finally, the third part develops the hypothesis that platforms (and their various uses) can be understood as instruments of ideological production; to do this we analyze the ‘pedagogical mission’ emphasized in the guidelines issued by many platforms.

Towards Gamification, or Invisible Labour

Human activities that take place on and around these platforms are obviously embedded in commercial relationships, and cannot escape the transformation of labour power into commodities, one of the fundamental characteristics of capitalism. And yet, in the case of cultural production financed through crowdfunding platforms, this transformation does not take place by way of a salaried workforce (which indeed has long been the case in the media and culture industries, where salaried jobs are the exception rather than the rule). Consequently, these apparatuses apparently consolidate pre-existing forms of labour organization, in particular by extending them to encompass cultural workers who had previously been spared to some extent, either because they were somewhat protected by public institutions or because their ‘amateur’ practices still put up some resistance to commodification and industrialization. It should also be recognized that intermediation apparatuses existed within the cultural field long before the emergence of crowdfunding and crowdsourcing platforms.

Nevertheless, what is most characteristic of cultural crowdfunding is its capacity to extend commercial prospecting into specific areas of cultural production, including alternative, or even oppositional, creative labour, and places where production merges into ‘social’ or ‘community economies’, drawing

these different forms into an eminently ‘entrepreneurial’ project-based model through the consecration of the figure of the artist as ‘project creator’. Secondly, if platforms do indeed bring about a structural modification of labour, they now do so, as Marine Jouan’s (2017) research suggests, in an entirely ideological way, acting as ‘pathfinders’: that is, although they no longer fundamentally transform labour *per se*, they show the way.

The hypothesis can be sharpened by looking into the terms used to define and circumscribe the phenomenon. The idea of ‘crowdfunding,’ like ‘crowdsourcing,’ refers to the idea of a corporate sponsor outsourcing tasks to the ‘crowd’ (Lebraty and Lobre-Lebraty 2015). Note once more that the current resurgence of the word ‘crowd’ not only implies the erasure of the singularity of each supposed member, but also tends to remove all trace of structural economic, social and cultural inequalities between those who purportedly make up this crowd. As suggested in preceding chapters, platforms are constructed as intermediation apparatuses and therefore as apparatuses for the mobilization of disparate players thus committed to ‘collaborating’ together. In this sense, they also set themselves up as the real drivers of the logics of trans-media convergence somewhat enthusiastically highlighted by Henry Jenkins (2006).

This mobilization is promoted by a profusion of evangelical technophile discourses consubstantial with the ‘collaborative web’ (Bouquillon and Matthews 2010), which advocate ubiquity of access, the omnipotence of the network, sharing, and diversity of content for all—so long as it is strictly contained within the framework of assent for these means of communication and content as private property. These discourses would have us believe that, thanks to digital intermediation, everyone is now in a position to engage in new creative ‘experiences’—experiences that blur the lines between production and consumption, as anticipated in the neologism ‘prosumers,’ coined by the American futurologist Alvin Toffler in the 1980s. Alongside the promotion of personalized, individualized ‘experience,’ all reference to labour as a social relation is gradually abandoned, even though it is this labour that enables the productive process and the capital accumulation realized through it. In this way, crowdsourcing and crowdfunding become original, indispensable methods for the creation, publicization and funding of cultural projects—methods that nevertheless remain entirely in line with the industrial strategies into which they are more or less obviously integrated. As entrepreneur and social media analyst Romain Péchan wrote in 2010 on OWNi’s website, ‘What is at stake for artists is no longer to produce, it is to face their audience, and to make sure this audience knows and recognizes them.’¹ What we see taking shape here is a metadiscourse produced by platforms as they attempt to mobilize labour (in ‘creative’ and other forms) without naming it, while dissimulating the inequalities and exploitation concomitant with it. The (free) participation of each person is foregrounded and capital is ‘democratized,’ while all reference to labour as social relation, object of commercial exchange and site of conflict disappears entirely.

