

From *Umfunktionierung* to Platformisation: Walter Benjamin's 'The Author as Producer' and the Political Economy of Algorithmic Journalism

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Abstract: This article rereads Walter Benjamin's *Der Autor als Produzent* (1934) as a theoretical resource for analysing journalistic labour under platform capitalism. It recovers Benjamin's key categories – *Umfunktionierung* (functional transformation), *Belieferung des Apparates* (feeding the apparatus), the dialectic of *Tendenz* and *Technik* – and mediates them with theories of platformisation (Nieborg and Poell 2018; Poell, Nieborg and Duffy 2022), digital labour (Fuchs 2014), and platform capitalism (Srnicek 2017). The article argues, first, that platformisation constitutes a qualitative intensification of *Belieferung*: under algorithmic governance, the journalist feeds the apparatus through content, data generation, metric-driven self-regulation, and symbolic credibility. Second, while the platform's structural power severely challenges *Umfunktionierung*, three contradictions internal to platform capitalism constitute terrain on which transformative practice remains possible, provided *Umfunktionierung* is reconceived as collective institutional design.

Keywords: Walter Benjamin, platformisation, digital labour, *Umfunktionierung*, journalism, platform capitalism, critical theory

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1. Introduction: The Return of the Production Question

In April 1934, Walter Benjamin delivered a lecture at the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris under the title *Der Autor als Produzent* (*The Author as Producer*). Rather than asking what position a literary work takes *toward* the relations of production, he asked what position it occupies *within* them (Benjamin 1998). The progressive writer, Benjamin argued, must not merely supply the production apparatus with politically correct content (*Belieferung des Apparates*) but must actively transform it (*Umfunktionierung*). Anything less, regardless of its revolutionary *Tendenz*, would amount to complicity.

Nearly a century later, the rise of digital platforms – Google, Meta, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube – as the dominant infrastructures of news distribution, monetisation, and audience engagement has fundamentally restructured the relations of production within which journalists operate. This process, theorised as “platformisation” (Nieborg and Poell 2018; Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal 2018; Helmond 2015), describes the penetration of platform logics – datafication, commodification, and algorithmic selection – into the organisational and editorial practices of journalism. The journalist now finds herself enmeshed in an apparatus whose infrastructure she does not own, whose algorithms she cannot inspect, and whose economic imperatives she is structurally compelled to serve.

The critical study of platformisation has produced rich scholarship on how platform dependencies reshape journalistic labour and news ecosystems (Nechushtai 2018; Caplan and Boyd 2018; Poell, Nieborg and Duffy 2022), yet this literature has developed its frameworks primarily through political economy (Srnicek 2017; Fuchs 2014), science and technology studies (Gillespie 2018), and organisational sociology (Ryfe 2012). What remains largely absent is an extended engagement with Benjamin’s *Der Autor als Produzent* – despite its evident resonance with contemporary conditions, and despite the mediating link provided by Enzensberger’s (1970) extension of Benjamin’s analysis to electronic media.

The article is guided by the following research question: To what extent does Benjamin’s concept of *Umfunktionierung* remain a viable critical category for analysing the structural position of journalistic labour under platform capitalism, and what theoretical reformulation does it require under conditions of platformisation?

The central argument is twofold. First, platformisation represents a structural intensification of *Belieferung des Apparates*: journalists generate not only content but data, engagement metrics, and audience attention that constitute the platform’s primary commodity. Second, while the structural power of the platform poses severe challenges to *Umfunktionierung*, three contradictions internal to platform capitalism constitute the material conditions under which transformative practice remains structurally possible, provided *Umfunktionierung* is reconceived as a project of collective institutional design rather than individual formal innovation.

The application of a 1934 conceptual framework to the conditions of the 2020s is neither self-evident nor unproblematic. Benjamin was writing about the bourgeois press, the publishing house, and the theatre – institutional formations that differ in decisive respects from the digital platform. The article does not claim that Benjamin’s categories can be transposed without mediation; it claims that the *structural logic* of his analysis – the insistence on locating cultural production within determinate relations of ownership, control, and distribution – identifies a level of abstraction at which meaningful continuities become visible. What justifies this mediation is not a claim of historical identity but a claim of structural homology: the platform, like Benjamin’s apparatus, positions the cultural producer within a set of relations that she must either transform or reproduce.

This article is a work of critical theory, not empirical research. It proceeds through close reading, conceptual reconstruction, and theoretical mediation rather than through the analysis of primary data. Its object is not what journalists *do* under platformisation – a question admirably addressed by a growing empirical literature – but rather the conceptual resources available for *thinking* the structural position of journalistic labour within platform capitalism. The article proceeds through five stages: a reconstruction of Benjamin’s conceptual vocabulary, situated within his broader critical project and its extensions by Brecht and Enzensberger (Section 2); a theoretical mediation between Benjamin’s framework and platformisation theory, including a reconceptualisation of the apparatus through Agamben (Section 3); an analysis of how platform logics reconfigure journalistic labour as apparatus-feeding (Section 4); an interrogation of *Umfunktionierung*’s contemporary possibility (Section 5); and a conclusion that returns to the research question.

2. Benjamin’s *Der Autor als Produzent*: A Critical Reconstruction

2.1. *Tendenz*, *Technik*, and the Politics of Cultural Form

Benjamin’s intervention consisted of refusing the dichotomy between political tendency (*Tendenz*) and aesthetic quality (*Qualität*) that dominated left-wing cultural debate. This opposition was itself symptomatic of the bourgeois conception of cultural production – treating the literary work as a finished product evaluated according to external criteria rather than as an intervention within determinate production relations. The question was not whether a work expressed the right political tendency, but whether its *technique* operated to transform or reproduce the existing apparatus (Benjamin 1998; Eagleton 1981).

