

**POWER**

**MEMORY**

**AFTER  
THE  
CREATOR  
ECONOMY**

**CONNECTION**

**CONTENT**

Tutorial  
Essay  
Selfie  
Book  
Album  
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Documentary  
Illustration  
Poem  
Song  
Zine  
Apology  
Tweet  
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Content

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Artist  
Painter  
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Musician  
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Scammer  
Entrepreneur  
Writer  
Illustrator  
Visual Artist  
Influencer  
TikToker  
Shitposter  
Creator



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# INTRODUCTION



In 15 years, will we  
still be asking people  
to like and subscribe?

For most people publishing creative work online, there is a growing sense of anxiety. While we have more online tools than ever to help operationalize and monetize creative businesses, the available options often feel mismatched with how we naturally create.

**We want work to be financially valued without compromising our integrity.**

**We want to make meaningful work that we're proud of, not please an algorithm.**

**We want to share work in ways that feel right to us, not compete for attention on a feed.**

**We want to feel seen without our creativity and identities being exploited.**

The broad industry of sharing our creativity online has been generally defined as "the creator economy," referring to the platforms, services and tools that enable the creation, distribution and monetization of content online.

In this publication, we explore directions for an alternative creative ecosystem – one that looks and functions differently. We challenge the assumptions of the current model and suggest some of the cultural and technological shifts that can get us closer towards new solutions.

What would an environment look like that is more collaborative, resilient, meaningful, and democratic?

How might we participate in creating the digital infrastructure of the next decade?

**What's after the creator economy?**

We spoke with creators of all kinds – musicians, podcasters, visual artists, and writers – to share their perspectives on the status quo and what comes next.

2021

🌐 Increasing NFT and blockchain-based experimentation.

2020

Covid-19 lockdown moves more of the creative economy online.

2019

Worker collective action events at tech companies increase.

2017

👉 Substack

YouTube updates its policies to get more control over which videos can make money from ads, requiring for the first time that channels reach 10,000 lifetime views before they can start to generate revenue.

2016

📺 OnlyFans 📺 TikTok

Worldwide internet usage on mobile surpasses desktop internet usage in October 2016.

2010

📷 Instagram

The term "influencer" is used to describe "a highly visible subset of digital content creators defined by their substantial following, distinctive brand persona, and patterned relationship with commercial sponsors." (Wikipedia) Taking photos of one's meal before eating it increases by 10,000,000,000,000%.

2011

👻 Snapchat 📺 Twitch

Youtube starts using the term "creator" instead of "YouTube star."

2012

📄 Medium 🌱 Vine

2013

🔴 Patreon

Ongoing subscription patronage allows "patrons" to opt-in to a person's ongoing creative pursuits, donating monthly and not just on a one-time basis.

2015

🌐 Ethereum launches.

2009

🟩 Kickstarter

Kickstarter starts using the word "creator" to describe a user category. Crowdfunding becomes a popular way for creators to fund projects. Gig work, popularized by companies like Uber, makes workers into micro entrepreneurs.

2008

Kevin Kelly writes "1000 True Fans," predicting that the internet would allow individuals to make a living off their creations by engaging a base of true fans that spend \$100 a year on "anything you produce."

2007

📺 Tumblr 🎧 Soundcloud 🎸 Bandcamp 📱 iPhone

YouTube announces Partner program, allowing creators to monetize content. Content goes viral through features such as Tumblr's Reblog and Twitter's Retweet buttons. Facebook starts delivering personalized ads based on user's individual data sets.

2003

👥 Myspace 🎧 iTunes Store 🗣️ AdSense (by Google) 📄 Wordpress

Bloggers start monetizing their weblogs by embedding ads. iTunes makes it possible to buy single songs. Clay Shirky publishes "Power Laws, Weblogs, and Inequality," stating that when many people are free to choose between many options, a small subset of the whole will get a disproportionate amount of traffic.

2004

👤 Facebook 📄 Flickr 🎧 Podcasting begins

Digital cameras become ubiquitous, resulting in billions of images created every day. Chris Anderson publishes *The Long Tail*, arguing that as the internet lifts the limitations of the physical world, the long tail of entertainment becomes more relevant.

2005

📺 YouTube

YouTube's slogan "Broadcast yourself" defines a new era in which the mere act of recording what you do is turned into content.

2006

🐦 Twitter 🎧 Spotify 📄 Google Docs

Time Magazine makes "You" the Person of the Year, recognizing the millions of people who anonymously contribute user-generated content to websites such as YouTube, MySpace, Facebook and Wikipedia. MySpace becomes the world's most popular website and Tila Tequila has the most-viewed profile on it, changing the rules of what it takes to become a celebrity. The streaming era begins.

2001

📧 Mailchimp

2000

📄 RSS 1.0 launches

RSS allows users to aggregate multiple weblogs in one feed.

1999

📄 Blogger, LiveJournal & Xandu

The weblog (blog) becomes a popular format for sharing personal thoughts online.

## A SHORT HISTORY OF CREATING, DISTRIBUTING, AND MONETIZING WORK ON THE INTERNET



# Foundations of the creator economy

**The creator economy is a belief system built  
on a few foundational concepts.**

## Abundance

Digital information is abundant with low or almost zero marginal cost of production. Digital content can be nearly infinitely replicated.

## Individualism

A value system that prioritizes independence, self-reliance, and individual merit.

## Personal media

The opposite of mass media, personal media describes the creation of content and media targeted at niche audiences with specific interests. It is often created on-demand or in dialog with an audience.

## Algorithms

A structure to organize and distribute content based on individual behavior.

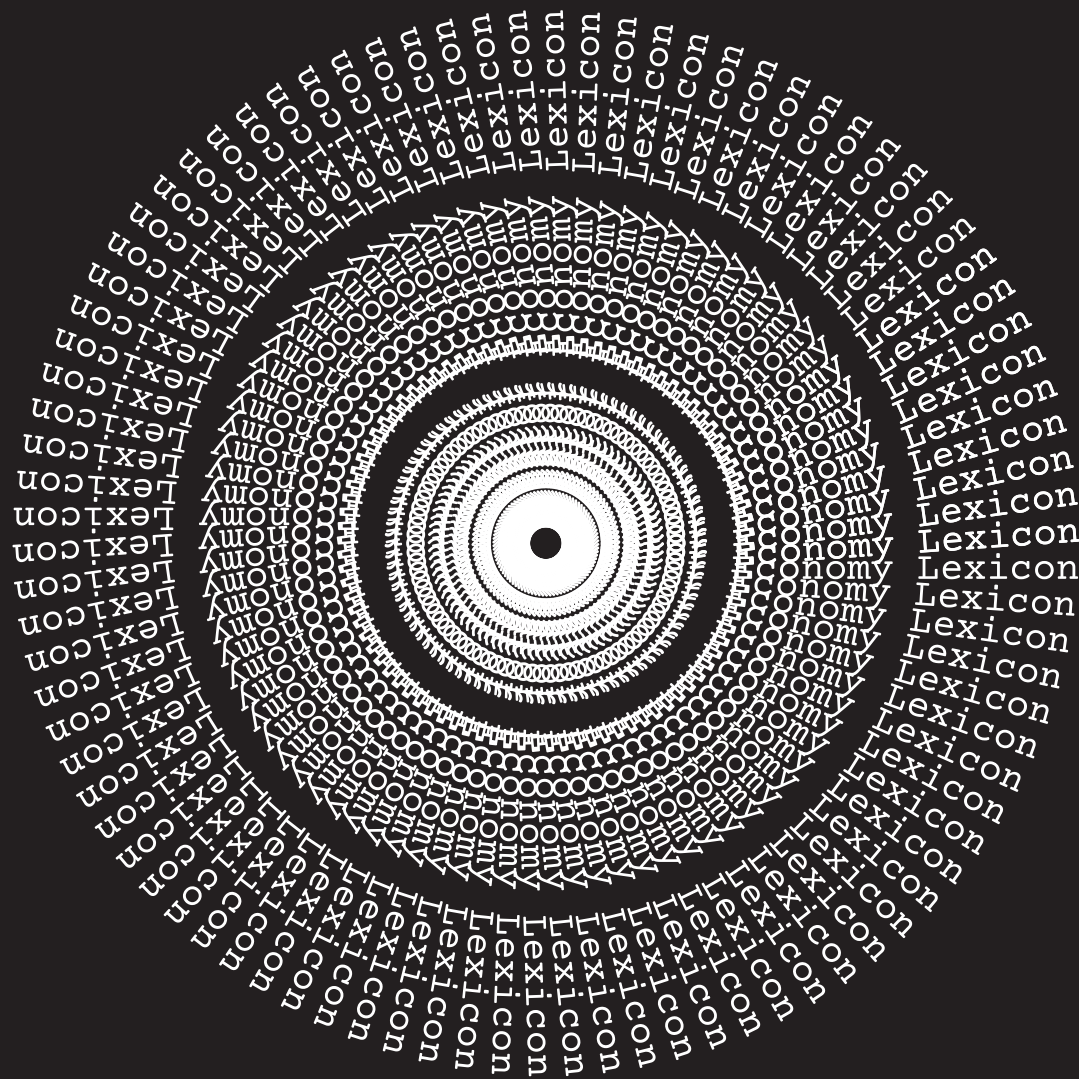
A common narrative in the creator economy is: "The internet enables each of us to earn more than ever before by matching us with the exact people – fans, customers, employers – who value our unique combination of skills and characteristics. It enables each of us to become a superstar." – Dror Poleg

## Growth

Economic models for platforms that often incentivize blitzscaling, rapid growth, and value extraction over creator interests.

# Creator economy lexicon

The meaning of words depends on the context they're embedded in. Here's what they mean inside the creator economy.



Content	A container of information optimized for distribution
Creator	An individual who creates in perpetuity
Community	An audience whose attention can be monetized
Creativity	An unlimited resource able to capture an audience's attention
Attention	A limited resource of an individual's focus on a particular item of information



# “Creator”



# “Economy”

w/ Yancey Strickler

Yancey Strickler is the cofounder and director of Metalabel and the cofounder and former CEO of Kickstarter.

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## CREATOR

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### What is a “creator?”

In its contemporary terms, it means people who professionally seek attention online.

### When did Kickstarter start using the word “creator?”

Back in 2007 or so before Kickstarter launched. Perry Chen, Charles Adler, and I were working on designs and language of the site. We knew Kickstarter would support only creative projects, but it was hard to know what to call the people making projects on the site. We were making a tool that was meant to serve musicians, painters, filmmakers, writers, designers, but also chefs, technologists, game designers. What were we supposed to call all those people? A word like “artist” was too limiting and “creative people” felt too exclusionary.

We kept iterating through different options before someone (I can’t remember who) suggested “creator” to encompass this wider circle. I can remember the word feeling really strange at first because I grew up Christian and I had always heard the word creator as with a capital-C. Creator literally meant God. I had an initial discomfort using it in a different context. But of all the options it was the one that stuck.

### What other words have you seen used instead of “creator?”

There was a period of time where people were called Makers. There was a Maker Faire at the White House. Makers were the future until they weren’t. If only they’d called themselves “The Maker Economy.”

### What do you think popularized the term “creator?”

Well, for us it was the idea of trying to encompass a wider spectrum of what was creative and artistic than before. It was embracing what was happening online, digitally, technically, and elevating those actions into the same space of traditional art and creativity.

What led us to the word more than 15 years ago was the search for an understanding of creativity that wasn’t trapped in the 19th century, and that embraced the internet. I feel like that’s exactly the energy that the “creator” term has come to encompass, but in a far bigger way than I imagined.

“It’s curious that appending the word ‘economy’ another word to make a phrase, as in ‘experience economy,’ ‘sharing economy,’ and ‘passion economy’ is largely a rhetorical device used a to signal the phrase-coiner’s interest in financial gain and indicate an investable category.”

— Toby Shorin

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# ECONOMY

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**What are ways that the word “economy” may not apply to creative practices?**

Appending “economy” says that the intention of creative work is its monetization. Or the intention of a fan relationship is monetization. The purpose of inspiration is monetization. It erases all of the nuance and struggle and inspiration and omg-is-this-not-gonna-workness of making creative things and reduces it to a person’s ability to get others to pay for it. It’s obvious that people who use this word or get excited by this word are not people who really know what it is to dedicate yourself to a creative practice.

**How would you define an “economy?”**

A system with financial inflows and outflows.

**When was the first time you heard of “the creator economy?”**

I don’t remember? Something from a16z probably?

**In tech, the word “economy” is often used to describe a type of investment thesis: “ownership economy,” “creator economy,” “passion economy.” Do you think this is what may be driving the adoption of the term “the creator economy?”**

Yes. It’s VCs talking their books, a way to promote their portfolio of investments.

