

Platformed intimacies: Professional belonging on social media

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journals.sagepub.com/home/ecs**Anne Soronen** 

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Abstract

This article explores how social media presence and platform engagements inform and affect creative workers' sense of professional agency and craft. Focusing on Finnish theatre, film and TV actors' perceptions of their social media interactions, the article proposes the concept of platformed intimacy to capture the simultaneous importance and ambivalence of mobile attachments that characterise actors' platformed lives. The research participants consisted of 15 freelancers and theatre employees, aged between 29 and 64 years. The analysis was based on the diary-interview method and close reading. In this article, we suggest that to understand the complexities involved in creative workers' presence on social media platforms, it is important to broaden the investigation from self-promotion to questions of professional identities and communities. The concept of platformed intimacy captures how actors experience social network sites and apps, such as Instagram and Facebook, as 'grey areas' in which they deal with the frequent uncertainty about the meaning of social media visibility for their employability and future collaborations. For actors in our study, social media presence is intimately entangled with their sense of professionalism and desire of to belong to a professional community of peers. As such it articulates senses of proximity and reciprocity as well as feelings of discomfort and anxiety.

Keywords

Creative work, diary-interview method, intimacy, professional actors, relational labour, social media platforms

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Introduction

Social media platforms pervade the everyday lives of contemporary creative workers. The platformisation of cultural production (Nieborg and Poell, 2018) encompasses content production, distribution and promotion, affecting all sectors and professional groups in cultural industries. Previous research on social media influencers and microcelebrities (e.g. Khamis et al., 2017) has shown that creative work is profoundly entangled with the logic of social media platforms (van Dijck and Poell, 2013) and that cultural producers need to continuously adjust to the operations of and changes in platform governance (Nieborg and Poell, 2018). Duffy et al. (2019) introduced the notion of algorithmic precarity to demonstrate how the volatility of algorithms intensifies the economic instabilities inherent in these cultural industries.

While the current literature has unpacked the extensive impact of platformisation on content production, highlighting the ubiquity and intensification of self-promotion for all creative workers (e.g. Abidin, 2016; Duguay, 2019; Duffy and Wissinger, 2017), we focused on the questions of professional identity and community building. Therefore, this article explores how the logic of social media platforms informs and affects creative workers' sense of professional agency and craft, even when creative work is not directly platformed.

Our study dealt with professional Finnish theatre, film and TV actors and their perceptions of their digital lives, social media presence and interactions in relation to their professional agency. Professional networks, contacts and social skills play a central part for employment in the Finnish film and TV industry as well as in the theatre (Houni and Ansio, 2014; Oksanen-Särelä and Kurlin Niiniahho, 2020 382). Social media presence makes these connections partly public, which entails distinctive dilemmas for individual artistic workers in precarious creative economies as they face challenges in developing and sustaining professional identities and forming communities (Leidner, 2016; Lingo and Tepper, 2013). Therefore, we examined how social media practices shape freelance actors' and theatre employees' professional lives, social relations and occupational self-conceptions.

Focusing on theatre, film and TV actors' experiences has allowed us to explore how social media platforms affect a traditional occupation in which employees' private selves and public roles overlap and the boundaries between work and non-work tend to become diluted. More specifically, we investigated the socialities and connections that emerge on social media platforms when contexts collapse (Marwick and boyd, 2011), 'selves' network (Papacharissi, 2010) and presence bleeds (Gregg, 2011) in a profession in which both publicity (performing for the public) and intimacy (one's persona and embodiment) are integral elements and key resources. In short, focusing on actors' experiences has allowed us to discover how networked professional publics emerge as intimacies.