This form of ideology appears in the arguments of the researcher Sophie Renault (2014), who speaks of ‘ludification’ (or ‘gamification’) as a process of ‘managerial innovation’ characteristic of collaborative platforms. According to Renault, this notion—which in fact leads to a form of social engineering—designates the ‘transfer of the mechanisms of the game into domains where they are not traditionally present’. She adds: ‘The objective of gamification, which depends on the crowd’s need for recognition, reward and amusement, is to influence the crowd’s behaviour’ (Renault 2014: 198). Here we find the elements of a fetishization of social reality that also helps call into question some fundamental oppositions and delimitations that appeared during early industrialization: the opposition between amateur and professional, and that between production and consumption. It is precisely within this optic that Patrice Flichy (2017) approaches digital labour in his book *Les Nouvelles Frontières du travail à l'ère du numérique* (The New Frontiers of Labour in the Digital Era) (2017). Although he gives a precise and lengthy description of the sociological constitution of this phenomenon based on a differentiation between work and leisure—all the better to establish how the lines between the two spheres have become blurred—he leaves aside the fact that this blurring of lines lies at the very heart of contemporary industrial strategies (particularly in the field of culture and communications). He can thus analyze the development of these platforms *ex nihilo*, as a vector of individual aspirations which promises greater entrepreneurial freedom to individuals. His analysis thus ends up very closely following the discourses and strategies developed by crowdfunding platforms, the promoters of digital *fnitech* and, in general, the players of the ‘collaborative’ economy.

Organizing and Optimizing Labour

Our analysis, on the contrary, sees digital intermediation apparatuses as instruments that enable a reconfiguration of the organization of labour, not in the sense of an emancipation of individuals, but, on the contrary, in the service of tried and tested capitalist logics. Under the cover of liberty and diversity, their primary aim is to optimize the various strata of a segmented production process, implicating all of the players involved.

1. Inside Platforms

The first level of the organization of labour is carried out ‘internally’ by the platforms’ managers. Its aim is to coordinate and optimize the work of their various direct ‘collaborators’: technical and logistical maintenance, research and development, the rollout and implementation of new services, finance and accounting, internal and external communications, particularly for the

benefit of different users and partners, and so on. We should emphasize that, as in the creative industries (Banks et al. 2013; Hesmondalgh and Baker 2011), the workforce here is insecure, often made up of interns and freelance workers. This insecurity can extend even to directors, who are sometimes unable to award themselves a regular fixed salary. Our interviews with managers of crowdfunding platforms during the two research programmes mentioned in the introduction confirm how uncertain and anxiety-inducing such work can be, particularly for those with the least security. In parallel, this organization depends upon the automation of processes for registering and creating pages ‘in a few clicks’, promotion of content on the site (projects highlighted depending on the user’s preferences or location, for example), automated aggregation and exploitation of user data (partly visible on the statistics pages the platforms provide), and the development of dedicated APIs (Application Programming Interfaces). On this point, sociologist Émile Gayoso emphasizes that platforms are technical objects made up of ‘various programs brought together under a single interface’; ‘internally’, they are used ‘to manage the company’s publications and the contributions of Internet users (content management), as well as communication between users (community management)’ (Gayoso 2015: 127). It is at these second and third levels that a *de facto* ‘external’ organization of labour is carried out *by* and *on* the platform.

2. Project Creators

The second level consists in the work of controlling and regulating the material that project creators bring to the platform. Firstly, according to an editorial logic that may be more or less strict, this material is screened (even before being accepted on the platform) and its ‘feasibility’ is gauged—something that takes into account the project’s ‘maturity’, the size of the existing community, the proposed duration of the campaign, the amount requested, and so on. As an example, the ‘refused projects’ section of KissKissBankBank says: ‘We refuse personal projects (vacations, honeymoons, birthdays, funding of a loan...). For projects that meet the criteria of creativity, innovation, or community value, the credibility and seriousness of the project must be clearly expressed in order for it to be presented on the site.’