**There are also concepts of less-financial exchange like the “gift economy” and the “solidarity economy.” How do you view these in comparison?**

The gift economy is very real. Lewis Hyde’s book about *The Gift* is wonderful, and something we thought a lot about with Kickstarter. There is a long, true, emotional history of what it feels like to create things for others. It has nothing to do with economics and everything to do with karma, gratitude, love, and making great work.

**How should we be thinking about creative practices online instead of an “economy?” As an ecosystem?**

Yes, ecosystems! Ecosystems have life, death, sustenance, competition, pain, rebirth, all of it. This is the truth of creativity in each individual person’s practice, as well as the giant space itself. Ecosystem is a far better word.

**Is the term “economy” implying more financialization than something like Kickstarter, where projects support creative projects without the expectation of financial return?**

My career started in music, working for digital music services. What struck me in that environment was everyone treated music as this infinite resource to be endlessly commoditized and sold. But nobody thought about the conditions of the musicians who made it, where new music came from, or how it was meant to be financed.

I was so frustrated by this back in 2005 it inspired me to start a record label within that digital music service so that we could actually be helping the creation of new music, helping the actual people who made music, rather than viewing music as a widget that some hedge fund could make more money off of.

“creator economy” is the same old mindset.

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# CONNECTION

+ Connect

“Once upon a time people were born into communities and had to find their individuality. Today people are born individuals and have to find their communities.”

— K-Hole, Youth Mode

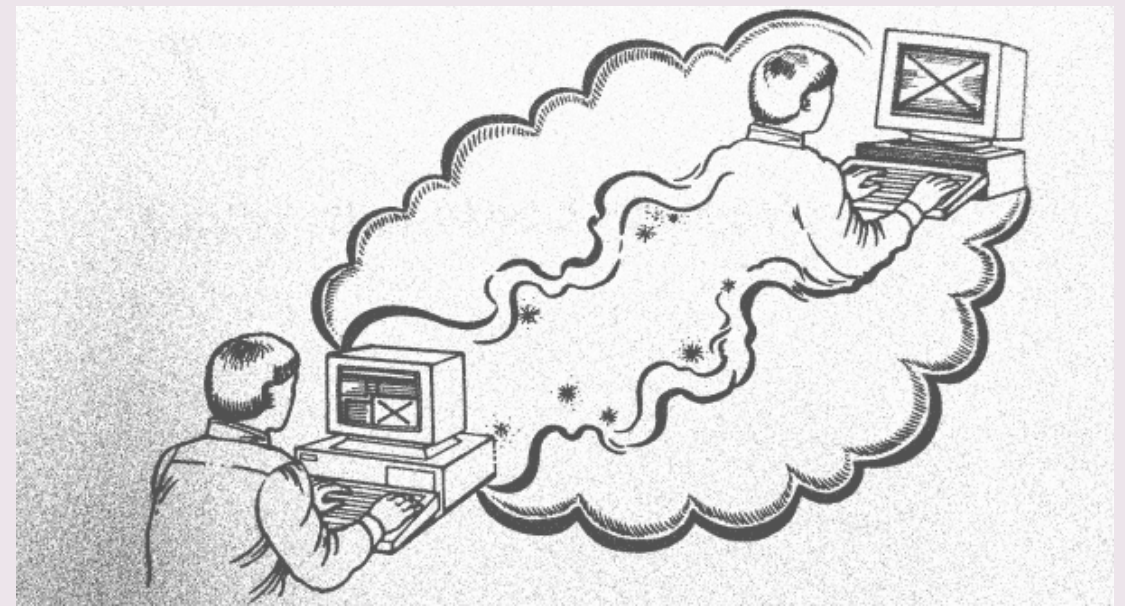
Being a creator today is lonely and isolating. It feels like we are forced to participate in a platform economy that places creators in competition against each other for followers and attention.

Instead, we desire for creative practices to be optimized for more basic human values and desires: making great work that we're proud of, and sharing it with others in ways that reflect what we care about.

That would a more multiplayer creative ecosystem look like?

A more connected online creative ecosystem doesn't default to treating "creators" as economic agents within transactional marketplaces. Instead, it emphasizes collaboration, solidarity, pluralism, and a movement beyond individualism.

How could it be different?



## Creativity in multiplayer mode

Liberation from creator economy logic requires new formation of creator networks. Lone creators join together to share resources, create common identities, and author work together.

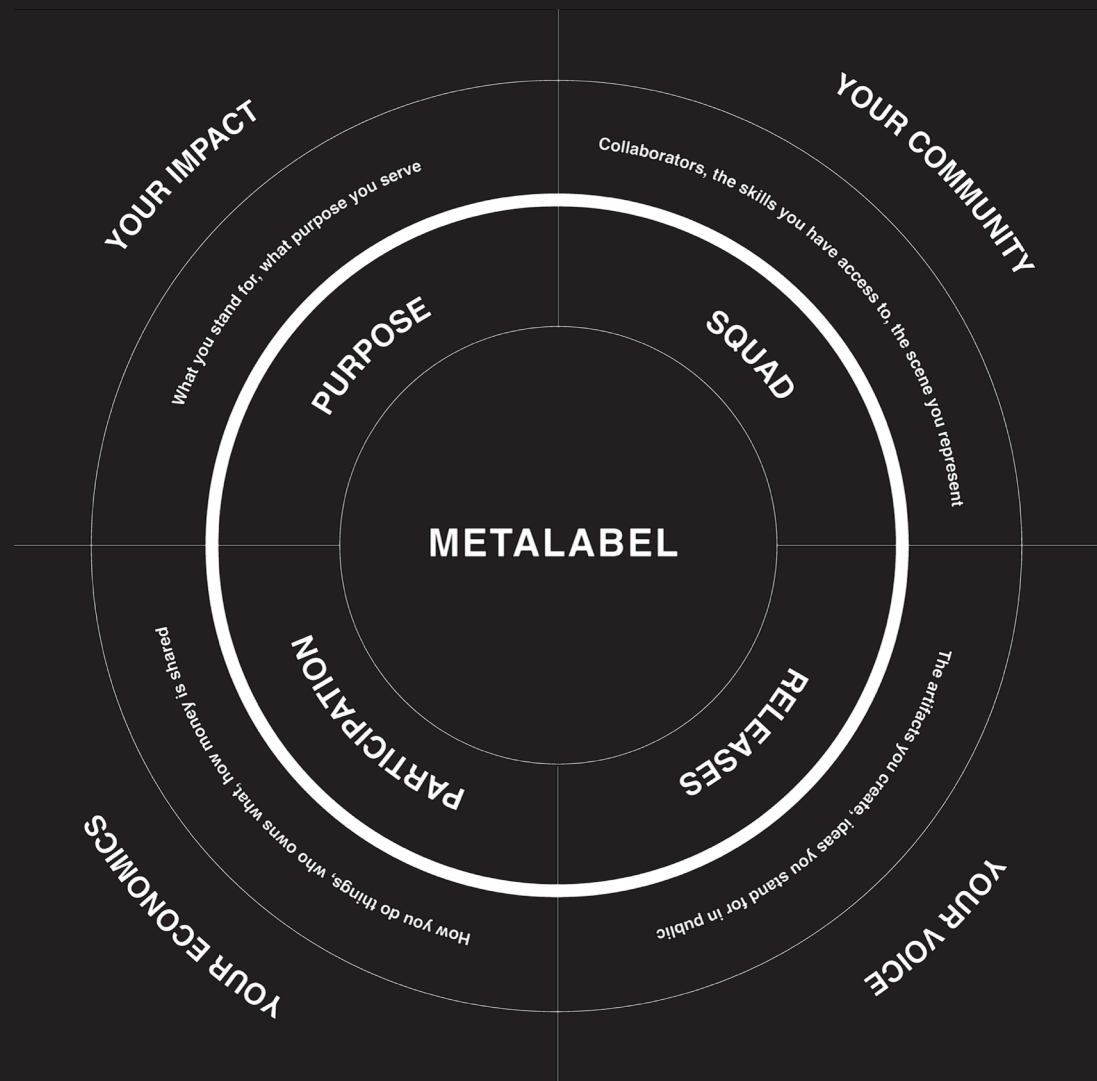
## Plural organizations and values

Plural organizations are where we get our social affiliations. These include: collectives, cooperatives, and clubs. The formation of new plural groups and reinforcement of plural values can help creators meet shared communal needs.

## Post-individualism

In the digital age we all have the capacity for a potentially infinite number of selves, each one a true representation of who we are or wish to be. Online these sub-selves create and join communities with the sub-selves of others, creating a fundamentally new, post-internet society.



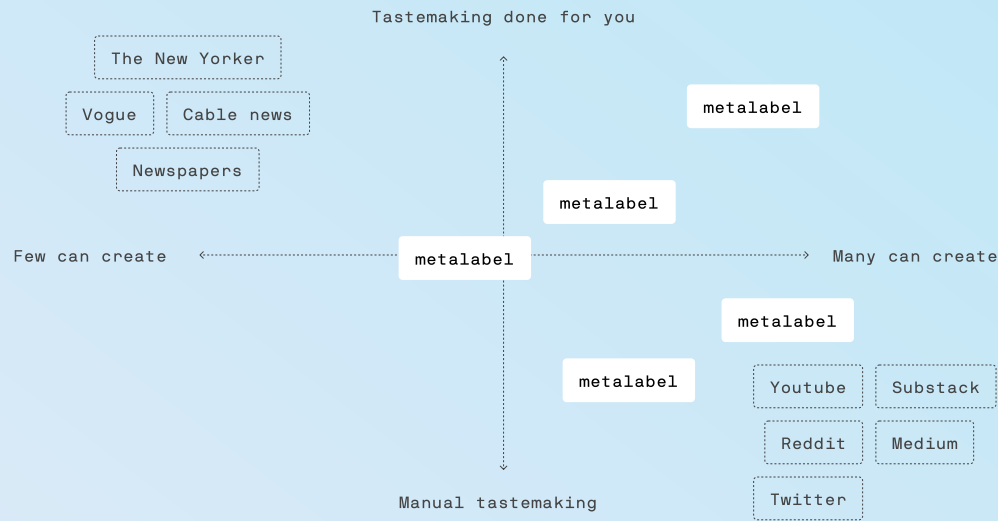


## metalabel

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A release club where groups of people who share the same interests drop and support work together. It's a lightweight structure that creates economic, emotional, and creative alignment between collaborators.

A metalabel is creativity in multiplayer mode: groups of people pooling skills, audiences, and resources in support of a larger creative vision or purpose.



Copyright Samantha Marin 2022

# Creating a media metalabel

## w/ Samantha Marin

Samantha Marin is the cofounder of Quorum, a media collective with a podcast and newsletter. Recently, Quorum joined together with the Bounty Hunter podcast and its host, Brandon Nolte, to form a collaborative media metalabel.

**Why is Quorum “going multiplayer?” When did it click to join forces?**

The creator economy is very individualistic and lonely, which is completely opposite of how humans naturally behave. Working together as a metalabel opens up the opportunity for collaboration and breaks open the isolation into a more natural formation of groups. It makes it so that every creator doesn't have to design their own brand, build their own audience, and run their own sponsorship strategy to make money. Multiple creators can share those resources – brand, audience, sponsorships – together.

**What do you see as some opportunities for creating a more collaborative writing practice?**

I see Quorum as a way for like-minded creators to come together and create work together. Writing can be a very lonely practice, so finding other writers is necessary for most writers to grow their skillset. For example, most professional writers have trusted alpha readers who read their work before it goes to an editor, then they have editors who work hard to make it better. A metalabel is a great combination of the co-creation of DAOs and the value and taste alignment of traditional media brands. I see metalabels as the future tastemakers of the internet so I'm excited to explore that further.

What does “creativity in  
multiplayer mode” mean to you?

“A certain lack of hierarchy feels key. No top-down process, conversational, room for reactivity and inspiration.”

Anthony V.  
Future Tape/ Hype Machine

“Being able to collaborate without attachment to outcome, knowing that the final output will be better for unexpectedness.”

Charlie Waterhouse  
Extinction Rebellion

“Making something that you were a part of but is bigger than you, that says things you didn’t know you would or could say, that expresses a feeling that you couldn’t articulate on your own”

Yancey Strickler  
Metalabel/ Kickstarter

“Communities collaboratively publishing and curating what media goes on a shared record.”

@popp0x

“Coming together to achieve something bigger and better and bolder than you could imagine on your own and creating room for the alchemy of collaboration to make impossible things possible along the way.”

Anna Bulbrook  
Metalabel/ Gxrlschool

“Making beautiful music together, improvising, reacting, taking turns, combining our frequencies to make the loudest and most salient synthesis without overpowering the rich texture of each component.”

Alex Grintsvayg  
LBRY/ Vibecamp



# Creativity as a supply chain

Sociologist Howard Becker argues that every work of art is the product of its own “art world.”

