

CONTEXT

Misogyny, conspiracy theories, surveillance, manipulation, fraud, and AI slop are flooding the internet. For the monopolists who dominate our online lives - X, TikTok, Amazon, Meta, Apple - this isn't an accident. It's the model. As tech critic Cory Doctorow puts it, the process is called enshittification: first, platforms lure us in with bait like free access; then they monetize our activity, degrading the experience while wooing advertisers; finally, once we're locked in and rivals crushed, every drop of value is siphoned upward to executives and shareholders. The result? Our supposed digital commons have curdled into arenas of torment. The utopian promise of the networked world, to bring people together to solve problems, has been thoroughly, irreversibly enshittified.

In *Against Platforms* (2025), critic Mike Pepi argues that these techno-feudalist infrastructures have hollowed out institutions, replacing them with skeletal logistical shells run on private data pipelines. The problem isn't just surveillance, he insists, it's dependence: entire societies lashed to systems engineered to maximize virality and extract engagement at any cost. Pepi calls for a radical rethink, perhaps even a redesign of what a platform is. Similarly, Joshua Citarella stresses that "we need new platforms to tell new stories" (*Politigram & the Post-Left*, 2018), underscoring the urgency of experimental infrastructures that can host alternative forms of collectivity.

THE STUDIO ASKS

Which individuals/communities sustain the platform economy, and what does this mean for our cities?

Where are the hidden nodes of platform urbanism, and how might we map them to expose their invisible infrastructures?

What digital and spatial situations, events, and activities unfold in these spaces, and how might platform logics be subverted and redirected toward counter-narratives?

How can these investigations translate into architectural expression: drawings, models, or a collective virtual space for protest, solidarity, and alternative gatherings?

THE STUDIO INVESTIGATES how digital platforms organize both spatial and social experiences, from rituals to resistance. We begin by tracing sites where conflict is staged and monetized: platforms of extraction where every gesture is mined for value; chats that spiral into shitstorms; markets of engineered stupidity; staged "viral" events grown in click farms; synthetic feel-good feeds that pump dopamine on demand; the endless abyss of doomscrolling; laboratories of the attention economy where outrage is preprogrammed; clickbait farms where curiosity is stripped and sold.

Why Everything Suddenly Got Worse... About Enshittification, Platformness and Counter-Spectacles

Keywords: platform capitalism, platform urbanism, attention economy, click-bait economy, doomscrolling, images ecology.

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EXPANDED LITERATURE

In parallel, the studio draws on Yancey Strickler's Dark Forest Theory of the Internet (2019), which describes hidden, semi-private refuges - group chats, closed servers, encrypted spaces - as the last habitats of trust and intimacy within extractive digital ecologies.

Further, we will engage with the writings of Guy Debord, specifically The Society of the Spectacle, where he observed that "the spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images." Today, platforms extend this condition, turning social relations into data economies, image ecologies, and spatial practices. Digital platforms - from ride-sharing and delivery apps to Airbnb and social media - are reshaping how cities function, often blurring the line between physical and virtual space. Some describe this shift as a form of platform urbanism.

Hito Steyerl, in Medium Hot: Images in the Age of Heat (2025), describes images as products of thermodynamic processes. Each image carries the residue of its production: data center emissions, invisible labor, geopolitical orientation. Images emerge as infrastructures heavy with consequence, entangling governance, resources, and culture.

Nick Srnicek, in Platform Capitalism (2016), describes how digital platforms consolidate labor, community, and value into extractive systems. He shows how companies like Amazon, Google, and Facebook operate not just as intermediaries but as infrastructures that centralize data, coordinate economic activity, and capture social interactions. What appears as neutral convenience, such as search engines, marketplaces, or social networks, functions instead as a means of monopolization, locking users, workers, and businesses into proprietary ecosystems. In this way, platforms transform everyday practices of communication, consumption, and work into sources of profit, while obscuring the asymmetrical relations of control that underpin them.

READING

Hito Steyerl – Medium Hot: Images in the Age of Heat (2025)
Hito Steyerl – Who Prompted All This Shit? (Spike Art Magazine, 2025)
Hito Steyerl – Mean Images (New Left Review, 2023)
Shoshana Zuboff – The Age of Surveillance Capitalism (2019)
Nick Srnicek – Platform Capitalism (2016)
Mike Pepi – Against Platforms (2025)
Ana Teixeira Pinto – Oh Man! Aggrieved Masculinity, Silicon Valley and the New Far Right (2025)
Joshua Citarella – We Need New Platforms to Tell New Stories (2019)
Joshua Citarella – Do Not Research (2023)
McKenzie Wark – Sensoria (2020)
Tiziana Terranova – After the Internet: Digital Networks between Capital and the Common
Yancey Strickler - The Dark Forest Anthology of the Internet (2024)
Scam: Inside Southeast Asia's Cybercrime Compounds by Mark Bo, Ivan Franceschini and Ling Li
Enshittification: Why Everything Suddenly Got Worse and What To Do About It by Cory Doctorow
Medium Design: Knowing How to Work on the World by Keller Easterling
Liam Young – City Everywhere (2018)

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