The Finnish theatre and performing arts industry comprises state-subsidised theatres, companies and national institutions, publicly funded and non-profit city theatres and a wide range of independent theatres and production houses (Esittävä taiteen tilastot 2020: 30). The Finnish Actors Union currently has about 1350 working-age members, including approximately 950 freelance actors. In our study, rather than performing historical and institutional analyses of changes in the acting profession, we centred our

study around actors' self-understanding of social media to address the broader question of professional intimacy (Gregg, 2011) not as a sphere or a feeling, but as 'mobile attachments' and 'the kinds of connections that impact on people, and on which they depend for living' (Berlant, 2008: 284). Through our analysis of the actors' experiences, we wanted to understand how professional selves and socialities emerge in and are challenged by the constant, never-ending work of networking and boundary drawing entailed in social media activities (Papacharissi, 2012).

In this article, we use the term social media platforms to refer to social network sites (Ellison and boyd, 2013) as well as social networking and connectivity apps. In terms of platforms, we focused on Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp as they were the most used social network sites and apps among the Finnish actors who participated in our study.

Relational labour as the work of intimacy

Creative work is often described as changing, uncertain and flexible. While cultural organisations manage economic uncertainty through project-based work, creative workers survive by developing strong social networks and holding down multiple jobs (Lingo and Tepper, 2013: 338). Previous research has shown that creative workers often engage in narratives of success, informality and rewarding work, referring to autonomy, dedication, passion and self-expression (Alacovska, 2020). However, these narratives tend to conceal the precarious realities of creative work, which involve constant self-promotion and the always-on mode of entrepreneurial labour (e.g. Anttila, 2019; McRobbie, 2016).

Mobile devices and digital platforms have increased the number of activities that count as work, escalating the intensity of work while also fostering a sense of fulfilment and collaboration (Richardson, 2018). Communication on social network sites involves mixing interpersonal relationships with alliance building by sharing feelings and thoughts related to one's work. Compared to in-person workspaces, social media interactions intensify the negotiations and reconfigurations of personal and professional roles (Richardson, 2018: 256). This situation has transformed workers' relationships with colleagues, peers, employers and audiences in a dynamic manner, with platforms' affordances and algorithms forming an elusive part of online action (Bucher, 2018). Activities on social media create value by generating more and deeper social connections, as well as greater and deeper platform engagement (Dobson et al., 2018: 5).

Social media platforms also reshape commercial practices and understandings of creative work. They impact the conditions of production, circulation, distribution and reception and offer new venues for performance, reputational work, marketing and audience engagement (Hadley, 2017; Patel, 2017; Taylor and Luckman, 2020). They also remodel audience expectations, putting more pressure on cultural organisations and creative workers to participate actively in channels favoured by audiences. As surveyed by Bree Hadley (2017), theatre performers, companies and art institutions use social network sites as a theatrical stage for aesthetic experimentation and for the dissemination of productions; as a critical stage for gathering ratings, reviews and commentaries; and as a cultural stage for fostering audience relationships (see (Blake, 2014; Lonergan, 2016).

Previous studies have shown that for creative professionals in precarious conditions, social media entails promotional work. For example, freelancers perceived communication on social media as essential for new job opportunities and reputation maintenance (e.g. Gandini et al., 2017: 20). As a result, many creative workers have transformed themselves into ‘promotional labourers’ (Bollmer, 2018) who regularly produce work-related social media content to increase their visibility and enhance their income. Baym (2018) used the concept of relational labour to refer to how musicians connect to and communicate with their audiences online, thus building and reproducing social relationships that enhance possibilities for continued work. The concept of relational labour frames social media activities as audience building and describes creative work in the digital context as resting on individualised, personal branding. While promotional work highlights the function of online sociality in terms of strategic communication, the concept risks ignoring more indeterminate and affective modes of digital connection and co-presence.