This includes everyone involved in an artwork, beyond the artist themselves. The concept of an “art world” includes everyone from the assistants, patrons, dealers, and collectors, to the factory workers who helped produce art supplies.



Works of art are produced by cooperation. The creating artist works with a network of suppliers of materials, distributors of art works, fellow artists, and with critics, theorists, and audiences. These contributing individuals and organizations together constitute an *art world*. And the very existence of this art world gives artists the opportunity and means to make art. How is this cooperation possible? In what ways do works of art show the effects of having been made collectively?

“What is the supply chain of making a theater performance? There’s a venue, performers, an audience, ushers, the person that prints out the scripts, and even the source of the paper itself. That’s a supply chain.”

– Nati Linares

Creators of all disciplines are atomized and individualized by platforms, but are each part of a larger holistic supply chain.

Michael Mignano, cofounder of podcasting platform Anchor, recently suggested a reframing of the creator economy, to the more expansive concept of a “creativity supply chain.” A more inclusive framing of ecosystems or supply chains for creativity helps acknowledge the inherently collaborative nature of creative practices – online and offline.

## Track listing

### Renaissance track listing

No.	Title	Writer(s)	Producer(s)	Length
1.	"I'm That Girl"	Beyoncé · Terius Nash · Kelman Duran · Michael Dean · Tommy Wright III · Andrea Summers	Beyoncé · Duran · Mike Dean <sup>[a]</sup> · Symbolyc One <sup>[b]</sup> · Jameil AOssey <sup>[b]</sup> · Stuart White <sup>[b]</sup>	3:28
2.	"Cozy"	Beyoncé · Honey Redmond · Christopher Penny · Luke Solomon · Dave Giles II · Nija Charles · Nash · Dean · Corece Smith · Curtis Jones · Kim Cooper · Peter Rauhofer · Ts Madison	Beyoncé · Honey Dijon · Chris Penny · Solomon · Dean <sup>[a]</sup>	3:30
3.	"Alien Superstar"	Beyoncé · Redmond · Penny · Solomon · Denisia Andrews · Brittany Coney · Shawn Carter · David Brown · Dave Hamelin · Timothy McKenzie · Danielle Balbuena · Fami Yacoub · Leven Kali · Alia Boggs · Levar Coppin · Saliou Diagne · Dean · Rob Manzoli · Richard Fairbrass · Christopher Fairbrass · John Holiday · Barbara Ann Teer · Kim Cooper · Peter Rauhofer	Beyoncé · Honey Dijon · Penny · Solomon · The-Dream <sup>[a]</sup> · Dean <sup>[a]</sup> · Nova Wav <sup>[b]</sup> · Kali <sup>[b]</sup>	3:35
4.	"Cuff It"	Beyoncé · Andrews · Coney · Morten Ristorp · Raphael Saadiq · Nash · Mary Brockert · Allen McGrier · Nile Rodgers	Beyoncé · Nova Wav · Rissif <sup>[a]</sup> · Saadiq <sup>[a]</sup> · The-Dream <sup>[b]</sup>	3:45
5.	"Energy" (featuring Beam)	Beyoncé · Tyshane Thompson · Sonny Moore · Almando Cresso · Jordan Douglas · Tizita Makuria · Andrews · Coney · Nash · Brockert · McGrier · Pharrell Williams · Chad Hugo · Adam Pigott · Freddie Ross	Beyoncé · Beam · Skrillex · AI Cres · Nova Wav <sup>[b]</sup>	1:56
6.	"Break My Soul"	Beyoncé · Nash · Christopher Stewart · Carter · Allen George · Fred McFarlane · Pigott · Ross · Jens Isaksen	Beyoncé · The-Dream · Tricky Stewart · Isak Swing <sup>[a]</sup>	4:38
7.	"Church Girl"	Beyoncé · Nash · Ernest Wilson · Elbernita Clark · Jimi Payton · Dion Norman · Derrick Ordógne · James Brown · Orville Hall · Phillip Price · Ralph MacDonald · William Salter	Beyoncé · No I.D. · The-Dream · White <sup>[b]</sup>	3:44
8.	"Plastic Off the Sofa"	Beyoncé · Sydney Bennett · Sabrina Claudio · Nick Green · Patrick Paige II	Beyoncé · Syd · Kali <sup>[b]</sup>	4:14
9.	"Virgo's Groove"	Beyoncé · Kali · Solomon Cole · Daniel Memmi · Dustin Bowie · Darius Scott · Jocelyn Donald · Jesse Wilson · Andrews · Coney	Beyoncé · Kali · The-Dream <sup>[b]</sup>	6:08
10.	"Move" (featuring Grace Jones and Tems)	Beyoncé · Richard Isong · Ariowa Irosogie · Andrews · Coney · Temilade Openiyi · Ronald Banful	Beyoncé · P2J · GuiltyBeatz <sup>[a]</sup> · MeLo-X <sup>[b]</sup> · The-Dream <sup>[b]</sup> · White <sup>[b]</sup>	3:23
11.	"Heated"	Beyoncé · Aubrey Graham · Sean Seaton · Rupert Thomas Jr. · Jahaan Sweet · Matthew Samuels · Andrews · Coney · Ricky Lawson · Oliver Rodigan	Beyoncé · Neenyo · Sevn Thomas · Sweet · Boi-1da · Cadenza <sup>[a]</sup> · Caley <sup>[b]</sup> · Duran <sup>[b]</sup> · White <sup>[b]</sup> · Harry Edwards <sup>[b]</sup>	4:20
12.	"Thique"	Beyoncé · Nash · Chauncey Hollis Jr. · Boggs · Julian Mason · Jabbar Stevens · Cherdericka Nichols	Beyoncé · Hit-Boy · LiJuMadeDaBeat <sup>[a]</sup> · White <sup>[b]</sup> · Ink <sup>[b]</sup>	4:04
13.	"All Up in Your Mind"	Beyoncé · Stevens · Nichols · Michael Tucker · Alexander Cook · Dean · Larry Griffin Jr. · Jameil AOssey	Beyoncé · BAH · BloodPop <sup>[a]</sup> · A. G. Cook <sup>[a]</sup> · Dean <sup>[a]</sup> · Symbolyc One <sup>[a]</sup> · AOssey <sup>[a]</sup> · The-Dream <sup>[b]</sup>	2:49
14.	"America Has a Problem"	Beyoncé · Nash · Carter · Dean · Andrell Rogers · Tino McIntosh	Beyoncé · The-Dream · Dean <sup>[a]</sup>	3:18
15.	"Pure/Honey"	Beyoncé · Tucker · Scott · Michael Pollack · Andrews · Coney · Nash · Saadiq · Moi Renee · Eric Snead · Jerel Black · Michael Cox · Kevin Bellmon · Richard Cowie · Count Maurice	Beyoncé · BloodPop · Nova Wav · Saadiq <sup>[b]</sup> · The-Dream <sup>[b]</sup> · White <sup>[b]</sup> · Dean <sup>[b]</sup>	4:48
16.	"Summer Renaissance"	Beyoncé · Andrews · Coney · Nash · Kali · Dean · Boggs · Coppin · Diagne · Lawson · Donna Summer · Giorgio Moroder · Peter Bellotte	Beyoncé · Nova Wav · Dean <sup>[a]</sup> · The-Dream <sup>[b]</sup> · Kali <sup>[b]</sup> · So! Was <sup>[b]</sup>	4:34
<b>Total length:</b>				<b>62:14</b>

How do you feel about releasing work as an individual vs. part of a collective?

We asked 30 creative practitioners to answer an anonymous questionnaire about their experiences releasing work online. Here's what they said.

:)

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"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. If you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far go together."

"At the moment I want to have individual creative control over how my work is released."

"I've always been more of a lone wolf when it comes to work given the positions I've put myself in. Finding community and working on a release with a squad and through a broader community was more fulfilling than I could have ever dreamed."

"I definitely prefer releasing work as an individual."

"Collaboration can be good but requires a trusted set of peers or squad that are aligned on expectations and outcome."

"I like the idea of releasing work as a collective, amplifying the signal, and feeling part of a community is something I strongly believe in."





# Individual artists and the collective

w/ Pictureplane

Pictureplane is an electronic musician, visual artist,  
and fashion designer based in Brooklyn, NY.

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“Making music for me would be a lot easier for me if I had some sort of encouragement from people. I have no manager, no label, no one getting excited if I make something new. I need to just make myself excited.”

– @pictureplane 02/22/2020

**How can artists join together to support each other?**

In my younger days as an artist, I felt so fortunate that I was able to live in a DIY warehouse in Denver called Rhinoceropropolis. My rent was \$300 in this enormous warehouse in an abandoned industrial area of the city. It was an incredible shared creative space. We were all artists and musicians, hosting touring bands and putting on art shows all the time. Spaces like that are so important, not only for fostering community, but for also just being an encouraging creative safe place, where anything is possible.

We would all feed off each other and learn from one another, and share ideas and techniques. It was magical and it deeply changed my life and impacted me as an artist forever. These types of places are becoming more and more rare, and it is really sad to me honestly. I will advocate for the importance of DIY spaces for the youth forever.

It's important to get out there and to meet people in real life. Go to shows or events that interest you, introduce yourself to artists whose work you like.

It can sound intimidating, but I

have found we are all in this weird world together, just trying to do our best. Most artistic people are open and friendly, and are also looking for peer support. I am always super happy to meet new people. And if for some reason this is impossible where you live, you can try to do the same thing online. It's so easy to share audio files now and to collaborate over long distances. It's more important than ever for artists to be working together and looking out for one another.

**How do you view releasing music as an individual vs. a group or collective?**

Releasing music through a collective or group will always benefit you. Having a supportive record label, or like-minded group of friends and collaborators that are hyping up your music can only be a good thing. I have released music on my own label independently, and I much prefer to be working with people who are releasing other music. My current record label, 100% Electronica, is a perfect example of this. I am really blown away by the community that surrounds the label and how supportive everyone is of all the interesting music they release.

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# Interdependent art worlds

w/ Calum Bowden

Calum Bowden is an artist, researcher, and cofounder of Trust, a network of utopian conspirators, and Black Swan, a Berlin-based collective pursuing horizontal and decentralized approaches to the traditional art world templates for art-making.




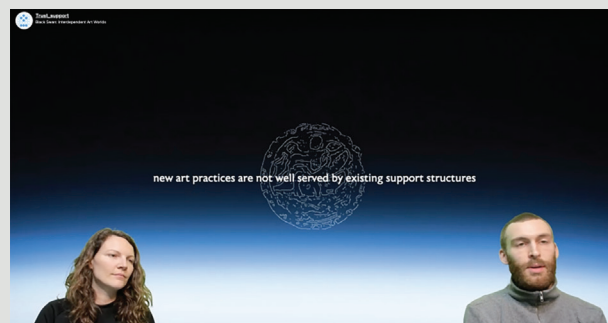
Image credit: Hydra, Black Swan, 2022

## What is Black Swan? How did you get involved?

Black Swan is an artistic research and infrastructure development project, which investigates ways of learning from peer to peer networks, decentralization, and blockchain, to imagine more equitable economics for creative practice and to enable art worlds based on mutualism and solidarity.

My interest in alternative platform economics started in 2017 while participating in The New Normal post-graduate program and “speculative urbanism think tank” at the Strelka Institute. We were researching the potentials that blockchains and DAOs afforded for distributing value differently through planetary-scale networks. I was excited to imagine ways of enabling the users of platforms to capture and share the value they create – first in the context of p2p energy microgrids – and address the failures of Web 2.0’s advertising-based business model. Off the back of this, Arthur Røing Baer and I started Trust in Berlin, to ground platform speculation and worlding in a community context and foreground ways of responding to critique through prototyping and play. As part of my creative practice, I began developing different organizational forms.

Through Trust, I met Penny Rafferty in 2018. She was creating a speculative proposal for using a DAO to redistribute power back to artists in the Berlin art world. In 2019, she convened a small interdisciplinary group of artists, critics and curators to discuss the ideas and later that year published *A Speculative White Paper on the Aesthetics of a Black Swan World* from which the Black Swan framework was born. In 2020, Trust was given the opportunity to research and prototype a Black Swan DAO situated to its specific context through the DAOWO Global Initiative and that began my collaboration with Laura Lotti. Based on our findings from a working group with Trust members, we built Cygnet, a consensus-building tool for online communities that uses Quadratic Voting, together with Leith Benkhedda and Rasmus Svensson.



“We’re developing ways of establishing common ground as a basis for creating peer support systems and platforms.”

## What are your thoughts on the creator economy?

I understand “creator” as a shortened form of “content creator.” It describes the role of creating value for social media platforms, and is emblematic of the transformation of users into the products that are sold to advertisers. I think that content is a reductive economic definition of art, meaning, metaphors, and worlds. Different people in different social contexts react differently to these phenomena, and the affective dimensions of aesthetic creation and experience are inherently pluralist and multidimensional. When this information is reduced to “content” it becomes about the potential for virality and the measure of interactions at the expense of nuance and depth. Content only exists in the context of Web 2.0 platform economics and leads to the standardized tropes seen across Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. The most effective “content” is often the most polarizing and outrageous.