The “activist” writer who published revolutionary content in bourgeois newspapers was, for Benjamin, a paradigmatic case of *Belieferung des Apparates*. As Benjamin formulated the point:

I should like to preface my remarks on the New Objectivity with the proposition that to supply a production apparatus without trying, within the limits of the possible, to change it, is a highly disputable activity even when the material supplied appears to be of a revolutionary nature. For we are confronted with the fact – of which there has been no shortage of proof in Germany over the last decade – that the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication is capable of assimilating, indeed of propagating, an astonishing amount of revolutionary themes without ever seriously putting into question its own continued existence or that of the class which owns it. In any case this remains true so long as it is supplied by hacks, albeit revolutionary hacks. And I define a hack as a man who refuses as a matter of principle to improve the production apparatus and so prise it away from the ruling class for the benefit of Socialism. I further maintain that an appreciable part of so-called left-wing literature had no other social function than that

of continually extracting new effects or sensations from this situation for the public's entertainment. (Benjamin 1998, 93-94)

The crucial distinction Benjamin draws here – between “merely supplying a production apparatus” and “changing it” – constitutes the conceptual axis around which this entire article turns. What is at stake is not the political content of the journalist's work but her *structural position* within the production apparatus: whether her practice reproduces or transforms the institutional and technical conditions under which cultural production takes place.

Two dimensions of *Belieferung* deserve emphasis for their relevance to the argument of this article. First, *Belieferung* was not a moral failing but a structural position. The individual producer's subjective intentions – however radical, however sincere – could not, by themselves, overcome the objective logic of the apparatus. This structural determinism distinguished Benjamin's analysis from the voluntaristic moralism of the literary left, which imagined that political commitment could be a matter of individual conscience rather than institutional transformation. Second, *Belieferung* operated through the medium of *form* rather than content. It was not what was said but how it was produced, distributed, and consumed that determined whether a given intervention fed or transformed the apparatus. This formalist dimension – the insistence that the politics of cultural production resided in the technical and institutional organisation of the production process rather than in the ideological content of the product – is Benjamin's most durable contribution to the critical analysis of journalism under platform capitalism.

2.2. *Umfunktionierung*: From Brecht to Benjamin

The concept of *Umfunktionierung* originated in Brecht's theatrical and media theory before Benjamin generalised it. In his 1932 essay *The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication*, Brecht articulated the demand for a functional transformation of media technology:

The radio is one-sided when it should be two. It is purely an apparatus for distribution, for mere sharing out. So here is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication. The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear, how to bring him into a relationship instead of isolating him. (Brecht 1932/1964, 52)

Brecht's demand – that the radio “step[s] out of the supply business and organize[s] its listeners as suppliers” (Brecht 1932/1964, 52) – prefigured the structural analysis that Benjamin would develop into a general theory of cultural production. Crucially, Brecht insisted that such transformation could not be achieved within the existing social order: “it is not at all our job to renovate ideological institutions on the basis of the

existing social order by means of innovations. Instead our innovations must force them to surrender that basis. So: For innovations, against renovation!” (Brecht 1932/1964, 55). This distinction between *renovation* (improving the apparatus without altering its structural logic) and *innovation* (forcing the apparatus to surrender its basis) is the conceptual kernel of what Benjamin would theorise as the opposition between *Belieferung* and *Umfunktionierung*. Brecht further specified the political stakes: “The increasing concentration of mechanical means and the increasingly specialized training – tendencies that should be accelerated – call for a kind of resistance by the listener, and for his mobilization and redrafting as a producer” (Brecht 1932/1964, 55). The listener must not remain a consumer of cultural products; she must be mobilised as a *producer* – an argument that directly anticipates Benjamin’s demand that the author recognise herself as a producer and act accordingly.

Benjamin adopted Brecht’s concept and extended it beyond radio to all forms of cultural production. In *The Author as Producer*, he introduced the term through a discussion of the composer Hanns Eisler’s analysis of musical production:

Brecht has coined the phrase ‘functional transformation’ (Umfunktionierung) to describe the transformation of forms and instruments of production by a progressive intelligentsia – an intelligentsia interested in liberating the means of production and hence active in the class struggle. He was the first to address to the intellectuals the far-reaching demand that they should not supply the production apparatus without, at the same time, within the limits of the possible, changing that apparatus in the direction of Socialism. ‘The publication of the *Versuche*,’ we read in the author’s introduction to the series of texts published under that title, ‘marks a point at which certain works are not so much intended to represent individual experiences (i.e. to have the character of finished works) as they are aimed at using (transforming) certain existing institutes and institutions.’ It is not spiritual renewal, as the fascists proclaim it, that is desirable; what is proposed is technical innovation. (Benjamin 1998, 93)

Benjamin illustrated this through Eisler’s argument that the crisis of concert hall music was “the crisis of a form of production made obsolete and overtaken by new technical inventions” (Eisler, quoted in Benjamin 1998, 95). The task, Benjamin concluded, consisted in “the ‘functional transformation’ of the concert hall form of music in a manner which had to meet two conditions: that of removing, first, the dichotomy of performer and audience and, secondly, that of technical method and content” (Benjamin 1998, 96). This dual demand – the dissolution of the producer-consumer distinction and the integration of technique and content – would become the structural template for Benjamin’s analysis of journalism and, as this article argues, for the critical analysis of platform capitalism. As Section 4 will demonstrate, the platform appears to fulfil both demands while systematically negating their emancipatory content: it dissolves the producer-consumer distinction through prosumerism, and it integrates technique and

content through algorithmic governance – but in both cases in the service of *Belieferung* rather than *Umfunktionierung*.

2.3. The Newspaper, Cultural Democracy, and the Problem of Techno-Determinism

One of the most generative passages in *Der Autor als Produzent* concerns the newspaper as a dialectical figure: simultaneously the most advanced capitalist cultural apparatus and the site where *Umfunktionierung* was most concretely visible. The newspaper had accomplished the dissolution of the boundary between author and reader – what Benjamin called the “literarization of all living conditions” (Benjamin 1998, 96). Yet this emancipatory potential was systematically contained by capitalist social relations (Benjamin 1936/2007; Hansen 2012).

Benjamin’s analysis of the newspaper did not stand alone but formed part of an engagement with the political economy of journalism and publishing that spanned his career. As early as 1927, in a short text titled *Journalism*, Benjamin offered a characteristically ironic reflection on the press’s power to fabricate reality (Benjamin 1927/1999). In *A Critique of the Publishing Industry* (1930), he called for a sociological rather than merely literary analysis of publishing institutions, insisting that writers’ structural subordination to publishers could only be understood through an examination of capital flows, market structures, and the political economy of the book trade (Benjamin 1930/1999). In a short 1934 text titled *The Newspaper*, he argued that the press represented a site where the categories of writing – the distinction between author and public, between literary genres, between fact and fiction – were being “melted down” by the material pressures of modern information culture: “it is at the scene of the limitless debasement of the word – the newspaper, in short – that its salvation is being prepared” (Benjamin 1934/2005, 741). In his essay on Karl Kraus (1931), Benjamin developed an even more radical critique, arguing through Kraus that “the newspaper industry, like a factory, demands separate areas for working and selling” and that technology, “while unable to coin new platitudes, leaves the spirit of mankind in the state of being unable to do without the old ones. In this duality of a changed life dragging on in unchanged forms, the world’s ills grow and prosper” (Benjamin 1931/1999, 435). These texts demonstrate that Benjamin’s engagement with the press was a longstanding theoretical preoccupation with the political economy of journalistic form – one of which *The Author as Producer* represents the most systematic, but by no means the only, expression.

