

## **Technology and Inequality in Culture, Media, and the Arts**

### **Special Issue of *Poetics: Journal of Empirical Research on Culture, the Media and the Arts***

In the summer of 2023, Hollywood writers and actors went on the longest joint strike since the 1960s, joined not long after by similar actions from voice and video game actors. Bollywood stars have begun including AI clauses in contracts, and the European artists who dub Hollywood movies for audiences on the continent have fought back against the use of automated voiceovers. These organized labor disputes have put a spotlight on the role of generative artificial intelligence technologies in disruptions, both actual and future, to creative and cultural work and cultural industries. The relative success of these union campaigns underscored that labor relations and the evolving conditions of creative and cultural work remain central to any critical analysis of technology-mediated society.

However, the technological and social transformations at stake extend far beyond AI-driven automation and strikes to encompass the broader digital infrastructures mediating contemporary cultural life. Technologies that create, curate, distribute, and shape cultural consumption - including but not limited to the rise of platforms that birthed both new kinds of artists, and new forms of fame and influence, to COVID-spurred uses of technologies to accommodate newly home-bound ways of working - are reshaping not only creative industries but also everyday practices of cultural participation and meaning-making. These shifts intersect with platform capitalism's consolidation of cultural production, while simultaneously reconfiguring cultural hierarchies and creating new forms of social stratification. These shifts can include both paid and unpaid labor, within formal organizations and outside of them.

This special issue of *Poetics* seeks to advance our understanding of how a broad array of intertwining developments in digital and data-intensive technologies are reshaping cultural production across diverse creative fields. We invite submissions that employ robust empirical methods to examine how these technologies are reshaping processes of cultural creation, circulation, and evaluation, with particular attention to their implications for creative labor and social inequalities.

### **Key Areas of Interest**

This special issue invites interdisciplinary contributions that situate their papers across fields, including but not limited to sociology, media studies, communication, and related social sciences. Substantive research questions may address a range of topics; however, *we expect all submissions to engage conceptually with the themes of both inequality and technology.*

This special issue invites theoretically informed empirical contributions using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies. Empirical abstracts should include a clear description of the methods employed and a theoretical framing that situates the paper within or across the scholarly disciplines and literatures within the scope of the special issue. Abstracts should also indicate what scholarly literatures the paper aims to draw on and contribute to.

*Gatekeepers & Inequalities:* How are traditional cultural gatekeepers responding to challenges raised by new ways of working with technologies? What new forms of gatekeeping status and taste have emerged alongside new means of cultural production and consumption? How have these shifts affected the hierarchies that sort high from low-brow forms of art and entertainment? Privileged and marginalized cultural workers and organizations?

*Technologies-in-use:* How are practicing artists and media-makers using, refusing, or working around different configurations of technologies and other artistic tools? How do practices of daily use, unconstrained by platform or media type, blend and bend technologies to meet diverse artistic ends or subvert constraints imposed by material constraints? How are media makers embodied relationships to their work and tools shaped by changing work practices? How do artists and media-makers understand the power of tech companies and their position within media ecosystems?

*Work & Value:* How are collective understandings of the value of creative work shifting? How are AI and other technologies interacting with existing political economies of precarity? Including, the shifting boundaries between paid and unpaid labor? This may include creatives' own understandings of their work, as well as analyses of the “back-end” of these technologies, including the creative works used to train AI systems. How does the integration of these technologies into creative practice raise issues surrounding ideas of intellectual property, theft, and fair use?

*Culture(s) of Governance:* How are the institutions that sell and evaluate art, fund and train artists, and regulate art worlds reshaping hierarchies and understandings of the rules of art and media? What are the legal, cultural, and political frames shaping contests between states, sectors, and institutional actors surrounding the creation or reformation of rules surrounding art and media?

*International & Cross-Cultural Dynamics:* How do these technological shifts play out differently across national, regional, or cultural contexts? How do they work to reconfigure geopolitical hierarchies and/or solidarities? What are the implications for cultural imperialism, local creative economies, or national cultural practices?

## **Timeline & Considerations:**

Abstracts should be emailed to poeticstechissue@gmail.com by December 1st 2026, by 11:59pm EST.

Abstracts (750-1000 words, excluding references) due by December 1st 2026, by 11:59pm EST.

Decisions will be communicated by March 1st 2026, by 11:59pm EST.

Full papers are due by June 5th 2026, by 11:59pm EST, in advance of a virtual workshop.

Virtual Workshop will be held in late June/early July - Participation in the virtual workshop is mandatory for inclusion in the resulting special issue, final date will be sent to all authors upon abstract acceptance.

All participants will be expected to read and offer constructive feedback to a small number of fellow participants and will receive feedback from special issue editors.

Full revised papers due by October 31st, by 11:50pm EST, for peer-review. Each author will be expected to peer-review a paper for the special issue.

Note: If your article is selected and you'd like to publish Open Access, Elsevier (Poetics' publisher) charges an article processing fee of \$3730. Some universities/colleges have agreements with some publishers to cover or discount this fee. Please check with the librarians at your institution to understand if your fees may be covered. If needed, the editorial team will assist authors with up to \$1865 of this fee. Depending on the final manuscripts accepted and author needs, we may be able to provide further assistance. You may choose for your article to be published for subscription only, and there is no article processing fee.

## **Editors:**

Julia Ticona (University of Pennsylvania), Alondra Nelson (Institute for Advanced Study), Angèle Christin (Stanford University).