This is all to say I’m skeptical of the “creator economy” and its ability to effectively redistribute value back to everyone who creates it. The creator carries on the myth of the individual creative genius, more interested in their own influence than in supporting the social and collaborative networks of which they are a part. If other platform formations are to exist based on solidarity, mutualism, and owning in common, they won’t be based around content, but I think something messier, more intangible, affective, and communal, which is definitely the case at Trust.



## What would the ideal platform economy look like?

It's a big question. In the Web 2.0 cosmos, you don't have the ability to transfer the value that you've created on one platform onto another. They create a lock-in mechanism by controlling the data and value that you generate. This becomes palpable as we witness the potential downfall of Twitter. I think some key parameters for platforms building towards more equitable relations include the democratic stewardship of data that is created and contributed, while imposing limitations on the freedom of financial exit (something unthinkable to Rage-Quit obsessed DAO denizens). What is good for a market is not good for a community: liquidity and solidarity seem in opposition.

I'm also thinking about things like federated networks and community archives, things that fracture a universal canon and democratize collective memory. For me, this is about enabling a multitude of niche and situated discourses, aesthetics, languages, and practices to flourish. Federation then is a meta framework building bridges between mini worlds that are owned in common. Interoperability is key here, and should be about enabling the creation of multiple ways into, interfaces for, and visualizations of databases that can speak to each other.

The importance of interoperability at both technical and social levels became clear through facilitating various experiments in community decision-making around the distribution of resources with Black Swan and Trust. We found that the less dialogue there was around proposals, the more intense the stakes became and the feelings of competition.

We found that by creating opportunities for people to open up their ideas as they were developing for feedback and revision, we allowed for more collaborations to take shape. By increasing the participation in the development of ideas, ultimately there could be less feelings of competition. Black Swan has used needs mapping exercises in addition to roleplaying games as ways of establishing common ground between practitioners who haven't yet been in dialogue with each other, to foreground the things that are shared and bring them together. Trust facilitates participatory events like reading groups, show and tells, and lectures as ways of developing commonality and a shared language.

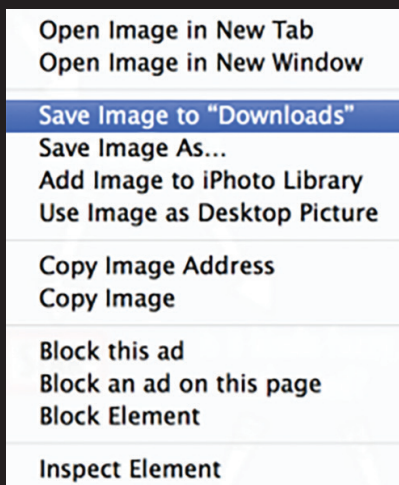


“Art has always been a collaborative practice. There's this myth of the individual genius that is the currency of the contemporary art world. We need new tools and new ways of enabling collaborations to exist and making it easier for creative practitioners to collaborate.”

– Calum Bowden

# CONTENT

What are we creating?  
Who are we creating for?



Today, artists of all kinds find themselves with an increasingly unsettling and unnatural relationship with the concept of content creation. "Content" flattens creative work – music, visual art, writing, and more – into the same container.

The choruses of pop songs are engineered to fit within shareable 15 second TikTok clips. YouTube videos are stretched beyond 8 minutes to fit in a second ad break. There's a persistent pressure to create work within algorithmic constraints.

Additionally, there's an unnatural pressure to post with sufficient quantity and frequency. Creators online need to always be promoting, posting, and engaging – and when content is delivered on feeds, we have little control over what our work is next to and how it is seen. The pressures created by these dynamics can result in burnout, unhealthy incentives, and even negatively affect the work itself.

Instead, how can we focus on creating the most meaningful work? How can we sustain this work on our own terms? How can we be in greater control of the ways that our work is presented and seen?

Could it be any different?

## **Context is queen**

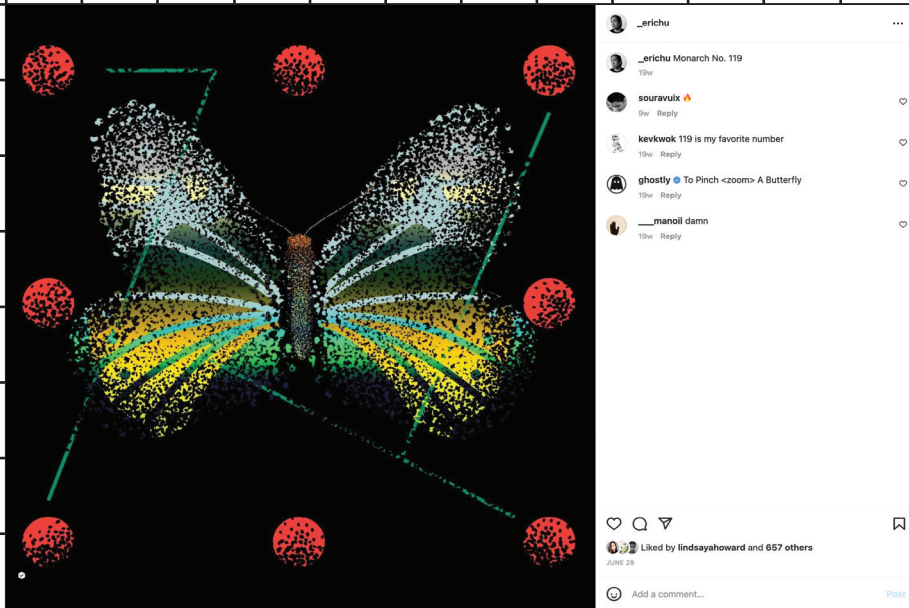
The value of anything is defined by its context – what it's next to, who made it, how it began. Greater control over the ability to create within a contextualized body of work allows for work to be understood relationally, rather than as standalone content.

## **Meaningful output and interactions**

The expression of our creative work online should be optimized for the wellbeing of the creators, not placement in an algorithmic list. An improved creator economy may be one where creative practices produce less content, supported by models that allow for more meaningful interactions.



❤️ 657



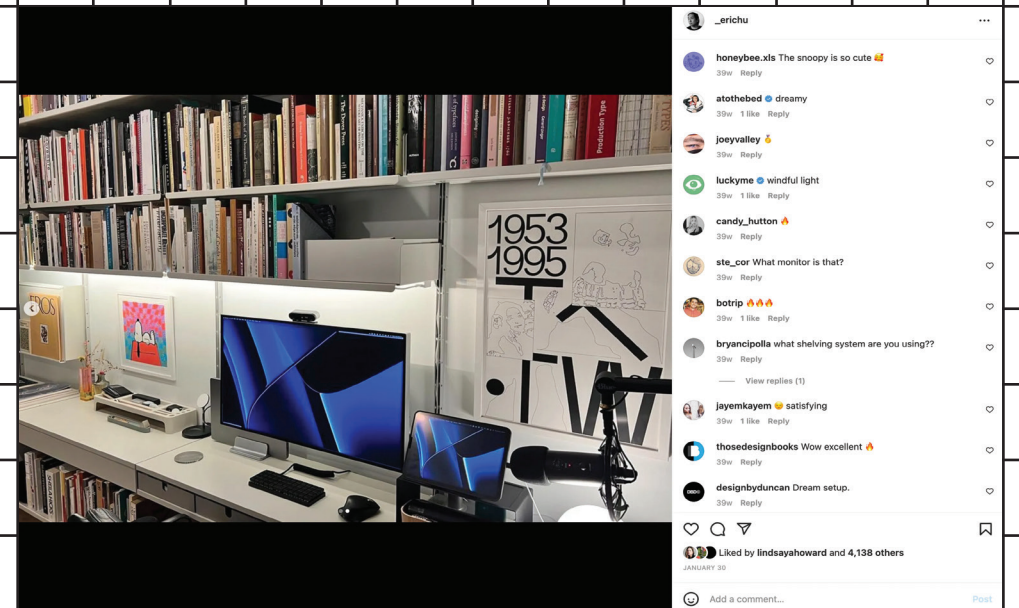
“It makes me so upset that my most popular post is a picture of my workspace.”

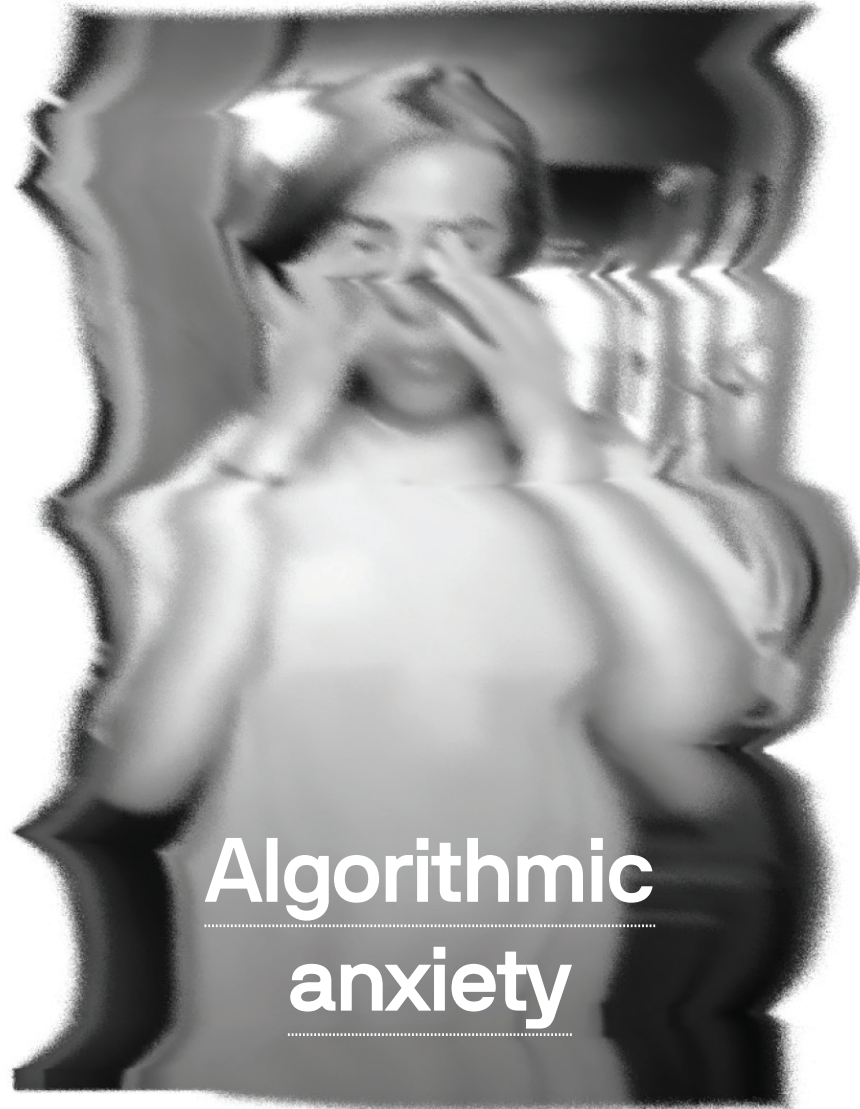
– Eric Hu

❤️ 4,139

“People care about the idea of a designer [as] an aspirational role, rather than the work itself.”

– Eric Hu, art director and designer based in New York





## Algorithmic anxiety

The feeling of uncertainty about how platform algorithms work, creating an unsettling lack of control.

“Now it seems like people are being instrumentalized by the algorithm itself. If you look at TikTok, your body is literally animated by the algorithm. It tells you how to move yourself and you end up dancing for this abstract formulation of capital and algorithmic recommendation.”

– Joshua Citarella

# Interview: Kyle Chayka

Kyle Chayka is a cofounder of Dirt, a newsletter on digital pop culture, and a contributing writer for The New Yorker covering technology and culture on the Internet.

**What is algorithmic anxiety?**

To me, algorithmic anxiety is the mismatch between how an algorithm perceives us and our desires and what we actually want. The anxiety crops up whenever an algorithmic feed, search, or recommendation doesn't give you what you want or what you expect, or gives you something that is totally the opposite of what you want or expect. It's surprising to us because we have this perception that algorithms are designed to give us exactly what we like, or more of what we've already engaged with.