The question of cultural democratisation through media technology links Benjamin to both Brecht and Enzensberger but also exposes a tension that critics have identified as techno-determinism. Brecht’s vision of the radio as a communication apparatus, Benjamin’s ideal of the newspaper that transforms readers into writers, and Enzensberger’s (1970) subsequent argument that electronic media possessed inherent emancipatory potential have all been criticised for assuming that the technical structure of new media *inherently* tends toward democratic use. However, this criticism requires

qualification. Brecht was explicit that the radio “could” but “cannot” achieve its emancipatory function under existing social relations – his point was precisely that the apparatus’s potential was *suppressed* by capitalist organisation, not that technology would automatically produce democratic outcomes. Benjamin similarly emphasised that the newspaper’s dissolution of the author-reader boundary operated *within* capitalist conditions that held its emancipatory potential. The critical point, for both Brecht and Benjamin, was not that new technologies *produce* cultural democracy but that they *make it technically possible* while the social relations of production *prevent its realisation*. This distinction – between technical possibility and social actuality – is essential for the argument of this article. Benjamin himself articulated it most clearly in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, where the dissolution of the author-reader boundary is presented as a historically advancing process:

For centuries a small number of writers were confronted by many thousands of readers. This changed toward the end of the last century. With the increasing extension of the press, which kept placing new political, religious, scientific, professional, and local organs before the readers, an increasing number of readers became writers – at first, occasional ones ... Thus, the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. The difference becomes merely functional; it may vary from case to case. At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer. (Benjamin 1936/2007, 231-232)

Yet Benjamin immediately qualifies this emancipatory possibility by noting its containment under capitalism: “In Western Europe the capitalistic exploitation of the film denies consideration to modern man’s legitimate claim to being reproduced” (Benjamin 1936/2007, 232). The digital platform reproduces this same dialectic at a vastly expanded scale. The platform, like Brecht’s radio and Benjamin’s newspaper, possesses technical capacities that could, in principle, support genuinely democratic forms of cultural production – capacities that are, however, structurally foreclosed by the social relations of platform capitalism. Benjamin’s own position is not without internal tensions. *The Author as Producer* exhibits a characteristic oscillation between two registers: a rigorously structural analysis of the production apparatus, which insists on the objective determination of the producer’s position by the relations of production, and a more voluntaristic register that appeals to the intellectual’s capacity to choose her position and to intervene transformatively in the apparatus. This tension between structural determinism and agential possibility is never fully resolved in Benjamin’s text, and it is precisely this irresolution that makes the essay both productive and problematic as a resource for contemporary analysis. The structural register aligns with the Marxist tradition of political economy; the voluntaristic register bears the traces of Benjamin’s earlier, more messianic conception of revolutionary practice. For the purposes of this article, it is the structural register that is foregrounded – but the persistence of the voluntaristic impulse in Benjamin’s text serves as a reminder that *Umfunktionierung*

was never, for Benjamin, a purely structural category: it always retained an element of political wager that exceeded what structural analysis alone could guarantee.

The critical contribution of the Benjamin-Brecht-Enzensberger tradition is not a naive faith in technology but a dialectical insistence that the gap between what technology *makes possible* and what social relations *permit* is itself a site of political struggle.

This point bears emphasis because it directly addresses the question of whether *Umfunktionierung* is a viable concept under platform capitalism. If new media technologies merely reproduced existing power relations without remainder, then the concept would be vacuous – there would be nothing to “refunctioning.” But if, as Benjamin, Brecht, and Enzensberger argue, each new media apparatus contains technical possibilities that exceed its current social organisation, then *Umfunktionierung* names the political task of realising those possibilities against the structural constraints that contain them. The question, as Section 5 will argue, is whether the specific structural features of the digital platform – its algorithmic opacity, its monopolistic control over distribution, its capacity to extract value from every interaction – have so thoroughly closed the gap between technical possibility and social actuality as to render this task structurally impossible.

2.4. The Concept of the Apparatus: Benjamin, Agamben, and Platform Infrastructure

The concept of the apparatus (*Apparat*) occupies a central but undertheorised position in Benjamin’s essay. Benjamin deploys the term to designate the ensemble of material, institutional, and technical arrangements through which cultural production is organised – but he does not provide a systematic definition. To clarify the specific sense in which Benjamin’s *Apparat* differs from a mere technology or institution, it is productive to draw on Giorgio Agamben’s genealogical analysis in *What Is an Apparatus?* (2009).

Agamben proposes a radically expansive definition: “I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings” (Agamben 2009, 14). This definition encompasses not only the institutional formations Benjamin analysed – the newspaper, the publishing house, the theatre – but also “computers, cellular telephones and – why not – language itself” (Agamben 2009, 14). For Agamben, the decisive feature of the apparatus is its relationship to subjectification: “I call a subject that which results from the relation and, so to speak, from the relentless fight between living beings and apparatuses” (Agamben 2009, 14).

