Furthering the agenda of algorithmic resistance: integrating gender and decolonial perspectives.

A response to Reviewer Feedback.

We would like to start thanking the three reviewers for thoroughly engaging with our book and for providing us with three very different readings, all of them full of insightful reflections. Not only are books *written* from positions that are never neutral, but they are also *read* from positions which are also never neutral. The three commentaries we received come from diverse perspectives (labor, gender and decolonial studies) and each of them generates different readings and raises important questions.

Beginning with the first commentary, we are glad to see that Seonok Lee agrees with us in pointing out that "the true adversaries we are confronting may not be Algorithms and AI themselves but platform companies manipulating the system from behind the scenes." This is a central point of our book, because when we talk about platform power, we mean the power that capitalist tech companies wield through the exploitation of algorithms and AI. Lee primarily addresses issues related to platform labor, workers' material conditions, and the organization of collective action and protests. While she acknowledges the book's emphasis on the continuity between industrial and platform capitalism, she cautions against the potential romanticization of everyday resistance practices toward the conclusion. This critique, which we anticipated, is one we are fully aware of and partially recognize as a potential weakness in our work. Throughout the years we spent working on this book, we engaged in countless discussions about the risk of romanticizing agency. It was one of our primary concerns, and while we made efforts to address it, we likely did not fully

succeed in avoiding this pitfall. Perhaps the hint of romanticism comes from our optimism for a better future that we expressed in the conclusions of the book. While this book recognizes the power imbalance between platforms and users, it also casts a more complex and nuanced vision, showing that the conflict is still open: the sounds of battle are already here, but the outcome is still uncertain. Remixing Stuart Hall et al. (1976) about the relations between subordinates and dominant cultures, we could say that "the outcome" of the conflict between platform power and human agency "is not given but *made*." Our optimism, however, is similar to that expressed by Stuart Hall towards ritual forms of resistance, such as the British youth subcultures described by him and colleagues in *Resistance through Rituals.* As James Procter pointed out in his book on Hall's intellectual legacy, "Unlike revolutionary resistance, which tends to work by rejecting or overturning, ritual resistance is about using and adapting. Such forms of resistance are not necessarily going to 'revolutionize' class structures in the sense of a straightforward inversion; they are *potential* forms, 'not given but made' " (2004, 90). Like *ritual* resistance, algorithmic resistance remains a process of ongoing negotiation rather than a solution to the power of platforms. We do not feel that this view of algorithmic resistance is romantic. At most, it may be too optimistic and confident in the resistance potential it represents.

We must also acknowledge that, after spending years closely examining these micro-resistance practices and mapping user agency, we risk overemphasizing individual agency. However, this is a common challenge for researchers deeply focused on their subject matter. In our case, agency was our central focus—something often overlooked in academic discussions of platform power. This is precisely why we felt it was necessary to dedicate an entire book to this topic. But beyond this limitation, we believe that our account of agency and resistance practices is less romantic than it might seem and, more importantly, it is grounded in the data.

Instead, we emphasize throughout the book the "agnostic" nature of algorithmic agency: it can be wielded by actors across the political spectrum and even serve purely profit-driven or propagandistic purposes (our book, p. 18). That said, we aimed to convey a message of hope with this work, pushing back against the wave of nihilistic or apocalyptic narratives about digital technologies. However, the antidote to such nihilism is not a romanticized view of human agency, but a Gramscian approach (Antonini, 2019) to the relationship between citizen agency and the structure of platform society: pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will. This balance is not wishful thinking but is rooted in our fieldwork. By documenting how countless people worldwide are organizing to challenge platform power and how larger movements emerge from these collective actions, we affirm that it is indeed possible to affect platform capitalism. Of course, while these creative but often fleeting forms of resistance are important, they are far from sufficient to subvert platform power or mitigate its harm. What is needed is the broader support of global public opinion, trade unions, and political action. The Platform Work Directive passed by the European Parliament in 2024 represents a first step in the right direction, though it is by no means enough (Rainone & Aloisi, 2024).

Turning now to the second commentary, we find the questions posed by Kruskaya Hidalgo-Cordero extremely relevant. These questions allow us to expand on a number of reflections that did not find their way into the book. The author rightly notes that we have not devoted enough space to reflect on the power relations within our research team and between us and the research subjects.