**What are some examples of algorithmic anxiety you've learned about?**

There's a lot of anxiety when people don't know what's going on or can't understand how an algorithm is working or when it's influencing them. They may also feel a loss of control in their consumption habits. One woman described to me seeing fashion trends on TikTok, and then feeling kind of irresistibly pulled into participating in them. It's like being bombarded by advertising, but it's not actually advertising. It's the algorithmic popularity of a particular thing. So people can feel a loss of control in their own taste and cultural design. And then, when you're a creator, the algorithmic promotion often pushes your work to an audience that doesn't necessarily understand it, or doesn't exist in the same context that you do. And so you may get harassment or bad comments on your Instagram posts. It inspires some amount of fear or anxiety of reaching the wrong audience and then getting harassed for it.



“Let us show you what you want.  
Don’t make any choices.”

Sometimes people now  
make art or songs  
to fit algorithmic  
recommendations.

It’s like SEO or clickbait culture, where  
content is designed to get promoted by  
algorithmic recommendations. That exists in  
Spotify, YouTube, TikTok, and nearly every  
platform. On Instagram you see a kind of  
homogenous direct-to-consumer aesthetic as  
well, where products are optimized for the  
platform in order to get as much engagement  
as possible.

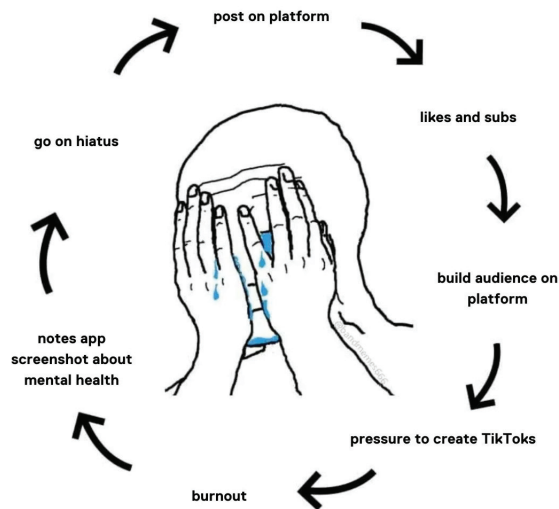
What’s next?

We are hopefully moving into not a post-  
algorithmic era, but an algorithmic era with  
more options for users. Right now, there’s  
a big movement towards social media that’s  
not algorithmic, like a Discord chat, a  
Reddit forum, or something like Bandcamp  
selling music directly to consumers. But I  
also see some desire for more transparent  
algorithmic recommendations, where the user  
has more agency over how they work, like  
being able to tune your Twitter or Facebook  
feed or switch between different kinds of  
algorithms. I think that’d be great for  
users. I don’t know if it’d be amazing for a  
company’s businesses, but I think it would  
solve that anxiety that people feel if they  
could just toggle a switch and modulate how  
the recommendations are working. But right  
now, it feels like products are moving toward  
less control – TikTok is one example of that.  
Its relationship to users is: Let us show you  
what you want. Don’t make any choices.

SOME PEOPLE  
PRAY TO GODS.  
I PRAY TO THE  
ALGORITHM.

ANONYMOUS RESPONSE TO OUR QUESTIONNAIRE





# Just post more

w/ Severin Matussek

Severin Matussek is a researcher and strategist based in Berlin.

Every day you wake up and need to come up with new ideas, interact with your audience and post regularly – all while dealing with trolls, hate speech, declining followers, or mundane life admin such as taxes, social isolation during a pandemic, global recession, the planetary crisis, or possible nuclear war. But hey, those could all be used for content right? Stay relevant. But now that you’ve figured out what to post, when to post it, and how often to post it, the algorithm changes again. Back to the drawing board. And then you need to make a living on top of it.

When you work twelve hours a day and still can’t pay the bills, you might start to get frustrated. It’s hard to survive inside the content-creator machinery. On average, 2% of creators on platforms make 90% of the money. The rest keep on trying. With 30% of kids nowadays wanting to become YouTubers(1), the supply of content creators is seemingly endless – yet only few are going to make it. According to a 2022 WeTransfer study of 6500 creative professionals, 75% of them experienced burnout last year (2).

“Recently, I’ve felt like I’m walking a tightrope. How do I balance creating art, distributing that art, and building meaningful communities while ideating, building and deploying new products and experiences, while consulting for companies, optimizing myself for the algorithm, keeping my chops in touring shape, remembering to hydrate, and avoid collapse from burnout?”

– Verité, musician

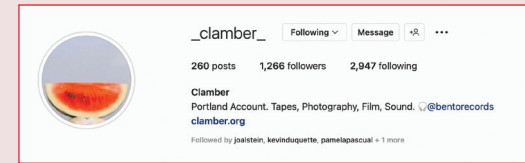
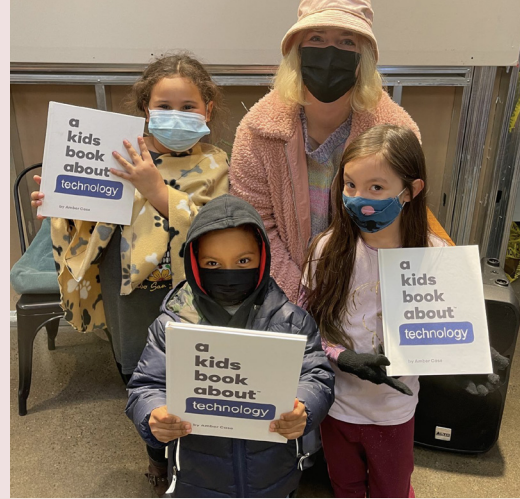
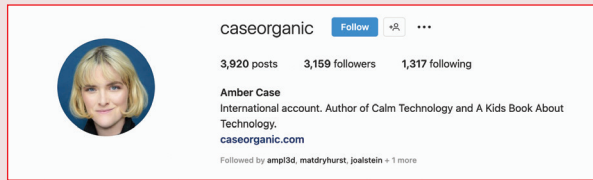


This pandemic of creator burnout might come as no surprise to you. There are numerous studies, articles and reports about burnout, but few offer sustainable solutions. According to one “Creator Burnout Report”, the solution to burnout is to take more days off, find support groups, or get a mental health coach (3). Adobe even suggests posting more when you’re feeling low. According to its “Future of Creativity Study”(4) from August 2022, “creators who post most frequently and spend the most time creating social content are also the most positive” and “creating social content on the daily drives just as much happiness as making money.”

Asking big tech for solutions to burnout is like asking the sugar industry to make us less fat. Too much is at stake for platforms, brands, and the ecosystem of companies and investors that profit off the content-creator-machinery.

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1) According to a 2019 survey by The LEGO Group and The Harris Poll, today’s children are three times more likely to aspire to be a YouTuber (29%) than an astronaut (11%) (PR Newswire)  
 2) WeTransfer Ideas Report 2022  
 3) The Creator Burnout Report, Vibely X Ian Borthwick  
 4) The Future of Creativity Study, Adobe X Edelman Data & Intelligence



**I'm a creator, and I've experimented with different types of accounts online.**

The primary account I've created is @caseorganic. It's mostly a blogging and Twitter person that I designed to be famous – an author of technology books that could handle fame in an elegant way. This persona is simultaneously a little formal. I leave a lot of my real self out of it. Originally, you wouldn't see this persona ever talk about drugs or have an alcoholic drink in my hand.

When I tried to express other parts of my identity, like my interest in music or photography, it was met with some resistance. I heard from followers that I was not focusing strongly enough on my official work associated with this account. That concerned me, because it meant that people thought that this identity was an entire human being, when in reality it was designed to be only 5% of my identity, if anything. I felt really confined in this persona, and I wanted to find more avenues to express myself more authentically, without the smooth edges that I had confined myself to in this persona.

My dad was a brilliant, if often financially misguided, inventor and audio engineer. When he died, I finally found the @caseorganic persona far too confining, and I created Clamber.

@caseorganic was all about being my professional identity. With @\_clamber\_, I felt I could play with photography, film, and music.

I was never making music for anybody else. I was making music for myself. I wanted to play to five people in a room that got it. But increasingly, the Instagram algorithm affected me, and I felt like I should be making professional studio photographs or something more formal. The formal identity started to affect my work, and the work went from draft-like and playful, to something that was much more uptight. Eventually, I noticed I was spending hours and hours on Instagram. Then I wasn't even posting anymore, I was just consuming. It was hard for me to make anything because of the high standards I set for myself based on consuming other people's work.

I'm a creator.  
I have two accounts online.

### w/ Amber Case

Amber Case is an author, researcher, and artist.



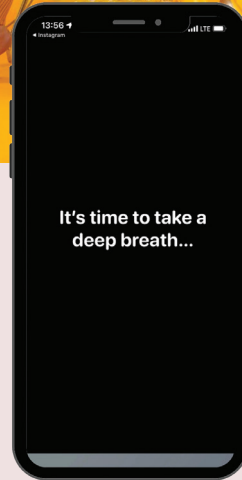


I found myself really influenced by what Instagram presented to me on my feed, and I felt like I needed help. I talked to one of my friends who thinks about things like cybernetics, addiction, and the reasons behind why these feedback loops affect creative people so much.

I found the stats on how much I was looking at my phone. It was nearly eight hours a day.

I said, "I'm extremely addicted. What can I do?" He set up an app called One Sec for me that takes over your screen when you try to open specific apps. It tells you to take a deep breath before slowly uncovering the option to leave Instagram or a button that says "I really want to look at it!" It also tells you how many times you've tried to open the app in the last 24 hours. At first, I noticed I was trying to open the app every hour. It was almost an automatic behavior. Second, I noticed that I didn't really want to open the app when I clicked it, and having those 10 seconds to consider my actions and breathe was just enough to make me click out of it once I realized what I was doing.

Today, I'm trying to do what I set out to do with this creative account – post whatever I want – and work on music behind the scenes as well. Managing an account feels more like a chore than it does a fun time, but I've noticed with this new app, I've gone from trying to click open Instagram once every hour, to six times every 24 hours, and my screen time has gone down to



about 3 to 4 hours a day. It's only been a month! I'm glad to be able to think about things this way, but not everybody has a smart friend with a metacognitive ability around these loops. I think a lot of us are addicted to these things but even being able to understand how to get out of them is tough.

It seems like being a creative person is even harder than before.

Right now I'm trying to bring way more fun to the Caseorganic person in the process, and how I experience life in general. I'm just trying to be myself.

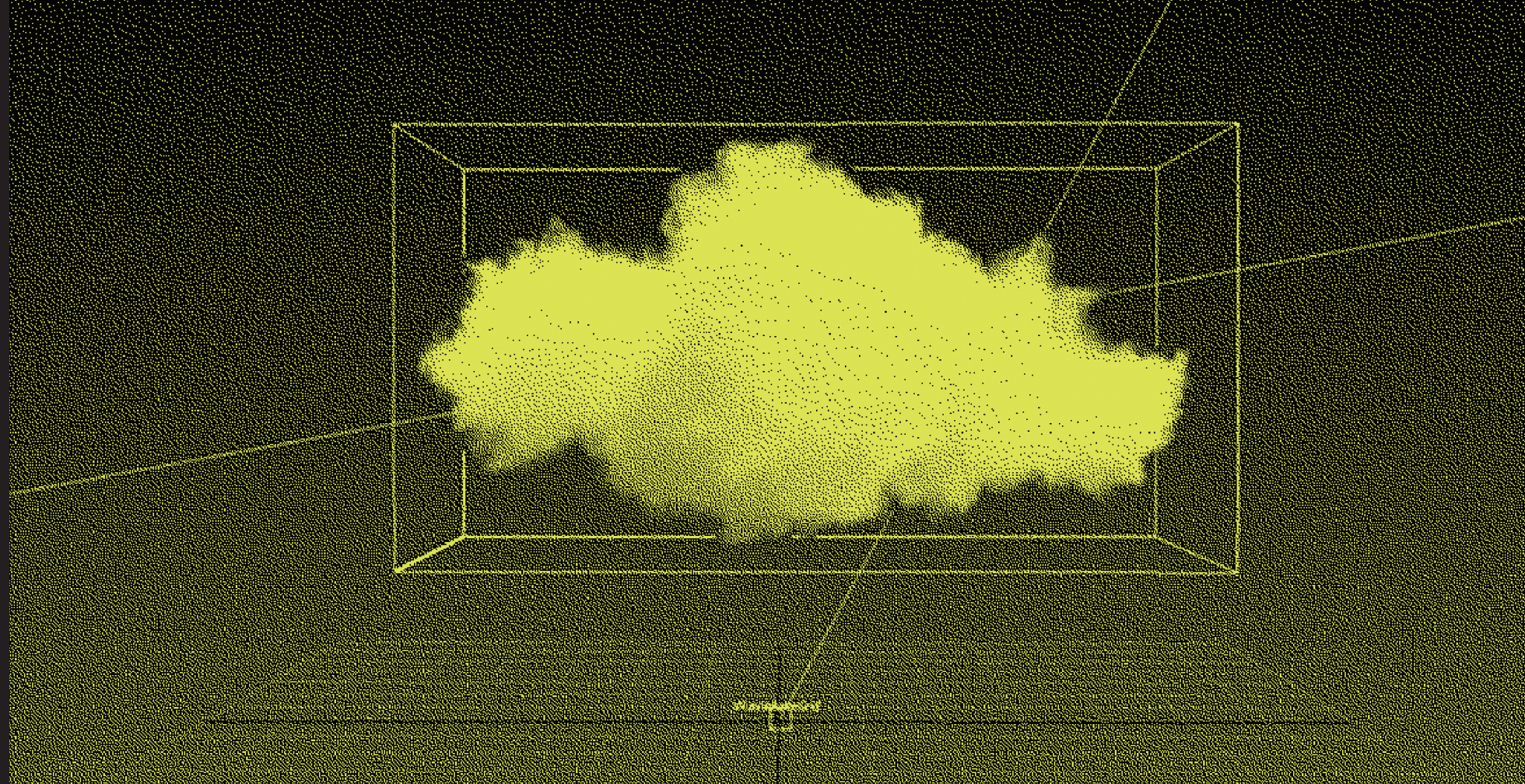
"I think the average creator's relationship with platforms is BDSM. One without good boundaries. The creator is always in a subspace and no one's ever coming to comfort them."