Agamben’s analysis introduces a further distinction that is directly relevant to the argument of this article. While earlier apparatuses produced new subjects through processes of subjectification – the penitent through confession, the prisoner through the prison – contemporary apparatuses operate increasingly through *desubjectification*: “He who lets himself be captured by the ‘cellular telephone’ apparatus – whatever the intensity of the desire that has driven him – cannot acquire a new subjectivity, but only a number through which he can, eventually, be controlled” (Agamben 2009, 21). This

insight illuminates the structural position of the journalist under platform capitalism: the platform apparatus does not constitute the journalist as a political subject capable of *Umfunktionierung* but tends, rather, to reduce her to a data point within an algorithmic system – a process of desubjectification that structurally undermines the very conditions of transformative agency that Benjamin’s concept presupposes. Moreover, Agamben’s analysis of what he calls the “profanation” of apparatuses – “the restitution to common use of what has been captured and separated in them” (Agamben 2009, 24) – provides a conceptual vocabulary for rethinking *Umfunktionierung* that complements Benjamin’s own. If the platform apparatus captures and separates the journalist’s labour, credibility, and audience relationships from common use, then *Umfunktionierung* can be reconceived as an act of profanation: the restitution of these captured capacities to collective, democratic control. This reconceptualisation, developed in Section 5, demonstrates how the two central aims of this article – the critical reconstruction of Benjamin’s conceptual vocabulary and the assessment of its contemporary viability – converge on the question of whether the platform apparatus can be profaned, or whether its desubjectifying logic forecloses the very conditions of transformative agency.

2.5. Enzensberger’s Extension and the Consciousness Industry

The most significant theoretical extension of Benjamin’s framework was undertaken by Hans Magnus Enzensberger in *Constituents of a Theory of the Media* (1970). Enzensberger argued that electronic media possessed, by virtue of their technical structure, an emancipatory potential systematically suppressed by capitalist organisation: “Every transistor radio is, by the nature of its construction, at the same time a potential transmitter; it can interact with other receivers by circuit reversal. The development from a mere distribution medium to a communications medium is technically not a problem. It is consciously prevented for understandable political reasons” (Enzensberger 1970, 14-15).

Enzensberger systematised the distinction between repressive and emancipatory media use: where repressive use involved “centrally controlled programme,” “one transmitter, many receivers,” “immobilization of isolated individuals,” and “production by specialists,” emancipatory use demanded “decentralized programme,” “each receiver a potential transmitter,” “mobilization of the masses,” and “collective production” (Enzensberger 1970, 25).

Crucially for the argument of this article, Enzensberger directed his sharpest critique not at capitalist media owners but at the left itself. He argued that the socialist movement’s reduction of media analysis to the concept of “manipulation” was “essentially defensive; its effects can lead the movement into defeatism” (Enzensberger 1970, 17). The left, Enzensberger contended, had retreated into “outdated forms of communication and esoteric arts and crafts instead of occupying themselves with the contradiction between the present constitution of the media and their revolutionary potential” (Enzensberger 1970, 18-19). This critique of left-wing media defeatism resonates

powerfully with contemporary debates about platform capitalism, where the diagnosis of total algorithmic control can similarly function as a vehicle for resignation rather than as a spur to transformative practice.

Enzensberger also advanced a crucial argument about the relationship between manipulation and democratic media use that has direct implications for the platform age. Against the left's moralistic rejection of media manipulation, he insisted that "every use of the media presupposes manipulation. The most elementary processes in media production, from the choice of the medium itself to shooting, cutting, synchronization, dubbing, right up to distribution, are all operations carried out on the raw material" (Enzensberger 1970, 20). The question, Enzensberger argued, was not whether media were manipulated but *who manipulates them*: "A revolutionary plan should not require the manipulators to disappear; on the contrary, it must make everyone a manipulator" (Enzensberger 1970, 20). This argument – that democratic media practice requires not the elimination of manipulation but its universalisation – offers a productive counterpoint to contemporary discourses that reduce platform critique to the denunciation of algorithmic manipulation, as if there existed a non-manipulative form of media organisation to which we might return.

However, Enzensberger's framework also reveals a structural limitation that bears directly on the contemporary analysis. Both Enzensberger and Benjamin presupposed that the technical means of production and the means of distribution were coextensive: that to gain control over the transmitter was simultaneously to gain control over the channel of distribution. The digital platform disrupts this presupposition by separating, as no previous media apparatus has done, the means of content production (which are widely distributed) from the means of content distribution (which are monopolistically controlled). This decoupling constitutes the structural novelty that most fundamentally challenges the Benjaminian-Enzensbergerian framework and that demands the specific theoretical work of mediation undertaken in the following section.

3. From Apparatus to Platform: Theoretical Mediation

The preceding reconstruction of Benjamin's conceptual vocabulary – enriched by its genealogical roots in Brecht, its extensions in Enzensberger, and its theoretical clarification through Agamben – provides the analytical framework within which the contemporary dynamics of platformisation can now be examined. The task of this section is to construct the theoretical mediation between Benjamin's *Apparat* and the digital platform, identifying both structural correspondences and critical divergences.

3.1. Structural Correspondences

Raymond Williams's (1980) insistence that the means of communication must be understood as *means of production* provides a crucial bridge between Benjamin's concept and contemporary platform analysis: new communicative technologies do not merely transmit existing social relations but constitute new ones.

The contemporary digital platform exhibits structural homology with Benjamin's apparatus. Nieborg and Poell define platformisation as "the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries" (Nieborg and Poell 2018, 4276; see also Poell, Nieborg and Duffy 2022). The platform, like Benjamin's apparatus, constitutes a structured totality that conditions the possibilities of production: it provides the technical infrastructure (hosting, distribution, algorithmic amplification), establishes the economic model (advertising-based monetisation, data extraction, attention brokerage), and imposes the governance framework (content moderation policies, algorithmic ranking criteria, terms of service) within which journalistic labour takes place. To produce journalism under conditions of platformisation is, inescapably, to produce *within* and *for* a determinate apparatus – precisely the structural situation that Benjamin's essay was designed to interrogate.

Two correspondences are central. First, the *structural position of the producer*: in both frameworks, the cultural producer occupies a position simultaneously inside and outside the apparatus – indispensable to its functioning yet unable to control the means through which her labour is organised. This ambiguity is the precondition for *Umfunktionierung*: it is because the producer is *inside* the apparatus that she can, in principle, transform it from within. The critical question is whether the specific structural features of the platform have altered this ambiguity in ways that foreclose the possibility of immanent transformation. Second, the *dialectic of democratisation and control*: the platform, like Benjamin's newspaper, appears to democratise production while concentrating control over distribution to an unprecedented degree.