In our theoretical approach, we interpreted Baym’s notion of relational labour via Berlant’s (2008) conceptualisation of intimacy as mobile attachments to explore the consequences of platformed socialities for professional identities and professional communities. Using the notion of ‘platformed intimacy’, we examined the double movement of connecting and boundary drawing that characterises Finnish actors’ platformed lives. The notion of relational labour refers to the work of connecting, which entails building audiences and expanding networks while also managing different kinds of boundaries (Baym, 2015, 2018). We claim that this dual logic coincides with Berlant’s understanding of intimacy as structuring relationality. Intimacy is not related to specific feelings or predictable forms; rather, intimacy operates more like a relation with tacit rules, obligations and fantasies (Berlant, 1998: 285). Crucially, Berlant (1998) underlines that intimacy in the form of meaningful connections and contradictory desires involves not a stable structure but ‘mobile processes of attachment’. Therefore, whereas the notion of relational labour emphasises connections as instruments of promotional work, the Berlantian notion of intimacy allows us to recognise and analyse how the work of connecting also mobilises the complexities and dynamics of professional identities and belongings.

Previous research has explored the complex connections between social media practices and the notion of intimacy. Kember and Zylinska (2012: xv) described social media as ‘ever more corporeal, ever more intimate dispersal of media and technologies into our biological and social lives’. Nebeling Petersen et al. (2018: 3) showed that social media and intimacy are entangled in a ‘feedback loop’, with social media enabling novel forms of intimacy and new intimacies, in turn, shaping the use of social media. Paasonen (2018: 103) described network connectivity as an ‘infrastructure of intimacy’ that fundamentally enables and constrains individual and collective lives, while Dobson et al. (2018) argued for distinguishing between ‘digital intimacy’ as potentially productive social capital and intimacy as immaterial labour.

Through the concept of platformed intimacy, we develop an idea of intimacy that consists of meaningful attachments and imagined presences of others while also being enabled and constrained by platform infrastructures. Exploring the co-constitution of social media and intimacy requires a detailed examination of how people connect, relate

and become close via their dynamic media-technology practices and processes (Nebeling Petersen et al., 2018). Cefai and Couldry (2019) described mediated intimacy as users' increased awareness of the presence and co-presence of others on digital platforms. These authors illustrated how social media practices mediate the relations and appearances of others as a form of attachment in which distance and presence vary. Bollmer (2018) conceptualised intimacy as a contradictory mode of experience framed by an ambivalent desire for presence, a yearning for connection and an 'unbearable' insecurity regarding reciprocity – that is, whether one's orientation and investment will be recognised and returned. In this article, we demonstrate how intimacy operates in platform-specific contexts that are characterised by varied expectations, hopes and desires with few explicit rules, routines and/or rituals.

Data and method

From June 2020 to March 2021, we collected data from 15 Finnish actors using the diary-interview method, which involved pre-diary communications via email and/or by phone, the diary period and a post-diary interview (e.g. Bartlett, 2012; Spowart and Nairn, 2014). The participants were recruited directly via email, Instagram or Facebook and indirectly via participants' networks. In addition, these participants were freelancers and theatre employees (nine female and six male) aged between 29 and 64 years (the average age was 42 years) and who were living in five cities in southern and eastern Finland. We anonymised the participants and modified the quotations to disguise individuals' personal information. Given the relatively small size of the actors' community in Finland, anonymity is important, which is why quotations from participants feature no details regarding age, gender or professional status.

The participants kept free-form diaries about their 'digital everyday lives' for approximately 1 week. The participants were told that we wanted to map actors' perceptions and experiences of digital and platformised everyday life as well as examine how actors saw digitalisation and datafication in social networks, media use, professional discussions, privacy issues and the promotion of oneself and productions. We did not provide any guidelines for entry style or length. The participants were given the choice to keep the diary in either written or audio format; however, only one participant preferred the audio format. An advantage of this diary-interview method is that participants had the time and space to consider what they wanted to share and how they wanted to express their thoughts (Bartlett, 2012). During the diary period, we contacted the participants once via email and offered them the opportunity to bring up any questions or concerns they might have had.

After the diary period, one of the authors conducted the interviews, 10 via Zoom and five by phone. As the data collection happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed various restrictions on assembly in Finland, face-to-face interviews were not an option. The interviews lasted between 41 and 93 minutes. All the participants had an individually designed interview frame based on the topics, issues and events that they mentioned in their diary entries. The diary-interview method allowed the participants to influence the interview themes by bringing up the topics that they felt were relevant regarding their use of social media and other digital platforms. The diary functioned as a

report on one's use of digital platforms and apps during the week, and the interview worked as a recounting of that report (see Latham, 2012). All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and all interview and diary excerpts included in the article were translated from Finnish into English by the authors.