– Amber Case



Artwork @houseof\_dame





# Collective voices for content creators

**w/ Gabriella Garcia**

Gabriella Garcia is a writer, performer, and poetic technologist. She is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at NYU's Interactive Telecommunication Program (ITP), where her research focuses on the protection of radical self-expression, networked subcultures, and cybernetic intimacy.



“There is a trend, going back hundreds of years, of sex workers or people in erotic labor being the reason for different technologies to be developed and financed, only to have no say in them.”

**What is Decoding Stigma?**

We are a collective that calls for the inclusion of sex worker voices in all spaces that purport to be designing the future. We coalesced as a group in 2020, when everyone was very isolated. We would come together and discuss the issues at hand, and a lot of cool collaborations came out of it. We’ve been able to host a lot of panels, develop research partnerships, and are currently working on our first platform, which brings a cohort of individuals together coming from either lived experience in sex work, or adjacent to sex work as accomplices in the movement. Then, we use grant money to support discussions and imagine what a research and design lab could look like if it were completely populated by such a community. We’re aiming to create a memory space at the intersection of sex work and technology and understand how people have been negatively impacted by surveillance models and policies, and also how people have subverted technology. We really want to use this collective space as a gathering point for the community to come and produce artifacts and put people in conversation with each other.

**Do you view sex work and the creation of adult content as part of the larger online gig work industry?**

Yes, 100%. Recently, I was reading a study about the gig economy and it completely omitted sex work as part of that. Sex work should be included in more of those conversations.

**Why is creating a collective voice within our online infrastructure important?**

People need to have the ability to finance themselves. Giving people the ability to earn money online can be the most effective way to get people out of violent situations. So much of technology has been motivated by the pursuit of erotic labor, all the way from the first photographs. There is a trend, going back hundreds of years, of sex workers or people in erotic labor being the reason for different technologies to be developed and financed, only to have no say in them.



**Do you see this as like a larger trend of labor consciousness within this community?**

The term sex work itself was created to make it a labor issue. So that is inherent in the idea. The movement to decriminalize sex work really is a solidarity movement that is just allowing sex workers to pursue the same labor rights, disability rights, and just, you know, health care rights as anybody else who’s just trying to survive in an extractive capitalist society.

**Adult content creators aren’t often mentioned in conversations about the creator economy or the gig economy.**

Erotic labor will infiltrate any system that is devised by a market. That’s just part of the shapeshifting way of surviving. It gets often segmented out because of moral policing. It’s easier to police people based on their behavior. You can’t have an app in the App Store if it promotes adult content. OnlyFans wanted to go public, but you can’t go public if you support adult content either. So a lot of it really comes down to more just financial extraction and how people can profit by excluding our community.

# POWER



- Who owns it?
- Who benefits?
- Who makes decisions?
- Who makes policy?
- Who gets deplatformed?
- Who is it for?
- Who captures value?
- Which features are built?
- Who gets access?

## **Ownership is a proxy for financial power and decision making power.**

Creating a more equitable power dynamic for the creator economy will require creator ownership of online infrastructure. Currently, creators generate value for the suite of platforms and tools they rely on, but are excluded from any ownership of them.

### **Could it be any different?**

A fairer creator economy requires the distribution of financial power and governance power among its users and workers.

### **Collective ownership**

Expanding ownership across our online creative ecosystem will have many experimental forms of expression: blockchain-enabled forms of programmatic, token-based ownership, as well as established forms of cooperatives, partnerships, employee stock ownership plans, steward ownership and trusts.

## **Collective control**

Post-individual organizations require updated social contracts and rules of participation, including new expressions of collective participation, governance, and community stewardship and accountability.

### **Shared values**

A shared vocabulary of values, including co-ownership, co-governance, co-creation, and democratic work practices, is key to expanding power across the online creative ecosystem. This relies on expanding the cultural understanding of these concepts, and imbuing them with ambitious and robust meanings.

## **solidarity economy**

A wide range of businesses and organizational models that form to meet communal needs. This includes cooperatives, community currencies, community land trusts, credit unions, and other DIY forms of community-led self sufficiency. Solidarity economics prioritize collective wellbeing rather than financial return or growth.





# Creator solidarity

w/ Nati Linares

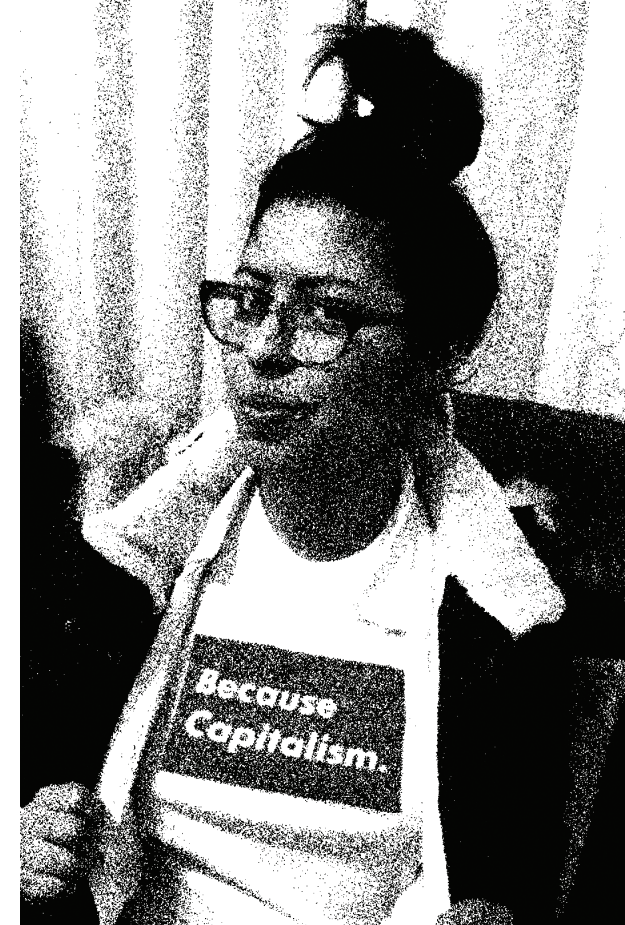
Nati Linares is an organizer and researcher of arts solidarity movements. She is the cofounder of Art.coop and coauthor of its Solidarity Not Charity report.

“What would it look like if Patreon was not just a creator economy platform, but existed for collective mobilization? A resource hub for artist, social, and cultural movements?”

**What is the difference between the creator economy and the solidarity economy?**

My gut feeling is that the creator economy is different because it focuses on the individual. It’s about what individuals can create and sell. Before I started working at Patreon in 2014, early 2015, I had been a member of an arts collective and venue in Sacramento called Sol Collective that was inspired by migrant organizing and Black Power movements in Northern California – as well as the Zapatistas, a revolutionary movement in Southern Mexico whose primary work focuses on building a local and regional economy based on collective effort and the well-being of the community, rather than competition and profit.

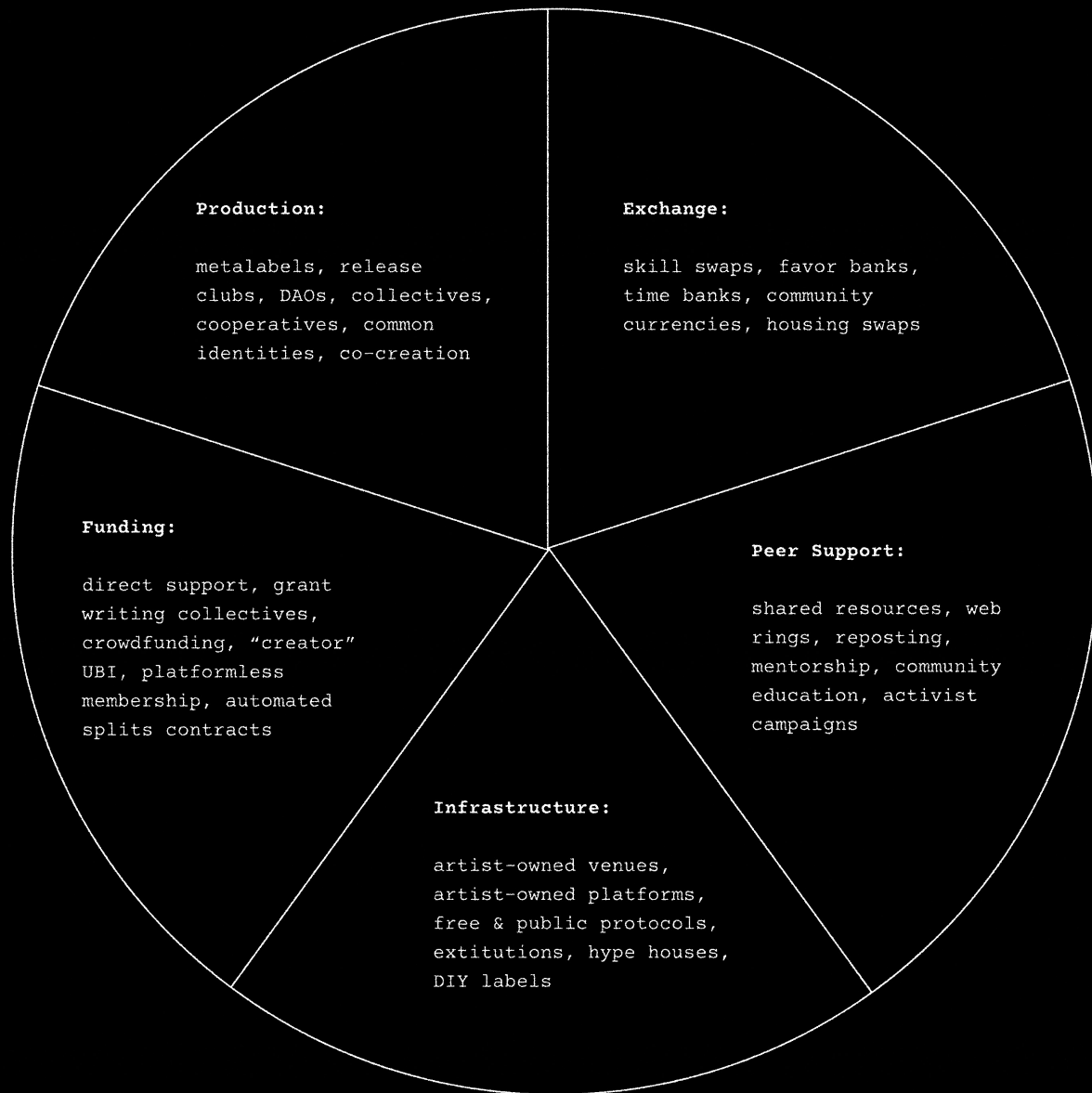
During that time, after the uprisings in Ferguson, MO, I thought Patreon could be a very useful tool for emerging social movements to raise resources. I had imagined it being a platform for efforts like tenant organizers, Black liberation movements and other liberatory



projects to raise money from newly activated people. Then, I got a reality check that they weren’t trying to use that platform for any kind of collective movement.

It really was about getting as much money as possible for individual creators through using their platform and singling out the stars who were the best at raising the most money for their particular creation – a re-creation of the “winners-take-all” system we see in the culture industry.

# What could a solidarity economy for creators look like?



## Is the language of the solidarity economy co-opted by platforms?

They use the language of the "creator," which markets a sort of collective identity to feel in solidarity with other creators on the platform. But to me, I feel that the creator economy focuses on an individualistic orientation to creating as opposed to this larger, collective project that has ancestors and a legacy. Instead, it's like, I'm a creator, and I've got to survive right now and we're all in this survival thing together – but it's still a competition over who can woo the most patrons. It's not about challenging any kind of system as a whole and building that from the bottom up.