On the pretext of ensuring the success of a project, the platforms then assist in the normalization of work processes. From this point on, the user’s activities now function in an undifferentiated, and rarely individualized, way. In our interviews, 70% of project creators said that the platform they submitted their project to did not help them during the campaign. Where help is given, it is via ‘recommendations’ and suggestions available online. Ulule offers project creators ‘five golden rules for a successful project’. KissKissBankBank lists a series of rules for successful fundraising called ‘the fundamentals’, and presents a ‘method’ that strongly encourages project creators to conform to the

production of normalized content: straplines, videos, or sequences of ‘powerful’ images, ‘effective’ rewards, a ‘credible’ biography. According to the online guidance given by all platforms, success depends on at least three elements: networking, community building and the visibility of the project. Figures are also presented to rationalize the progress of a successful campaign: if a project reaches 30% of the total requested within the first week, it has more chance of success than otherwise. It seems to us that many of these FAQs suggest what an ‘ideal’ crowdfunding campaign looks like, and encourage users to follow this pattern. A set of normalized organizational processes emerge, often in the form of questions. Project creators are nonetheless free to ignore them. This is how we can read the following declaration by Jean-Sébastien Noël, co-founder of the Quebec platform La Ruche: ‘You’re not obliged to do it, but I’d strongly recommend it to anyone.’ Our quantitative study confirms this proposition is a prerequisite for a campaign’s success. If we compare the variables representing a campaign’s success with the variable representing whether or not it followed the platform’s guidelines, it seems that the chances of success or failure are mixed. However, in the case of video production, it does seem that the rate of success is dependent on following the guideline.

What is characteristic of these ‘recommendations’ is that they blur the lines between command and suggestion. The tasks to be accomplished are carried out in a devolved, outsourced way that may at first sight seem free of any injunction from above. But by making these ‘recommendations’ to project creators, platforms drive a normalization of ‘how things are done’ and what strategies should be adopted, and so develop a form of control over the whole experience, in the sense in which Deleuze (1995) understands the term ‘control’. Our qualitative and quantitative studies confirm that, depending on the project’s profile, the amount of labour spent on it varies greatly (from less than five hours per week to over twenty). But we can show a net correlation between the number of hours spent on a campaign and its likelihood of success: a 21% success rate against a 2% failure rate when more than twenty hours per week are spent on the project. In all other cases, the failure rate is greater than the success rate.

What emerges is an obligation to dedicate at least twenty hours of labour per week to developing and promoting one’s crowdfunding campaign, including during its preparation, when specific tasks must be carried out, including in particular the design and distribution of ‘rewards.’ As we can see from the responses of project creators, this work calls for multiple skills, including communication and marketing (cited by 63% of respondents), project management (55%), IT and/or graphic design (48%), and video editing (31%). These skills are often quite different from those the artistic project itself is based on, and are generally self-taught and/or supplied by appeals for help to members of the ‘community.’ Most project leaders we interviewed confirmed that such work causes significant stress (which, incidentally, undermines the supposedly ‘ludic’ nature of the process). Furthermore, none of this is any guarantee of success. In

our study, 57% of project creators said that their campaign had been a failure, as opposed to 43% who reported success. The failures were most often attributed either to having requested too high an amount, or to problems reaching people beyond their immediate or extended family (family and friends of friends). In our interviews, respondents often ‘owned up’ to their responsibility for the campaign’s failure, recognizing mistakes made in the development or implementation of their marketing strategy, and regretted not having better followed and/or understood the advice provided in the guidelines.

More generally, with the help of these tools and recommendations, platforms are achieving ever-higher rates of success. KissKissBankBank went from a 34% success rate in 58 projects launched in 2010, to a 70% success rate out of a total of 4,470 projects in 2017. Ulule has an overall success rate of 65%, while Kickstarter has a lower rate of 35.8%. Although success rates vary widely across different cultural sectors—depending on the mobilization of the available donors and the average amounts pledged—they testify above all to the success of simplified recommendations, and to the fact that platforms have an interest in emphasizing these recommendations yet further so as to optimize the number of successful campaigns and the fees earned from them.