However – and this constitutes a central analytical claim of this article – it is necessary to problematise the notion of "democratisation" in the platform context, since this concept does significant ideological work in legitimating the platform's structural dominance. The fact that anyone with an internet connection can publish content does not constitute a democratisation of *production* in any meaningful Marxist sense. Production, as Marx insisted, is always a matter of *relations of production* – ownership, control, distribution of surplus – not merely access to the *means* of production. User-generated content represents an expansion of the technical capacity to produce, but within relations of production that remain radically asymmetric: the platform owns the infrastructure, controls distribution through proprietary algorithms, and appropriates the value generated by user activity. To describe this situation as "democratisation" is to confuse the proliferation of producers with the democratisation of the production process – precisely the kind of confusion that Benjamin's structural analysis was designed to expose. Benjamin's own analysis of the newspaper is instructive here: while recognising that the newspaper had technically dissolved the boundary between author and reader, he insisted that this dissolution operated *within* capitalist conditions that ensured it served the apparatus rather than transforming it. The same structural logic applies, with intensified force, to the platform: the technical democratisation of the means of

content production coexists with – and indeed *enables* – the monopolistic concentration of the means of content distribution and value extraction.

3.2. Critical Divergences

Yet the platform differs from Benjamin's apparatus in three decisive respects:

First, the platform achieves a degree of infrastructural integration that far exceeds anything Benjamin could have envisioned. The newspaper publisher of the 1930s controlled the means of production and the means of distribution but did not control the means of *consumption*: the reader's encounter with the text remained, in principle, beyond the apparatus's reach. The contemporary platform, by contrast, extends its infrastructural control across the entire circuit of cultural production, distribution, *and* consumption. Through algorithmic feed curation, notification systems, engagement metrics, and personalised content delivery, the platform actively structures the conditions under which journalistic content is encountered, consumed, and evaluated by its audience. The apparatus has colonised the moment of reception itself – a development that fundamentally alters the terrain on which any project of *Umfunktionierung* would have to operate.

Second, the platform operates through what Srnicek (2017) has termed the platform as an intermediary – a multi-sided market structure that positions the platform not as a producer of content but as a broker of interactions between content producers, advertisers, and users. This intermediary position grants platforms a structural power that differs qualitatively from that of Benjamin's apparatus. The newspaper publisher was a participant in cultural production: she selected, edited, and organised content according to criteria that were, at least in principle, transparent and contestable. The platform, by contrast, positions itself as neutral infrastructure while exercising, through algorithmic architecture, a form of structural power that is at once more pervasive and less visible than anything the traditional cultural apparatus could achieve (Gillespie 2018; Pasquale 2015).

Third, and most consequentially, the platform has restructured the political economy of cultural production in a manner that intensifies the dynamic of *Belieferung* to a qualitatively new degree. Under Benjamin's apparatus, the journalist who fed the production machine did so by providing content that the apparatus distributed and monetised. Under platform capitalism, however, the journalist's labour generates value not only through content but through the *data* thrown off by production and consumption: behavioural data, engagement metrics, audience demographics, and attention patterns. The platform extracts surplus value not merely from the journalist's content but from the *totality of social interactions* that the content occasions (Fuchs 2014; 2021) – a process that constitutes what Couldry and Mejias (2019) have termed "data colonialism." The journalist feeds the apparatus doubly: she supplies content that generates direct advertising revenue, and she generates data that feeds the platform's surveillance and targeting infrastructure.

It is here that the limitations of the existing critical literature become visible, and that Benjamin's framework reveals its distinctive analytical purchase. Fuchs's (2014) theory of digital labour provides an indispensable account of value extraction on platforms, but it operates primarily at the level of political economy and does not adequately address how the *formal organisation* of platform-mediated production shapes the political possibilities available to producers. Srnicek's (2017) analysis of platform capitalism as an accumulation regime is illuminating at the structural level, but it treats platforms as economic formations without close attention to the specific dynamics of cultural and journalistic production. What Benjamin's framework adds is the question of *cultural form* as a site of political struggle – a dimension that neither the political economy nor the platform studies tradition has fully theorised. *Umfunktionierung* names a mode of practice irreducible to either seizing the means of production or reforming content: an immanent transformation of the apparatus's own technical possibilities.

The most consequential divergence concerns the platform's capacity to *metabolise* critique. Unlike Benjamin's apparatus, which merely *contained* critical content, the platform converts criticism into data that feeds its algorithmic optimisation. Boltanski and Chiapello have analysed capitalism's capacity "to survive by absorbing part of the critique," arguing that capitalism "needs its enemies, people whom it outrages and who are opposed to it, to find the moral supports it lacks and to incorporate mechanisms of justice whose relevance it would otherwise have no reason to acknowledge" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 27). However – and this is a point on which the present article departs from Boltanski and Chiapello's framework – where they traced the absorption of critique through shifts in managerial ideology and organisational form, the platform accomplishes it *automatically*, through the indifferent operation of its algorithmic architecture. The analytical contribution advanced here is that the platform's metabolic capacity operates at a different level: every engagement, affirmative or critical, generates the same data and serves the same accumulation logic. The platform does not need to *respond* to critique; it merely needs to *process* it. This distinction between ideological and algorithmic absorption of critique is, I argue, essential for understanding why *Umfunktionierung* faces challenges under platform capitalism that Benjamin could not have anticipated.

4. Feeding the Platform: The Journalist as Digital Content Supplier

Having established the structural correspondences and divergences between Benjamin's apparatus and the contemporary platform, the analysis now turns to the specific mechanisms through which *Belieferung* operates under conditions of platformisation. This section – the article's most fully developed original contribution – demonstrates how the three axes of intensified *Belieferung* identified below do not merely extend but transform in kind the dynamic that Benjamin diagnosed.

4.1. Three Axes of Intensified *Belieferung*

Before examining the specific mechanisms of *Belieferung* under platformisation, it is necessary to clarify two key concepts. *Digital labour*, following Fuchs (2014), designates forms of human activity that create value appropriated by capital through digital media, including both waged and unwaged labour performed on, through, and in relation to digital platforms. *Algorithmic journalism* refers to the production, distribution, and consumption of journalistic content under conditions in which algorithmic systems – recommendation engines, content management platforms, engagement metrics dashboards – play a structurally determinative role in shaping what is produced, how it circulates, and who encounters it (Diakopoulos 2019; Anderson 2013).

Under platform capitalism, *Belieferung* undergoes qualitative intensification along three axes. The first concerns the *multiplication of the commodity form*. When a journalist publishes through a platform, she generates at least three forms of value: *content* attracting audience attention; *data* (engagement metrics, behavioural patterns, demographic information) feeding the advertising infrastructure; and *network effects* sustaining the platform's monopolistic position. Benjamin's journalist produced a single commodity – the article; the platform-age journalist produces a commodity proliferating across multiple registers of value extraction.