## What should creators ask of the platforms they use?

I think transparency, ownership (in the sense of stewardship rather than having domination over), and control (in the sense of who is making decisions). We should ask to collectively own our own platforms and have clear mechanisms, resources and the practice to make that a reality.

It's also a question of what creators can give. When we're talking about prefiguring new platforms – alternatives to Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, or Patreon – it will take a lot of work. There will be a lot of failures. And that's okay because it's a David and Goliath struggle out there. So, participation and perseverance is what these new platforms ask of creators, too.

"The idea is that all of these initiatives – mutual aid networks, housing and worker co-ops, participatory budgeting processes, public banks, and time banks support one another to form a base of political power because they have this in common: community ownership and democratic governance for political, cultural, and economic power."

– [art.coop](#) report

The art.coop report, co-authored by Nati Linares, argues that artists and cultural laborers have historically led systems change.

## Organizations co-founded by artists and culture bearers:

- The oldest native cooperative (Qualla Arts & Crafts)
- The first democratically managed investment fund (Boston Ujima Project)
- The oldest non-extractive venture capital firm (The Working World)
- An organization that gives 30,000 freelancers benefits and pensions (Smart.coop)

# CHANGES IN OWNERSHIP

BANDCAMP .....→ EPIC GAMES  
TWITCH .....→ AMAZON  
INSTAGRAM .....→ FACEBOOK  
TWITTER .....→ ELON MUSK  
MYSPACE .....→ RUPERT MURDOCH  
YOUTUBE .....→ GOOGLE  
ANCHOR .....→ SPOTIFY  
TUMBLR .....→ YAHOO!

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# Semantics

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Building an improved online ecosystem requires the articulation of shared, aspirational values.

In order to communicate these values, we rely on a shared understanding of the meaning of words. What is community “ownership?” How can organizations be “democratic?”

There’s a risk in the misuse or obfuscation of language, which can turn virtuous ideas into cynical marketing campaigns. Products may be “green-washed” into appearing more sustainable. Online platforms may be “community-washed” or engaging in “solidarity theater.”

Meaningful collective “ownership” and “democracy” can be enabled only through a robust shared understanding of what these words mean.

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# Platform semantics

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**w/ Trebor Scholz**

Trebor Scholz is a scholar-activist and Associate Professor for Culture & Media at The New School in New York City.





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## Sharing economy

Companies like Uber, and particularly Uber, use the emotional language of sharing, and even love, to speak to people. Sociologist Eva Illouz writes about the idea of “emotional capitalism” and how the language of the “sharing economy” makes you feel like a lover is talking to you on the pillow at night. The emotional language distracts you from what is really happening: selling a commercial service through a platform.

The gig economy is morphing into a hazardous fantasy, and the satire of *Silicon Valley* is frighteningly accurate TV. At this point in time, few people still believe the exploitative platform economy’s sharing theater and its deceptive “peer” rhetoric. Sharing economy monopolies present their company as a #woke buddy, with CEOs offering a “we are all connected” voiceover and finishing with cryptic references to environmental sustainability.

But language is not solely obfuscated in the sharing economy. In German, an employer is called an “Arbeitgeber” which is somebody who “gives you work.” Whereas, the worker is called the “Arbeitnehmer,” or one who is “taking the work.” This flips reality on its head.

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## Solidarity theater

“Solidarity theater” fits well with the Shangri La dialogue of the “sharing” or “on-demand” economy. It’s using the emotional language of collective organizing to sell products. It’s like a “theater of democracy.” Through an obfuscation of language like “sharing,” these companies try to recuse themselves from the very real consequences of human suffering caused by their algorithms and protocols. The surface progressivism of Silicon Valley serves as an alibi to consolidate platform power.

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## Community ownership

Is “community ownership” a form of smoke and mirrors comparable to the “sharing economy?” Maybe it’s not quite as ideologically dishonest. When it comes to the idea of “community ownership,” it’s important to first understand what is meant by “community,” a term that can be interpreted in countless ways. And while some may argue that Web3 is all about “community ownership,” it’s still unclear what that would actually entail.

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## Community-washing

Individuals may adopt “community” jargon to appear community- or solidarity-economy-minded, or to imply that they care about cooperative principles, when in reality they are trying to market their commercial digital platform. If they are genuine, their professed beliefs and aspirations must be structurally ingrained in their business. Typically, the litmus test for genuine commitment is the prevention of a traditional exit, such as an acquisition or IPO.

Community-minded language should not be the icing on your website’s cake; cooperative principles should be the lubricant of your business. The important thing is that the community has a say in how the asset is managed and used. This allows for greater transparency and accountability than traditional ownership models. When done correctly, community ownership can be a powerful tool for promoting economic democracy.

James Muldoon talks about community-washing as the corporate marketing strategy of framing the activities of the company in the language of community empowerment and fulfilling a social mission. The aim is to drown out questions about substantial user fees, tax avoidance, venture capital funding, and the company’s litigious history with stories of interesting hosts and travel experiences. Community-washing allows companies to present themselves as upstanding members of the community, even when their actions suggest otherwise. This type of marketing is particularly prevalent in the sharing economy, where companies often rely on users’ goodwill to provide services.

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## Creator economy

What if artists and designers word organize into worker-led, self-organized, and self-managed organizations – organizations that are small and local, but networked internationally using shared digital infrastructure?



@kabosuoroshi

# What is democracy?

**w/ Nathan Schneider**

Nathan Schneider is an Assistant Professor of Media Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder, where he leads the Media Enterprise Design Lab.

“Words are the tools of my trade as a writer, so I like to have a handle on what they mean. We rely on them so much. They connect us to each other; they remind us what we’re capable of. And I hope that the Internet can help us make our definitions of democracy more ambitious, rather than redefining it out of existence.”

– Nathan Schneider, "Ours to Hack and to Own"

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## How do you define "democracy?"

I draw how I think about democracy from someone who's not my favorite philosopher, but who I think got this one right: Jacques Derrida. He talked about "democracy-to-come," as if it's all one word. The idea is that democracy is not a thing you have, it's a thing you aspire toward. It's not a set of institutions. It's a sense that we are moving in the right direction of shared governance and self governance. In the "creator economy," the "sharing economy," or any of these other "\_\_\_\_" economy memes, the language of democratization has been used in ways that move us in the wrong direction. They are the wrong kinds of movements. Everyone gets to access more, but they don't actually get more control. They don't get the opportunity to self-govern, and they don't get to deepen that possibility. But I think at the moment, we're in another danger, which is overly identifying democracy with a particular set of 300-year-old institutions that aren't really working.

## How has the term "democracy" or "democratization" been misused in tech?

One is the idea that "democracy" means "access," which goes back to the *Whole Earth Catalog* of the 1970s, whose tagline was "access to tools." When somebody builds a new app, it's essentially the same consumer logic, that you have access to new tools. We've "democratized" access to photo sharing tools through Instagram, running your own taxi company with Uber, or running your own newspaper with Substack. Of course, the ownership and control in each of those platforms gets consolidated and further removed from the person contributing work. Access to tools becomes a substitute for having control over your relationship to those tools and the economies surrounding them.

Then you see Elon Musk taking over Twitter and placing it under centralized control, claiming he's doing it for our civil society. This is the same guy who says we'll have direct democracy on Mars, but won't let his workers organize in Tesla factories. This is an example of someone who is in love with this illusion of democracy, but clearly hates the actual practice of it — or is at least structurally disinclined to adopt it.

## What will a more democratic online economy look like?

We always need to be asking ourselves: What are our collective needs? What are the things that allow us to be more fully ourselves, and allow us to be creative in the ways we need to be creative? Do we have an effective voice in the meeting of those needs? Unfortunately, I think we've ceded a lot of that thinking and imagining to tech platforms that primarily want to reduce our power.

Creators should ask: *Where's the value going? Where's the platform pushing its value?* Where is it designed to push its value? Instead of consolidating value and power, a democratic creator economy is one that distributes and strengthens effective voice across all of a network's nodes.

### affective voice

Expressing your feelings, being able to speak, and maybe even be heard.

### effective voice

Being able to use mechanisms of power, even if you have a very small fraction of that power to actually enact change.



# MEMORY



How can we create a long lasting and contextual archive of or cultural works online?

Today, much of our contemporary shared cultural, informational, and knowledge bases live online. We rely on proprietary corporate software, depreciating hardware, and corporate databases to steward cultural work and information. Information is increasingly digital-first, without an analog counterpart.

We are learning that content posted to any contemporary creator economy platform will have a life, and eventually, an uncertain death.

For example, in 2019, every song or piece of content ever posted to Myspace was permanently deleted. None of it is recoverable. How can the anthropological value of twelve years of music be calculated?

## Interoperable content and audiences

Creative content, audiences, and data is locked within corporate platform databases. Creative work needs to be free from platform lock-in and able to be interoperably moved from one platform to another.

Online creative works have an inherent platform risk. We rely on platforms to be good faith stewards of our cultural and personal data. But what happens when platforms atrophy, decay, or die?

There is increasing worry that this platform and archive precarity may inadvertently lead us to a "Digital Dark Age."

Could it be any different?

A better alternative to our current creator economy will be built on infrastructure that frees artists, writers, and musicians from platform lock-in and allows them to permanently catalog and archive their work.

## Resilient archiving

When a platform dies, works should continue to be archived at the protocol level. We are beginning to see some encouraging explorations around platform-agnostic storage, from Arweave to IPFS (Interplanetary File Storage).

# PLATFORM

# MEMORIAM

2009

Geocities closes, taking with it thousands of home pages and decades of data.

2016

Twitter announces the closure of Vine leaving many creators searching for a new home.

2017

Spotify eliminates its messaging feature. Users lose messages and recommendations they have sent on the platform.

2019

MySpace loses all content uploaded before 2016 due to a server failure.

2022

Pantone requires a \$15/ month subscription in order for users to continue using its color tones in Adobe software design files.

2015

Last.fm redesigns their page eliminating certain features that users used to track their concert history.

2016

Cloud storage site Bitcasa kills its B2C service giving users 30 days to clear out their files.

2019

Flickr announces new pro pricing plan. Accounts with more than 1000 images that did not upgrade had their images deleted.

2021

Adobe blocks flash content from running in flash player making years of independent games obsolete.



# Creators who have quit

## Miss YanYi

In 2016, content creator Miss YanYi quit her \$80,000/ year corporate job to become a full-time YouTuber focused on beauty, fashion, and lifestyle content. After four years of vlogging, however, she declared it a failure. While she felt passionate about her work, YanYi became increasingly dissatisfied with YouTube's algorithm.

No matter how much content she posted, her channel could never increase its views or subscribers. The lack of growth impacted both her esteem and income, spurring her to scale back on vlogging and return to her corporate career.

“I went from making like \$5,000 a month on YouTube to literally making peanuts at this point.”

“After being absolutely horrible to my family all for the sake of capturing the ‘perfect’ content for Instagram, I realized [that I was] the Erin I did NOT want to be. And I made a change in trajectory and in the way I approached IG [...] Less documenting, more just doing. Instead of constant content creating, just more simple living. Just being plain ol’ us.”

## Erin Kern

Erin Kern took up content creation while raising her children, documenting her motherhood journey on her blog and social media. It wasn't long before she accrued over half a million followers on Instagram, but the pressure to always be productive and always be online inevitably took a toll on her family life. Kern is no longer active on Instagram, though her page is still up. Her last post was in December 2021.

“There is no healthy way to use social media, anymore. That is my opinion and I know that may make some people upset to read. When something is designed to be addictive, it doesn't exclude anyone from its wrath.”

## Lynzy Coughlin

For over a decade, Lynzy Coughlin has found success as a lifestyle blogger, fashion curator, and wellness podcaster. In the time that she was active on Instagram, she amassed nearly 500,000 followers. However, like many other influencers who quit social media during the pandemic, Coughlin realized that it was damaging her mental health and there was no way to remedy it. She deleted her Instagram in November 2021. An IG logo remains at the bottom of her website, though it directs to a broken link.



In 2019, a failed server migration at MySpace permanently deleted all music, uploaded to the site between 2003 and 2015. A collection of 53 million songs was lost, with many of those songs only existing on the platform.

During the period 2006-09 and driven by a desire to reach the top of the charts of MP3 blog aggregator The Hype Machine, many blogs released regular music from bedroom producers across the world. This period has been named by some as the “blog house” era. As time went on, many of these platforms have disappeared from the internet along with the music they released.

In 2019, the Red Bull Music Academy came to an end as Red Bull took the decision to reduce its marketing spend in music and culture. Amongst the content it had produced were 20 years of lectures, music journalism, and radio shows. Since 2019 some of this content has already disappeared from the Internet and its continuing availability relies on Red Bull continuing to keep it online.