3. *The ‘Community’*

Lastly, on a third and more indirect ‘external’ level, we find the work of ‘community management’, which is largely outsourced to project creators. For a crowdfunding campaign to succeed, ‘leverage’ on digital social networks obviously has to be optimized. This remains one of the priorities of the various people who work for the platform. It is to be achieved by ensuring the ergonomics and fluidity of the site and its interconnection with external networks and players. Project creators have a clear role to play here, since it is up to them to launch the project, to maintain and increase the flow of donors and to ensure the everyday management of these ‘communities’. They must make every effort to publicize their project; they are ‘invited’ to send regular updates through e-mail and social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) to family, friends and acquaintances, following a centripetal logic known as ‘the three circles’ (family and friends, acquaintances and the wider public). To attain the required ‘levels’, they must continually activate their network. But as in the model of the ‘two step flow of communication’ developed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (2017[1955]), it must be enriched by similar, redundant activities on the part of members of the ‘community’ who support the project. This labour is fundamental, since projects are hierarchized as a function of community activity, becoming more or less prominent on the site depending on quantitative variables defined by the management (support, fans, subscribers, likes, comments, etc.). Some players even define this regular, time-consuming involvement as a kind of ‘art’, which suggests that they must draw some benefit from elevating routine

administrative processes into art forms, and raises significant questions about the real level of permeability between these two domains.

4. The Professional 'Ecosystem'

This mobilization of the community and these forms of networking are also pursued by the managers of platforms themselves, as they promote an image of (hyper)active 'start-uppers' constantly in search of new modes of financing and value creation. To this end, they actually make use of 'their' own platforms with the aim of developing extended and versatile social and professional networks. Marine Jouan describes this intense labour of networking:

As it appeared on the media agenda, more and more players outside the world of crowdfunding asked themselves whether or not they should be using this funding method. [...] The objective of crowdfunding professionals is to get these players to forge partnerships with their platforms, so that players interested in crowdfunding do not start up their own platforms, increasing competition for the capture of projects and funds. (Jouan 2017: 337)

Jouan's research also insists on the importance of consolidating and extending existing networks, particularly by producing and disseminating supposed 'crowdfunding studies' and 'barometers.' In their 'desire to communicate,' these discursive elements 'are conceived above all to create 'buzz' in the media, but also around events organized by the association [Crowdfunding France]' (Jouan 2017: 343). She lists two forms of partnership such activities aim at, both of which are undeniably reminiscent of professional community management. In the first case, the partner 'will direct toward the partner platform certain project leaders who are in its network and who are seeking funding,' while 'the second type of partnership involves the transfer of the partner's funds to the campaigns on the platform' (Jouan 2017: 355). It is useful to compare these two ways of optimizing social networks, one of which is deployed by project creators, the other by platform managers, but both of which depend on constantly increasing and renewing traffic in order to avoid failure and maintain the momentum of their respective projects.

Train, Educate, Agitate

We have emphasized that one of the characteristics of cultural crowdfunding is that, if it does not entirely overthrow all the classical codes and references of the 'worlds of art,' it certainly erodes them—or, as we have written elsewhere, it gives a 'common language' to the different players connected by the platforms

and, in doing so, contributes to shaping them as predominantly economic players (Matthews, Rouzé and Vachet 2014: 30). Most platform directors and managers insist on the ‘pedagogical’ work they have to do for project creators and certain ‘communities’ of backers. The objective here is to counteract the ‘old’ mentalities of cultural workers who are too dependent on systems of public grants (or ‘assistance’), wary of going beyond their target audience, lacking in communication skills and unable to ‘sell themselves.’ We have observed how, beyond setting up the technical means to enhance the initiatives of project creators, platforms employ a discourse of the rationalization and commodification of the cultural sphere, and do their best to transform cultural workers into entrepreneurs. This discourse is disseminated on websites and social networks—but also through online and print publications, heavy coverage in traditional media, organizing and participating in public conferences, university education, and initiatives where certain project creators are recognized and given appearances at public events. Barely concealed in the invitation to ‘become a part of an artistic, creative and innovative family’ is a condemnation of those losers who don’t know how to take advantage of these (necessarily ‘neutral’) new technologies.