The second axis concerns the *internalisation of apparatus logic*. Benjamin's journalist fed the bourgeois press from the outside: she produced content according to professional norms at least nominally independent of commercial imperatives. The boundary between editorial judgement and commercial logic was institutionally maintained through structures of professional autonomy (Bourdieu 2005; Hallin and Mancini 2004). Under platformisation, this boundary has been eroded. The platform shapes production by rendering visible, in real time, the engagement metrics that determine the content's reach and viability. The journalist who monitors performance metrics, adjusts headlines for optimisation, and calibrates publication schedules has internalised the apparatus's logic as a constituent element of her practice – feeding the platform *through* the exercise of her professional judgement (Christin 2020; Usher 2021). In Benjaminian terms, this represents the colonisation of *Technik* by the imperatives of *Belieferung*. For Benjamin, *Technik* was the site at which *Umfunktionierung* could take place: it was by transforming the technical means of production that the producer could alter the relations of production themselves. Under platformisation, however, *Technik* has been captured by the apparatus in a manner that inverts Benjamin's emancipatory schema. The technical means available to the journalist – the content management system, the analytics dashboard, the social media interface – are not neutral instruments that she can deploy according to her own purposes; they are proprietary extensions of the platform apparatus that embed the logic of *Belieferung* into the very tools of production. To use these tools is already to feed the apparatus; to innovate within them is, in many cases, merely to feed it more efficiently. The technical means of production, which Benjamin envisioned as the site of transformative intervention, have become the

primary mechanism through which the apparatus secures the journalist's complicity in its own reproduction.

The third axis concerns *temporal restructuring*. Benjamin's analysis of *Belieferung* operated within a temporal framework defined by the rhythms of print production: the daily newspaper, the weekly journal, the periodic publication. The platform apparatus imposes a radically different temporality – one characterised by continuous publication, real-time engagement, and the perpetual demand for new content that the algorithmic feed requires to sustain user attention. This temporal acceleration transforms the journalist's relationship to her own labour in ways that deepen the dynamic of *Belieferung*. The journalist who must produce content at the rhythm demanded by platform algorithms – multiple articles per day, continuous social media engagement, real-time responsiveness to trending topics – is structurally compelled to prioritise the *quantity* of apparatus-feeding over the *quality* of journalistic practice. The platform's temporal regime thus operates as a disciplinary mechanism that subordinates the journalist's labour to the apparatus's reproductive imperatives while foreclosing any considered reflection on – let alone transformation of – the production process structurally impossible (Deuze and Witschge 2018; Bunce 2019).

4.2. The Algorithmic Displacement of *Tendenz*

Under platform capitalism, *Tendenz* has become an object of algorithmic management. Recommendation algorithms modulate content visibility according to engagement probability, advertiser compatibility, and user retention potential – metrics systematically biased toward emotionally charged, attention-maximising material (Tufekci 2018; Noble 2018). The result is an *algorithmic displacement of Tendenz*: the political orientation of journalistic content is subordinated to the engagement-maximising logic of the platform's infrastructure. The journalist may intend a critical *Tendenz*; the platform's mediation will modulate its visibility according to criteria indifferent to political content.

This algorithmic production of *Tendenz* has profound implications for Benjamin's dialectic. If the political tendency of journalistic content is no longer determined solely by the journalist's editorial judgement but is actively shaped by the platform's algorithmic architecture, then the question of *Tendenz* can no longer be posed at the level of individual production. This displacement deepens *Belieferung*: even explicitly critical or oppositional content serves the apparatus insofar as it generates engagement. The investigative report that exposes corporate malfeasance, the opinion piece that challenges political authority, the critical analysis that interrogates the platform's own practices – all of these produce the clicks, shares, comments, and emotional reactions that the platform's business model requires. The platform is, in this precise sense, indifferent to the *Tendenz* of the content it distributes; what matters is not the political direction of the content but its capacity to generate the behavioural data and attention patterns from which the platform extracts value. The platform does not merely *tolerate* critical content; it *incentivises* it insofar as critical, controversial, and oppositional content

tends to generate higher levels of engagement than content that merely informs or educates (Munn 2020).

This analysis reveals a structural dynamic that Benjamin's framework illuminates but that the existing platformisation literature has yet to theorise. The algorithmic displacement of *Tendenz* is not merely a distortion of journalistic content; it is a transformation of the *conditions of possibility* for politically consequential cultural production. When the visibility of journalistic work is determined not by its political significance or its contribution to public understanding but by its capacity to yield behavioural data, the very category of *Tendenz* – the question of what political direction cultural production serves – is rendered structurally irrelevant to the apparatus's functioning. The platform apparatus is, in Benjamin's terms, the most perfect form of *Belieferung* yet devised: an apparatus that extracts value from every *Tendenz* indifferently, and that therefore has no reason to suppress any *Tendenz* so long as it generates engagement. It is precisely this indifference – not censorship, not ideological manipulation – that constitutes the platform's most effective mechanism of political neutralisation.

4.3. Desubjectification and the Betrayal of Benjamin's Vision

The platform has accomplished, at a scale Benjamin could not have imagined, the dissolution of the distinction between cultural producers and cultural consumers. Every user of a social media platform is, at least potentially, a producer of content; every act of consumption – the click, the share, the comment, the reaction – is simultaneously an act of production that generates value for the platform (Fuchs 2014; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). The figure of the “prosumer” – the producer-consumer whose undifferentiated activity constitutes the platform's primary resource – represents the fulfilment of Benjamin's vision in a form that hollows out its emancipatory content. The platform does indeed transform every user into a potential producer; but it does so under conditions that ensure the proliferation of producers serves not the democratisation of cultural production but the intensification of value extraction. The prosumer's labour is appropriated by the platform without compensation and without any meaningful control over the conditions of production. The universalisation of the author-function has been accomplished, but in a form that strips authorship of its transformative potential: to be an author on the platform is to perform unpaid labour within a proprietary extraction machine (Andrejevic 2011; Terranova 2004).