While we recognize that it is impossible to entirely eliminate power dynamics within any research group, as scholars, we should strive to minimize them as much as possible. In our case, we established clear expectations from the outset: we defined the team's goals, outlined what we could offer, and communicated what we expected in return. We committed to collectively discussing the

data generated by all team members through a series of workshops, with the goal of including it in at least one collaborative article, which we would lead (Bonini et al., 2023). At the same time, we granted each participant the freedom to use their individually gathered data independently. During the workshops, we fostered an open and convivial environment, encouraging constructive critique so that everyone felt safe sharing their insights. In our interactions with interviewees, we aimed to establish a transparent and fair relationship. We consistently communicated the objectives of our research and explained how their data would be protected. We expressed gratitude for their time and always inquired if there was anything we could do to assist them or compensate them for their participation. With many interviewees, this relationship evolved beyond a single interview; we maintained ongoing dialogue, discussing our interpretations of the data and inviting them to share their reflections and perspectives. The second reviewer asks whether interviewees had the opportunity to review what was written about them before the manuscript was published. As noted in the methodological appendix (p. 182), "two couriers also agreed to read what Tiziano had written and provided their comments in chapter 3." We invited several other interviewees to review the sections concerning them, but many lacked the time to engage with such detailed accounts. We were mindful not to pressure them for feedback, aware of their limited availability of time and concerned that this request might cause undue stress. However, we did send copies of the book to those with whom we had built lasting relationships of trust. Achieving truly equal relationships with research participants is always challenging. While methodologies like action research or workers' inquiry offer ideal approaches, they are not always practical in the field. We have reflected deeply on these issues in a forthcoming chapter (Bonini & Treré 2025), where we argue for the importance of fostering a caring relationship with research participants. The other criticism that Hidalgo-Cordero raises is the lack of gender analysis in the users' conception of moral economy. This is another issue we have discussed extensively among ourselves, and we agree with her that the

gender dimension of digital workers is indeed underestimated in our book. We recognize it as a promising area for future research. We hope that scholars who are more attuned to gender dynamics in labor studies will explore the gender differences within the moral economies of workers. We believe that the works of Gupta (2020), Milkman et al. (2021), Centeno Maya et al. (2022), and James (2022) have already laid a solid foundation for this research perspective, which certainly warrants further investigation. Hidalgo-Cordero also highlights that "the concepts of riders and couriers, gig workers and platform workers, are used synonymously in the text without contextualization or explanation of that choice" and ultimately invites us "to be more intentional and political with the use of these terms, ensuring that any extraction or quotation of their research makes the recognition of subordination visible". On p. 4 of our introduction, we assert that "attributing the label of 'digital labor' to all activities performed online or mediated by digital platforms risks turning the term itself into an 'empty signifier.'" Furthermore, we make a clear distinction between free digital labor and platform labor in the book, following the framework proposed by Gandini (2021), and we specify that gig workers are a subset of platform workers. We never use these two terms interchangeably. The only exception is our interchangeable use of "riders" and "couriers." We acknowledge that this can be misleading, as riders specifically refer to those who use bicycles or mopeds for their work, while "couriers" is a broader category. Regarding the need raised by the author to clarify the power relations between platforms and workers it seems to us that the paragraph "online food delivery platform power" at p. 61 details the ongoing power relations between food delivery companies and workers and makes clearly visible the subaltern condition of gig workers.

The third reviewer, Darsana Vijay, raises important questions and invites us to "(further) decentering platforms and algorithms to bring to view the other power structures and institutions

that concurrently impact users' everyday lives." We concur with her assertion that "deep contextualization and taking the decolonial turn in media studies scholarshipneed not be at odds with recognizing agency and resistance." For instance, Udupa and Dattatreyan (2023) offers a critical framework for situating digitalization within the long history of coloniality, simultaneously exposing the intricate connections between digital platforms and ongoing global movements advocating for decolonization[1]. We believe that our book already contributes to a decisive decentring of Western data universalism (Milan and Treré, 2019, 2024) in the contexts of labour, digital culture and activism. Through a cross-cultural, comparative, and multilingual approach, our work aligns with decolonial principles, advancing both a southern digitalities agenda and a holistic data justice perspective (Treré, 2022). However, we also caution against uncritically adopting decolonial frameworks to avoid what Casilli refers to as the "neocolonialism pitfall." He argues that in the realm of digital labor, this pitfall arises from conflating any form of international power relation with neocolonial dynamics. He states: "using notions such as colonialism, imperialism, and slavery by drawing broad parallels between present and past times risks trivializing and dehistoricizing the experience of colonization, neglecting the specificities of colonial past and geographies" (2017, 3945)[2]. We thus recognize the need for a more explicit engagement with decolonial frameworks, while also being mindful not to overextend their analytical scope.

In conclusion, we acknowledge that incorporating gender perspectives and engaging more explicitly with decolonial perspectives would have strengthened our arguments. The limitations and gaps identified by the reviewers suggest several avenues for the evolution of our research field. As stated in the introduction, while writing this book, "we constantly reflected on the limits of our gaze and

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[1] For an overview and discussion of decolonial approaches to digital technologies and data systems, see also Treré (2022).

[2] On this point, see also Milan & Treré (forthcoming 2024).

how much our analysis was conditioned by our position, but in any case, we are aware that writing is neither neutral nor innocent."

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