1. Promotional Discourses

Promoted by numerous players in business, the media, academia, and politics, it is supposedly certain that the crowdfunding model will spread and become a significant component in numerous economic sectors—a determination reflected in the extent of coverage in both print and online media (Benistant and Marty 2016). These discourses are echoed by the publication, in many countries, of dozens of didactic and popular works with evocative titles such as *A Crowdfunder’s Strategy Guide: Build a Better Business by Building Community* (Stegmaier 2015), *Crowdfunding Basics in 30 Minutes: How to Use Kickstarter, Indiegogo, and Other Crowdfunding Platforms to Support Your Entrepreneurial and Creative Dreams* (Epstein 2018); *Le Crowdfunding: les rouages du crowdfunding* (Crowdfunding: The Mechanics of Crowdfunding) (Iizuka 2015); *Le Crowdfunding: mode d’emploi* (Crowdfunding: An Instruction Manual) (Hendrickx 2015), and *Crowdfunding: mener son projet* (Crowdfunding: Running Your Project) (Baudoire 2016). If we are to believe these various infatuated commentators, crowdfunding has become a ‘must’ for the funding of cultural production at an individual, community, industrial, and institutional level.

This enthusiastic discourse can take as evidence the continually improving economic performance of the platforms. In Europe, across 150 platforms including all forms of financing, the amounts raised grew to almost €3 billion in 2014—a growth of 146% on 2012.² According to the BPI, 80% of the money raised came from UK platforms. After the UK came France, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Spain. Worldwide, crowdfunding in all its forms

Table 1: Evolution 2013–2017.

Gift platforms: (i.e. Bulb in Town, KissKissBankBank, Proarti, Ulule, Commeon, Fosburit, J'adopte un projet, Kocoriko, Freelendease).				
Number of projects	Amount Raised	Average Amount	Average Campaign Period	Success Rate
20105	94M€	4,686€	32	44%
Lending platforms (i.e. Hellomerci, Unilend, Lendosphere, Lendopolis, PretUp, Prexem Bolden, Blue Bees, Lendix, Les Entrepreneurs, WeShareBonds, Edukys)				
Number of projects	Amount Raised	Average Amount	Average Campaign Period	Success Rate
1515	202M€	133,131 €	15	18%
Equity platforms (i.e. Lumo, Smartangels, Wiseed, HappyCapital, MyNewStartup, Sowefund, IncitFinancement, Raizers, Enerfip, Proxima, Hoodlers, Fundimmo, Booster, Health Investbook, Feedelios, Kiosk To Invest)				
Number of projects	Amount Raised	Average Amount	Average Campaign Period	Success Rate
327	134M€	409,173 €	105	40%

Source: BPI.

grew from \$2.6 billion in 2012 to \$34 billion in 2015, shared unequally across continents, with the majority concentrated in North America, Europe and East Asia (Massolution Crowdfunding Industry Report, Crowdsourcing.org 2015). In France specifically, the professional association Crowdfunding France confirm that, between 2015 and 2016, gifting platforms saw a 37% growth in their activities (from €50.1 million to €68.6 raised), while loan platforms grew by 46% (from €66.3 to €96.6 million raised) and investment platforms by 36% (from €50.3 million to €68.6 million).³ On this basis, crowdfunding is presented as a 'simple', rapid response to the timidity of institutional lenders (not to mention cuts to public funding), and as a profitable solution for investors facing poor returns from 'sovereign' investments (the Livret A, euro life insurance funds, etc.).