Agamben's concept of desubjectification illuminates this dynamic. The platform does not constitute the journalist-producer as a political subject capable of transformative agency; it reduces her to a data point within an algorithmic system – “a number through which [she] can, eventually, be controlled” (Agamben 2009, 21). The journalist who believes she is using the platform as an instrument of independence is engaged in *Belieferung* at its most sophisticated: feeding an apparatus that presents its own reproduction as her liberation. This exhibits what Marx (1990/1867) termed “real subsumption”: the labour process materially reorganised according to capital's logic, making *Belieferung* an organic feature of the labour process itself.

5. Can *Umfunktionierung* Survive Platformisation?

The analysis of *Belieferung* in the preceding section painted a picture of near-total structural capture. Yet to conclude from this analysis that *Umfunktionierung* is categorically impossible would be to attribute to the platform a degree of structural totality that no historical formation has ever achieved – and that contradicts the fundamental insight of the critical tradition to which Benjamin belongs: that capital’s dominance is internally contradictory, and that the very mechanisms through which capital reproduces itself generate the conditions of its potential transformation (Marx 1990/1867; Harvey 2014). This section therefore turns to the second aim of the article: assessing the contemporary viability of *Umfunktionierung* by identifying the contradictions within platform capitalism that constitute the conditions of its possible – if by no means guaranteed – realisation.

5.1. Three Contradictions

Enzensberger anticipated this very problem. Against the Orwellian thesis that the “consciousness industry” achieves total control, he argued that “a linked series of communications or, to use the technical term, switchable network, to the degree that it exceeds a certain critical size, can no longer be centrally controlled but only dealt with statistically” (Enzensberger 1970, 16). The consequence, Enzensberger insisted, was that “blanket supervision would demand a monitor that was bigger than the system itself” (Enzensberger 1970, 16). This “basic ‘leakiness’ of stochastic systems” constitutes a structural limit on the platform’s capacity for total subsumption. This limit is confirmed by the platform’s persistent inability to fully control the content and interactions that circulate through its infrastructure, as evidenced by the continuous challenges posed by disinformation, coordinated inauthentic behaviour, and the tactical use of platform affordances by social movements.

Three contradictions within platform capitalism can be identified that open or fore-close spaces for structural transformation. By “contradictions,” I mean structural tensions within the platform’s own logic that generate conditions the platform cannot fully control or resolve: points at which its extractive imperatives conflict with its operational requirements, and at which the structural position of the journalist-producer is not wholly determined by the apparatus’s reproductive logic.

The first is the *dependence-devaluation paradox*. The platform’s business model depends on journalistic content – particularly investigative reporting, breaking news, and analysis – for engagement, legitimacy, and advertiser-valued demographics. Journalistic content generates high levels of user interaction, confers informational legitimacy on the platform, and attracts the educated, high-income demographic segments that advertisers most value. The platform *needs* journalism: its own infrastructure produces no content, and its value as an attention-brokerage system is parasitic upon the content that others produce (Bell and Owen 2017; Nielsen and Ganter 2022). Yet the same structural logic simultaneously drives the relentless devaluation of journalistic

labour. The platform's intermediary position allows it to capture the advertising revenue that once underwrote the institutional infrastructure of professional journalism – the newsroom, the editorial staff, the foreign bureau, the investigative team – while externalising the costs of content production to individual journalists and media organisations that are increasingly unable to support themselves economically. The result is a structural paradox: the platform depends on a form of labour that its own economic logic is systematically destroying – manifesting in the collapse of local news ecosystems, the precarisation of journalistic work, and the growing public perception of a “crisis of journalism” that is, in reality, a crisis of the political economy of journalism under platform capitalism (Pickard 2019). This contradiction identifies a structural vulnerability: the platform cannot automate the production of the journalistic content on which its legitimacy depends.

The second is the *credibility paradox*. Platforms have confronted a deepening crisis of legitimacy stemming from their role in the proliferation of disinformation, the amplification of extremist content, and the erosion of epistemic norms in public discourse. This crisis has generated mounting regulatory pressure, advertiser anxiety, and public distrust (Napoli 2019; Gillespie 2018). In response, platforms have increasingly sought to differentiate “quality” journalism from the broader mass of user-generated content – through algorithmic boosting of “authoritative” sources, through partnerships with professional news organisations, and through funding initiatives designed to support journalistic production. These measures represent an implicit acknowledgment that the platform's own content-indifferent logic threatens its continued viability. The platform needs journalistic credibility precisely because it cannot produce credibility itself; its algorithmic architecture can amplify content but cannot authenticate it (Carlson 2017; Ekström and Westlund 2019). Journalists thus possess a form of *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu 2005) that the platform cannot appropriate without the consent of its producers. The difficulty is that this symbolic capital operates within a field of structural asymmetries: the individual journalist's withdrawal is individually costly and structurally insignificant. Transforming symbolic capital into structural leverage requires collective organisation exceeding individual capacities.

The third concerns *extra-platform spaces*. Platform capitalism has not achieved total subsumption. Alternative practices have emerged: cooperative media organisations, reader-funded outlets, open-source publishing infrastructures (Siapera and Papadopoulou 2016; Deuze and Witschge 2020).

5.2. Platform Cooperativism and the Limits of *Umfunktionierung*

These alternatives intersect with what Scholz (2023) has theorised as “platform cooperativism.” Scholz defines a platform cooperative as “a project or business that primarily uses a website, mobile app, or protocol to sell goods (e.g., data) or services, and relies on democratic decision-making and shared community ownership of the platform by workers and users” (Scholz 2023, 10). Platform cooperativism challenges the structural asymmetries of platform capitalism not merely through regulation but through the

construction of alternative infrastructures embodying different relations of ownership and value distribution.

From a Benjaminian perspective, the critical question is whether these practices achieve *Umfunktionierung* – transforming the apparatus’s structural logic – or merely occupy a marginal position. The picture is deeply ambiguous. On the one hand, cooperative ownership and reader-funded models genuinely reorganise internal production relations: they alter the relations of ownership (from private to collective), the relations of production (from hierarchical to participatory), and the relations of exchange (from advertising-mediated to subscription-based) (Sandoval 2016). On the other hand, these practices remain structurally dependent on platform infrastructure for distribution, audience reach, and discoverability. The cooperative news outlet may have transformed its internal relations of production, but it still relies on Facebook, X, or YouTube to reach its audience; it still optimises its content for platform algorithms; it still generates data and engagement that feed the platform’s accumulation machine. The transformation of the internal apparatus has not been accompanied by a transformation of the external infrastructure through which the journalistic product reaches its public.