In their Facebook and public Instagram accounts, the participants presented themselves as actors or artists. All of them have or have previously had active social media accounts and were responsible for them, choosing not to hire communications professionals. The social media network sites and apps they used most actively were Facebook and Instagram, while some also used Twitter. Many participants described work or, more generally, the fields of theatre, cinema and television as the main content of their social media posts. The participants' follower numbers varied greatly. Some participants used their Instagram accounts professionally as promotional tools. All the participants barring two exceptions also described WhatsApp as a key channel for work-related communication.

Our analysis involved several rounds of closely reading the transcribed interview material and the diary entries in which the participants described their work-related experiences of social media use; actual and intended/imagined audiences and followers, peers and professional communities; and expectations and imaginings to do with social media work. By closely reading the data, we identified several affective tensions and ambivalences (see Lehto and Paasonen, 2021) between individualised social media personas and collective artistic work, self-presentation and community building, private dispositions and promotional demands, and social media visibility and employability. The notion of intimacy has allowed us to grasp and name the structuring tensions and the 'mobile processes of attachment' (Berlant, 1998: 284) in the participants' accounts, as well as to identify the fundamental interdependence and simultaneity of reaching out and leaning back, of connecting and disconnecting and of relating and distancing.

Based on the works of Baym and Berlant, the sections below discuss the following three tensions related to platformed intimacies that emerged in our data: between self-promotion and community building, between visibility and invisibility and between openness and professional secrecy. All three tensions involve balancing social media presence with the specificities of professional identity, and all highlight the complex intimacies entailed by relational labour on social media platforms.

From self-promotion to professional belonging

A culture of everyday self-promotion permeates social media, turning strategic communication into a societal norm (e.g. Duffy and Pooley, 2019). While having to combine self-management and self-marketing with one's professional identity is not a new phenomenon among professional actors (see Haunschild and Eikhof, 2009: 157), our data confirmed that presence on social media entails being continuously reminded of the possibilities for self-promotion. For many participants, promotional updates were a routine, self-evident and even rewarding part of their work: 'It takes two minutes for me to dig out a picture [from an image bank] and formulate an official text about how today [a series] begins on this or that channel at 7 o'clock'. This particular participant and six others described promotion on Instagram and/or Facebook as a mundane, uncomplicated part of their work, even if it was time-consuming. The platform offered the participants

an arena for sharing official promotion materials, inviting audiences to the performances and opening nights of the forthcoming films and highlighting the cheerful dimensions of their work. Sharing professional, high-quality marketing materials seldom engendered emotional trouble, as this kind of content was impersonal and obviously not self-made, and sharing was not a strict requisite.

Users of social network sites take cues from the communicative environment to conceptualise an imagined audience, which is often challenging because social media technologies collapse multiple contexts and bring together audiences that are otherwise distinct (Marwick and boyd, 2011). While the assumed promotional audience on social media is the general, paying audience, our data shows that the participants' peers and colleagues constituted the primary reception horizon. The actors did not explicitly name their colleagues as such, but their reflections on promotional work and social media posts in general (particularly, their feelings related to such posts) conveyed the impression that professional followers from their field were the main intended audience. Many participants preferred to announce premiers, new projects, work-related distinctions, travel destinations and work-related leisure activities on their feeds; however, such announcements often involved attempts to control or predict how the peers would understand the poster's professional self. While public social media posts are, in principle, intended for both specific addressees and the general audience, our data reveals a sense of platformed intimacy as the participants' reflections on their social media presence foregrounded the actors' own professional community.