While they are supposed to guarantee transparency, the figures given by the platforms should be treated carefully. Any comparison between them is difficult because of the different time periods used to produce them, the criteria and denominations used and each platform's distinctive features. But they do illustrate the capitalist interest of these practices, and give us some indication of the cultural sectors that use them most. Gift platforms with a cultural dimension are the largest in terms of the number of projects submitted. Nevertheless, as the BPI figures compiled between 2013 and 2017 show, in total amounts raised and average sums they are clearly inferior to loan

and investment platforms—a gap explained in part by a smaller average total request by project creators, but also by the duration of campaigns, which are longer on investment platforms.

The enthusiasm of the media and politicians should also be tempered somewhat in regard to the real economic significance of crowdfunding, particularly in the cultural field, when we look at the revenues of the sector as a whole (Picard 2018) or compare them to the cumulative totals of existing public funding channels. The figures given here are only indicative, due to the heterogeneity of the criteria used by different European countries and debates about the use of statistics in the cultural domain (Benhamou and Chantepie 2016: 8–18). We may hypothesize that, in certain regards, cultural platforms still offer terrain for experimentation, with a view to expanding and establishing them in other economic sectors—the aim being to ideologically prepare the ground for this propagation, and to minimize the risk involved by encouraging optimal participation among lenders and backers. It is within this optic that many banks have built partnerships with platforms, or created their own, going beyond mere transaction management—for example, committing themselves to participate if funds are successfully raised. La Banque Postale, longstanding partner of KissKissBankBank (and its lending and investment spinoffs), finally acquired the company in June 2017. Contrary to the media and academic discourse that presents crowdfunding as an alternative, we see an increasing integration of these platforms into the existing financial sector. Furthermore, these apparatuses are presented as tools which complement existing sources of credit, something that is reassuring to potential investors and particularly to banking institutions.⁴

2. *The Importance of Education*

Like many other web entrepreneurs, the managers of crowdfunding platforms take on the appearance of educators—evangelists, even—whose mission is to spread their new ideas—their Good News—within communities or social groups that lag behind or are still hostile to this new ‘way of the world’. Accordingly, certain platforms have opened training centres, such as Proartschool, the Kickstarter Campus and the Indiegogo Education Centre. The statements of the founders of South African platforms Thundafund and Backabuddy give eloquent examples of their belief in this pedagogical mission: one speaks of ‘the spirit of *ubuntu*’ and the way in which their platform will be able to ‘build on’ vernacular systems of collective financing in Africa ‘by using a specific tone [...] and using the same jargon, that of community-based care’. His colleague confirms this:

Yeah, I think again it’s education around the tone of the projects. The projects that tend to do well are those that have some sort of a positive

outcome. So of course, because its causes and individuals there's usually crisis-based projects [...]. So we've got to help them change the tone [...] and often this is a psychology thing, that's my training. To help them and actually take over the wording, campaigning, this is what you do, because otherwise people have quite a sort of negative response. So a lot of the work is really involved in that, in managing all of the campaign creators [...]. It really, really takes quite a lot of hand holding.

One of the founders also informed us during the same interview that she drew on her experience of training project creators when authoring two virtual courses on the American education platform Udemy (which also hosts online courses accredited by Kickstarter): 'I use this platform a lot, just in terms of guidance about tone, because they have very strict criteria and I've put two courses online, so I try to transfer this experience to campaigns.' In her doctoral thesis, Marine Jouan writes about her experience as a 'project moderator' with KissKissBankBank, a role that brings together two complementary missions: 'giving advice to project creators and looking for new projects for the platform':

My work then consisted in 'moderating' requests for fundraising that arrive on the platform [...]. I would also advise them on fundraising. I would show them how to achieve their goal by sending e-mails or getting their family and friends involved. Some project leaders asked for my help during fundraising, worried that the amount raised might stall as the end of the campaign came nearer. I then tried to see with them what they could do in order to achieve the goal they had set. The second part of my work consisted in attracting new projects to the platform, I also did a review of the public and private bodies, associations and organisations that might come into contact with project creators looking for funding. I tried to contact them via e-mail to present the work of KissKissBankBank and invited them to contact us if they were interested. I also made many phone calls to these bodies to ask whether they had any artists in their network who might be interested. I ended up going to some of them to give presentations to interested parties. I responded to their questions about how the platform works and how a fundraising campaign works. (Jouan 2017: 22)