This ambiguity points to a fundamental limit: Benjamin’s *Umfunktionierung* presupposed that production and distribution were institutionally integrated – the newspaper that produced journalism also distributed it. Under platform capitalism, production and distribution have been structurally decoupled – a separation that Enzensberger (1970) had already begun to identify and that the digital platform has radicalised. *Umfunktionierung* at the level of production, however genuine, cannot by itself achieve the structural transformation of the apparatus as a whole. The transformation of the production apparatus must be accompanied by the construction of alternative distribution infrastructures. This task exceeds the capacities of individual producers, or even individual organisations; it requires forms of collective action and institutional innovation irreducible to the practice of any single author-producer.

5.3. *Umfunktionierung* Reformulated

Umfunktionierung under platform capitalism cannot be conceived as a project that individual producers or even individual organisations can accomplish through interventions at the level of form and technique alone. The structural power of the platform – its control over distribution, its algorithmic governance of visibility, its capacity to metabolise critique – means that transformative practice must operate simultaneously at multiple levels: the reorganisation of the internal relations of journalistic production (ownership, governance, revenue models); the construction of alternative distribution infrastructures that reduce or eliminate dependency on proprietary platforms; and the political contestation of the regulatory frameworks that enable platform monopolisation. *Umfunktionierung* must be understood as a project of *institutional design*: the construction of media organisations, distribution networks, and governance structures that embody, at the level of their structural organisation, the transformation of the production apparatus that Benjamin’s concept demands.

Benjamin himself was not unaware of this collective dimension: his discussion of the newspaper form emphasised not the individual writer's capacity to transform the apparatus but the *structural features of the apparatus itself* that enabled or foreclosed transformative practice. The newspaper that dissolved the boundary between author and reader did so not because of the genius of any individual producer but because of the institutional and technical organisation of the newspaper form as such. The contemporary equivalent of this insight is the recognition that *Umfunktionierung* under platform capitalism is not a matter of individual journalistic practice – however innovative, however resistant – but a matter of institutional design that addresses the structural decoupling of production and distribution that defines the platform condition.

Enzensberger's insistence that "every use of the media presupposes manipulation" and that "the question is therefore not whether the media are manipulated, but who manipulates them" (Enzensberger 1970, 20) points toward the kind of reformulation required. The task is not to escape the apparatus but to democratise control over it: "A revolutionary plan should not require the manipulators to disappear; on the contrary, it must make everyone a manipulator" (Enzensberger 1970, 20).

What remains of *Umfunktionierung* is not a programme but a *structural aspiration*: an orientation refusing satisfaction with apparatus-feeding, grounded in real contradictions constituting the material conditions of its possible realisation.

6. Conclusion: Beyond Feeding the Apparatus

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that the structural position of the journalist under platform capitalism is intelligible through Benjamin's conceptual vocabulary in ways that the existing literature on platformisation has not adequately recognised. The three mechanisms identified in Section 4 – the multiplication of the commodity form, the colonisation of *Technik* by *Belieferung*, and the algorithmic displacement of *Tendenz* – collectively describe a condition in which the journalist's productive practice has been internally reorganised to serve the platform's accumulative logic.

Returning to the research question posed at the outset – to what extent does Benjamin's concept of *Umfunktionierung* remain a viable critical category under platform capitalism, and what reformulation does it require? – the article offers the following answer. *Umfunktionierung* retains its full diagnostic force: the structural position of the journalist as a feeder of an apparatus she does not control is, if anything, more thoroughly determined under platform capitalism than under the conditions Benjamin analysed. However, the prescriptive dimension of the concept requires substantial reformulation. Under conditions where production and distribution have been structurally decoupled, where the apparatus metabolises critique automatically through algorithmic processing, and where the journalist is subject to processes of desubjectification rather than subjectification, *Umfunktionierung* can no longer be conceived as a project of individual producers intervening at the level of cultural form. It must be reconceived as a project of collective institutional design – one that transforms the production apparatus at the structural level rather than merely supplying it with new content. The three

contradictions identified in this article – the dependence-devaluation paradox, the credibility paradox, and the persistence of extra-platform spaces – constitute the material conditions under which such a project, however difficult, remains structurally possible.

The first implication concerns the political economy of journalism. Benjamin's framework suggests that the crisis of journalism is not merely economic but concerns the *relations of production* within which journalistic labour is organised. The question is not only how journalism can be funded but how the apparatus within which journalism is produced can be structurally transformed – a question that encompasses ownership structures, governance models, technical infrastructures, and the distribution of control over the means of publication. The cooperative models, reader-funded initiatives, and platform cooperativist projects discussed in Section 5 represent incipient responses to this question, but they remain structurally constrained by their continued dependence on platform-controlled distribution. A critical political economy of journalism adequate to the present conjuncture would need to address not only the internal organisation of journalistic production but the structural conditions of distribution. This task requires engagement with the broader project of platform regulation and the construction of public alternatives to proprietary platform infrastructure.

A second implication concerns the theory of digital labour. Benjamin's concept of *Belieferung* adds a dimension that the digital labour literature has not fully developed: the question of *cultural form*. For Benjamin, the politics of cultural production resided not in the quantum of value extracted from the producer's labour but in the *formal organisation* of the production process – the technical and institutional arrangements that determined whether the producer's activity reproduced or transformed the apparatus. This formalist dimension suggests that the critique of digital labour cannot be exhausted by the analysis of value extraction alone; it must also attend to the ways in which the formal organisation of platform-mediated production shapes the *political possibilities* of journalistic practice.

Finally, Benjamin's reflexive insight acquires heightened urgency under platformisation: the critical scholar publishing on platform-mediated academic infrastructure, the public intellectual disseminating critique through algorithmically curated social media feeds, the investigative journalist exposing platform practices in articles generating engagement data – all reproduce the *Belieferung* they diagnose. This is not a reason to abandon critical practice but to subject it to the structural scrutiny Benjamin himself demanded. The critical intellectual must ask not only what position her work takes *toward* the relations of production, but what position it occupies *within* them. Benjamin's *Der Autor als Produzent* ends with the demand that the author recognise herself as a producer and act accordingly – transforming the apparatus rather than feeding it. Nearly a century later, the platform has not abolished Benjamin's question; it has radicalised it.

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