“My content grievance is difficult to describe. After all, it’s a new human condition. And while the loss could be trivialized to a list of videos, it feels so much more than that. The death of my playlist feels like losing progress, or something cherished, but also feels as if I lost a piece of myself.”

- Matt Klein

Collective Zine is a music forum and review platform covering DIY music in its various forms. For many years it provided an active space for artists and music fans alike to organize tours, release music, and share recommendations. In the late 2010s the original forum was lost due to a server error and whilst it has recently re-launched as a Discord channel, the communication, conversation, and connections from the original forum have all been lost.

In 2021, writer and strategist Matt Klein awoke to find the YouTube playlist he had meticulously created for the last 14 years had been deleted from the platform. The playlist was a carefully curated time capsule of everything he had connected with on the platform over the years. It was removed without any forewarning due to a supposed content violation that is still unclear to this day.

In 2017 Spotify made the decision to “depreciate” the Inbox/Messaging feature based on data analysis that said not so many people were using it. Users lost the music conversations they’d made with friends and the recommendations they had sent each other.





**w/ Mat Dryhurst**

Mat Dryhurst is a Berlin-based artist and researcher and cohost of the Interdependence podcast.

# Platform risk



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## What is platform risk?

Platform risk, as far as I understand it, is the basic idea that communities and companies are built on top of dependencies. There are technical dependencies, where an application may rely on several software libraries to work. There are also dependencies when an artist dedicates years of their life to a particular platform. For instance, an artist may become dependent on SoundCloud keeping certain features. Platform risk is really the risk inherent to being overly dependent on one platform or another. If somebody had dedicated all their time to building a MySpace following and developing an audience there, the inherent platform risk is clear when that platform disappears, and all that audience goes with it. You could also say that the tragedy of MySpace accidentally deleting all that content, that archiving on a service that you don't have any control of, is a platform risk.

One of the things that's appealing about decentralized or node-based protocols and networks is the idea that you might minimize platform risk. For example, let's say your content is hosted in a decentralized manner. Let's say your transactions and your collector base and your audience is something that's registered on-chain. In a sense, you're distributing the platform risk wider by saying it's far less likely that the Ethereum network is going to go down than a platform like SoundCloud. I don't mean to pick on SoundCloud, but I would suggest that they are an example of a centralized entity that a lot of people put a lot of time into, and it's not guaranteed that that history will be preserved, or that the service will continue to play a role in culture.

There's been a tendency within the platform world to flatten our culture under one economic model.

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## What kind of solutions do you see on the horizon?

There's a tendency within the platform world to flatten our culture under one economic model. In order to do that, you would try and value music, as an example, based on the number of times it was played. I'd argue those models don't work for many people, because many of the most important musical projects to me would not be able to sustain an economy based on the number of times someone streamed it. That model fundamentally only works for more populist approaches.

The great hope with some of these newer approaches is not that people lose their sense of ambition in terms of wanting to grow prominence in the world or promote what they're doing, or be niche for niche's sake, but instead giving artists, communities, or scenes the tools to be able to tailor their own economies and determine their own economic logics for what best suits their context. Only then do you actually start to understand the possibilities of what a true diverse kind of creative economy could look like. I still think we're kind of on track to see more of that, with many examples of people tinkering with bespoke economies. I think that habit is here to stay, but I think we're still early on that front.



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# Death of a virtual influencer



**w/ Ziv Schneider**

Ziv Schneider is a New York based artist, creative technologist, and creator of @myfriendsylvia, a rapidly aging virtual influencer who passed away in November 2020.



### Why create a virtual influencer that dies?

First of all, the question was “why not?” The project initially started with the idea of challenging the design convention that virtual beings are designed young by default. This notion that when given an option, the ideal human is always 18 – 25 years old when our lifespan includes so many more stages. I wanted to see if we could use virtual influencers to connect to more vulnerable parts of the human experience – like aging, struggle, and loss.

In the concept development stages I realized that the element of change is an interesting one to explore with a virtual influencer. It’s not something we’re used to seeing with virtual characters. They usually remain pretty flat and unchanging. I thought, what if we could start her off at a young age like the others but then see how people respond when she ages in front of them? From that point, one thing led to another: deciding to change Sylvia’s age rapidly led to her inevitable death, and that led to the idea of a funeral/celebration of life as part of the IDFA DocLab festival events.

### What kind of commentary is the Sylvia project making about the “creator/ influencer economy?”

Instagram can be a very competitive environment that also blurs the boundaries between our so-called “personal” and “professional” personas. There is a suite of tools to enhance your personal brand’s performance on platforms like Instagram, from post-writing templates to paying someone that engages with potential audiences through your account. Sylvia used those tools and worked hard to blend in and succeed in the world of influencers on Instagram. Part of the project’s innovation was in taking the automation further, as parts of Sylvia’s writing were generated by ML and trained on the writing of influential Instagram accounts.

Virtual or not, it takes a lot of labor to make a successful virtual persona, and there is something sweet and sad about wanting to replace humans with virtual influencers. The idea of having an army of 3D artists power this being that’s supposedly immune to everything us humans are vulnerable to, like wrinkles or just bad days.

“The performance of living and dying as Sylvia had an unexpected therapeutic effect for me. I recommend living and dying as a virtual human to anyone, it is a great exercise in death acceptance and fulfills that fantasy many people have of being present at their own funeral.”



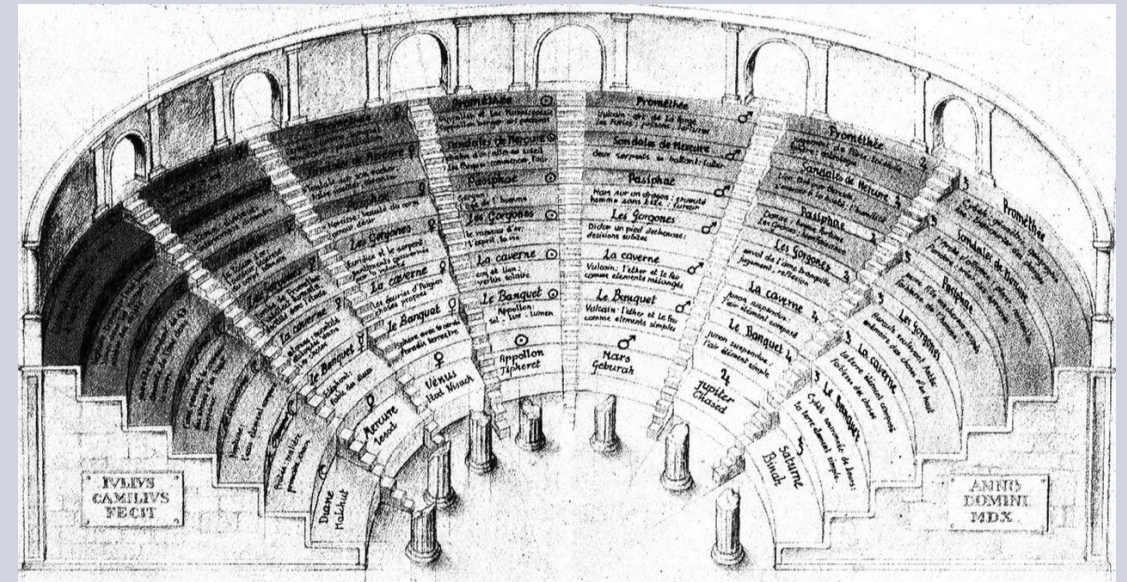
There’s also that fear I think many of us carry in this economy that is much more fluid and unstable than in previous generations of being aged out of our careers, becoming irrelevant, and falling behind technologically. I wanted to touch on this with Sylvia, to use her as a way to open up about these fears and imagine what aging as a virtual being could look like. While Sylvia had a somewhat critical stance towards the virtual influencer world and its inherent agism, the project tried to propose a different design approach while also being completely immersed and playing by (some of the) rules in the world that it wishes to critique.

### What was the most amusing thing that happened in Sylvia’s life and death?

Sylvia’s DMs were wilder than I anticipated. Since I was the one operating them, I felt like something between a catfish and a responsible adult worried for the well-being of troubled youth messaging an aging “robot” who they developed warm feelings towards.

I continue to receive Sylvia’s messages and emails, and she is still getting offers for collaborations despite there being no new activity on the account and the last post being a death announcement. I keep imagining Sylvia considering coming back from the dead for a collaboration with some random swimwear brand on Instagram, then deciding it’s not big enough.

# Mediums of memory



w/ Kei Kreutler

Kei Kreutler is an artist-researcher  
and cofounder of Gnosis Guild.

# MEMORIES

**You recently gave a presentation at FWB Fest titled "Mediums of Memory." How would you describe this exploration?**

It's a broader research topic I'm interested in, how we think about archival forms societally. It's mediums of memory. Public forms of remembering. My presentation at FWB Fest was specifically thinking about how we conceptualize memory in the context of institutions that have large online presences. Whether that is on-chain or off-chain matters less than the extent to which those institutions produce different forms of knowledge that persist over time, across culture, or across generations. My presentation was trying to think through how we start thinking about the memory legacy and knowledge forms that organizations, DAOs, and other groups we are involved in are actively producing.

**Is the preservation and archival of work something more cultural creators should be thinking about?**

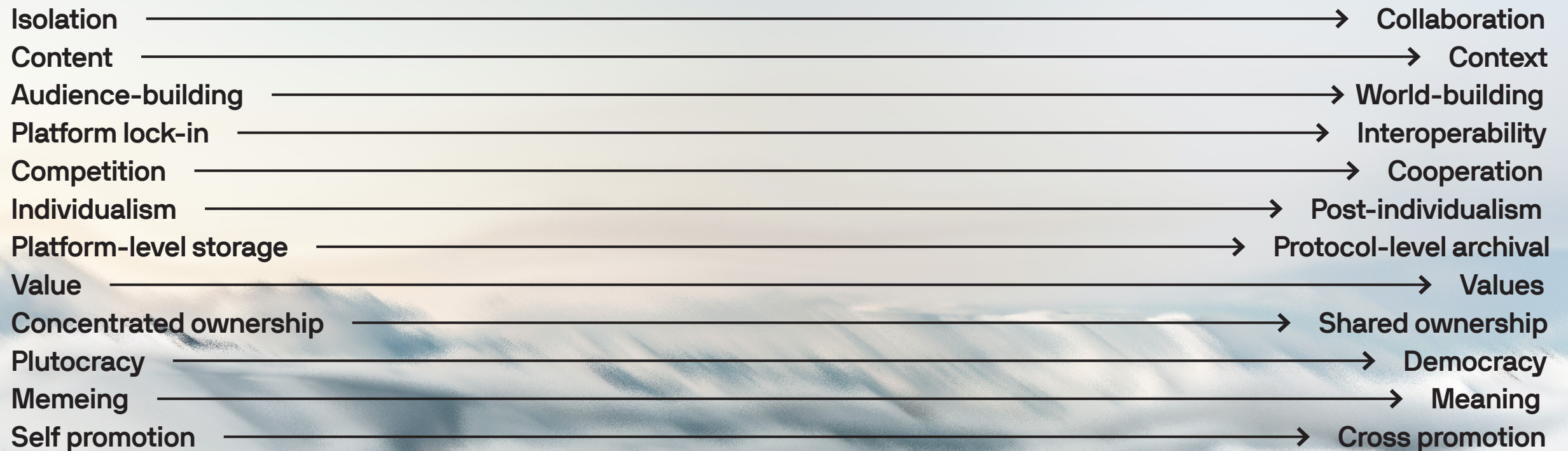
It's a huge question. It's also a question that doesn't have just one answer. In the context of Web3, an immutable archive is not always ideal. But often, in the case with older web platforms, there's a kind of custodial nature of that memory, and that archive may be really important. So who's able to capture that archive, and who's able to access it, are the real questions – not necessarily whether there should be an archive. Who owns the archive? And to what purposes will it be deployed?

**Memory is both a tech term, but also describes like a living experience. What drew you to memory as a subject to reflect upon?**

I've been thinking about it for a while. I like the term "memory" because it can be both an active form, and also one that we think of through the past. We currently have a dominant model, particularly in the software and digital realm, in which we think of memory as a kind of entry in a database. It's the idea that once something's uploaded, we have its preservation and digitization, which can easily be restored and backed up, etc. But to me that conceptual model for memory is very poor. Instead, it's this feeling that memory is something that lives between objects, between people, or between agents. I've been reading a lot about how different cultures, different parts of the world, and very different time periods would store intergenerational knowledge or pass it on. It was always very much stored in stories that were told between people and in relationships to the environment, to objects, artworks. So as we kind of head into uncertain times, it's really important to think of memory as a much richer and relational form because otherwise we stand to lose it all.



# After the creator economy





After The Creator Economy

By Metalabel & co-matter