She concludes this brief account of her internal experience with the platform by emphasizing that it offered her the first signs of what she went on to observe in her research—in particular, 'the tensions between the values of mutual aid and the financial dimension, between a generous image of crowdfunding and the realities of fundraising, centred on financial matters.' These values of mutual aid and this generous image seem like a veneer that attempts to dissimulate the true

nature of the ‘teachings’ which these proselytizing managerial discourses proffer to project creators who then, in turn, must repeat the same process among their own little ‘crowds.’

Another example is given in the following exchange between two entrepreneurs, reported by Joan from one of her observations at an internal seminar for the organization Crowdfunding France:

Denis: I really get the feeling that we focus too much on the purely financial side of things, and we forget this whole other aspect of the campaign, and beyond that the project creator of course, and then a community who will contribute a lot of other services apart from funding. It’s not just the financial and budgetary aspect. I know we’re at Bercy [Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Industry], but other arguments need to be heard, just so that we don’t see this as a matter of finance and nothing else [...]

Lilian: Once again, I would say yes, you’re quite right [...]. But at the end of the day, you can say what you want, but crowdfunding is still funding [...]. The link between all of this, after all, is that at a some point you get some money. So it’s a different way of getting money, but it’s still getting money. No one does all of this for nothing! In the end, how do we measure the success of crowdfunding on a site? Either the funds are released or not, depending on what you’ve put in, and that’s the plain fact of the matter. That’s why people do it. (Joan 2017: 148)

The expression ‘you can say what you want’ refers back to Denis’s comment that the values of mutual aid and the construction of ‘communities’ should be foregrounded, whereas Lilian emphasizes that non-financial support (live capital) and financial support (dead capital) are both ways of obtaining capital. The exchange confirms that the managers of platforms are players, one of whose principal skills consists in being able to ‘say what you want’ (i.e. their propensity for ‘story-telling’). But what is no doubt more interesting is the second part of the quote: ‘Either the funds are released or not, depending on what you’ve put in.’ We might relate this comment to the investment of the platform managers who may or may not make a profit when the funds are released, depending on their work in educating project creators. But we may also, of course, relate it to the project creators themselves, who may or may not obtain the funds they asked for (through direct financial or indirect contributions), depending on what they have ‘put in,’ such as labour time in marketing and communication—in short, ideological production as well.

Finally, during an interview with the founder of a crowdfunding site for concerts, we asked to what extent he had to encourage artists to keep their social media pages updated. He responded:

Very much. Especially social media. I've been frustrated at times with the lack of understanding from the music industry of what social media should be [...]. I still hammer on constantly when I talk to people about email and I tell them: You've got to be on Facebook, you've got to do what you can on Facebook. Tag people. Go to the private pages, not to your band pages always. And those [...] the people that understand that are usually good [...]. And it sort of comes back to a question of coaching people at that. We really had to [...]. Because again it brings us back to that idea of most artists just want to be artists. They don't want to be marketing people or promotion.

It seems obvious then that a significant proportion of the activity of managers is dedicated to this managerial and psychological guidance, and therefore to forms of production that are entirely ideological. Consequently we may ask to what extent these players, ultimately, are specialized ideological producers, even if this is not exactly the 'heart of their job'. And are they producers of cultural and ideological forms *in just the same way* as the cultural project creators they virtually work with, and whose work they offer to host and to help them propagate? For we must keep in mind that all of this takes place thanks to means of communication that the managers do not necessarily own—even if they may hold shares in these companies and operate in accordance with the wishes of their financial commissioners. Or is the relation between managers and project creators an asymmetrical one, insofar as the ideological production of the former serves objectively to *frame* the latter, in the sense defined by Robert Bihl (1989)—to form and to agitate them? We use the latter term advisedly, in reference to Plekhanov's distinction between propaganda and agitation: the first is the presentation of an important number of generally complex ideas to a small number of people, and the second is the diffusion of a few relatively simple ideas to a mass of people (Plekhanov 1892).

Conclusion

'Free your creativity!' are the words with which KissKissBankBank welcomes every Internet user to arrive on their website. This tagline is aimed primarily at artists, as an invitation to become project creators, but ultimately it can be read as a leitmotif of the managerial and ideological production of such platforms. In an interview with the newspaper *L'Humanité* on the publication of *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello declared: 'We set out from the principle that people are capable by themselves of gauging the gap between what they're told and what they actually experience, so that capitalism somehow has to provide factual reasons to adhere to its discourse. However, the weakness of capitalism is that it all it has to offer is the insatiability of its

process of accumulation. Since it is profoundly amoral, it must find outside of itself the motives for engagement, and it is critique that often furnishes these motives.'

In effect, the building and the very functioning of platforms of digital intermediation demand that the different players who use it, aiming to capture economic value, must silently pass over the reality or the 'operationality' of most of the tasks they carry out. The foregrounding of a democratic, innovative, horizontal model (equally prominent in the management discourse of project creators in relation to their 'communities' as in the discursive and procedural management of platforms in relation to 'creative' workers) is an attempt to mask the logics of predation and competition that emerge more clearly as the number of projects grows. By 'projects' here we should understand both the individual fundraising campaigns *and* the *ventures* seeking to claim their share from the windfall of digital intermediation. Cultural crowdfunding platforms are obliged to reassure, to motivate and to mobilize by using a judicious mix of digital technology and marketing techniques (more or less innovative depending on configuration and partners), but in this regard they remain dependent on an ideological production that accounts for a significant proportion of the activities of the various managers. We find the counterpart of this intense work of production of cultural forms (Garnham 1990) among the artistic project creators who, with varying degrees of skill and elegance, improvise appeals to persuade their 'community' of backers to rally behind their project.

The aim of this analysis is not to situate the different forms of labour carried out by and on platforms on a single plane. Rather, it is to suggest some elements which let us compare the tasks which the agents connected by these platforms engage in or submit to—whether those players are managers (or employees with different degrees of responsibility), project creators, or various external 'partners' (primarily funders/donors in the case of crowdfunding campaigns). Each player objectively contributes their time, their capacities and their skills (their live or dead capital) to the general process of production and accumulation.

In fact, here it is not just a question of *the artist as worker*, but also of the mobilization of the artist's 'community'. This also has to contribute to the work of production and communication, as well as making a financial contribution. As with individual startups and incubators, this calls for the development of a 'creative ecosystem', even while attempting to evacuate the question of labour and its remuneration (and therefore its commercialization). Thus we observe the polymorphism of the entrepreneur, a sort of 'matchmaker' at the intersection between players, and between organizations and players, of very disparate origins and influences, whose logics, desires and strategies he must attempt to combine in order to generate economic value. The various facets of their enterprise contribute to the most general development of labour under contemporary capitalism, by participating in what is called, quite incorrectly, the 'collaborative' economy, and by sketching out new 'suggested' modalities perhaps made possible by even greater flexibility, mobility and insecurity.

Notes

- ¹ http://owni.fr/2010/11/24/mymajorcompany-la-fin-de-lhistoire__ Accessed 24 November 2010.
- ² <https://tousnosprojets.bpifrance.fr/Marche-du-crowdfunding/Actualites/Le-marche-europeen-du-crowdfunding-en-chiffres> Accessed 27 February 2019.
- ³ <http://financeparticipative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Barometre-CrowdFunding-2016.pdf> Accessed 5 March 2019.
- ⁴ See, for example the article of Stéphane Vromann ‘Les banques et les plateformes de crowdfunding sont-elles compatibles?’, *les Echos*, 16 December 2016.

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