In our data, Instagram and Facebook were identified as providing the ability to address other professionals in the field of theatre or screen media production and to stay informed about ongoing projects. This echoes what has been described as the 'interstellar' community, in which film stars use their posts to signify their position within the occupational celebrity group and to represent this community to their fans (Turner, 2019). While our participants also viewed Facebook and Instagram as enabling the building of professional networks visible to the general audience, they avoided indicating exclusive distance from non-professional followers. We interpreted this continuous movement between signalling one's position in the professional community and drawing subtle boundaries around it as a central aspect of platformed intimacy, which involves signposting and expressing attachments to various projects and professional teams, as well as negotiating the boundary between the primary intended audience (peer followers) and the other (actual and imagined) 'general' followers.

Sharing photos of oneself together with co-workers was, for some participants, an ordinary way of performing, belonging to a professional community and visualising one's professional networks. However, these updates generated tension and emotional trouble for the actors. While one participant stated that it was acceptable to photograph one's co-star and publish such photos on Instagram, another wondered about the appropriate moments for taking photos during production and posting them. Many participants considered this kind of posting promotional work, often encouraged by production companies, but at the same time they were clearly motivated by the desire to nurture relationships with their peers. Notably, the participants did not discuss posting in terms of gaining new followers. Instead, their explicit and implicit motivations were related to maintaining

collegiality and peer networks, and/or seeking recognition from previous, current or future co-workers. These motivations were made apparent came up in their ways to observe the number of likes and who gave them. Although this motivation was shared by all participants, some of them found social media networking to be associated too closely with self-promotion in a manner that they found uncomfortable, distasteful or ambiguous (see also Leidner, 2016).

While often experienced as affirmative and community building, this form of platformed intimacy may also provoke highly ambivalent feelings. For example, one participant stated that they removed a social media post in which they announced that they were delighted about their wonderful working day because a colleague from another theatre commented about missing such days. By removing the post, the participant expressed empathy towards the colleague and, at the same time, protected the employer. This case illustrates how a mundane work-related post can produce contradictory feelings in relation to a colleague's perspective, chiefly due to the post's appearance on one's social media feed and its availability to other professional followers.

Theatre and screen media productions are predominantly collaborative in nature, and actors participate in diverse teams; however, through their Facebook and Instagram accounts, the actors – by default – express themselves as individual creative workers. As actors are highly dependent on others to validate their professional identities (Leidner, 2016), they also assess the consequences of their social media posts from their co-workers' perspectives and their personal positions within the professional field. This may generate platformed intimacy based on the duality of professional self-conceptions. Creating the image of being good in the project at hand and promoting oneself is different from understanding oneself as someone who is renowned for the quality of their work in general and for the extent to which they enjoy honing their own craft and that of their fellow workers (see also Gershon and Deuze, 2019: 304–305).

This sense of professional belonging was further strengthened when the participants underlined the importance of closed Facebook and/or WhatsApp groups for collegial communication. For example, one participant described how the shop stewards' closed Facebook group broadened their professional horizons and created a sense of community in the field:

Now when we haven't seen each other [because of the pandemic], you get from it [the Facebook group] information nationally about the situations of different theatres, and people have opened up in a different way about their circumstances and how difficult it has been there, what is happening and so on, how they rehearse or can they rehearse at all, what is their future, so in that way it is. But if I wasn't an employees' representative, I wouldn't perceive it [Facebook] so. . . I think it would be more like ordinary use.

For this participant, the Facebook group enabled them to be informed during the pandemic about the concerns of colleagues in other cities or art institutions. Platformed intimacies overlap, as closed professional groups enable actors to discuss occupational issues and problems in a confidential atmosphere. Moreover, WhatsApp groups function as production-based links between on- and off-platform labour, serving scheduling needs but also intensifying a sense of togetherness and availability.

Visibility tests: existing for peers and employers

Recurrent concerns over visibility permeated our data, as participants reflected upon networking with various social media audiences. On Facebook, friending and categorising ‘friends’, as well as posting public or limited updates, are means of distinguishing different audiences. The participants mainly used Finnish in their Facebook posts, but some had two Instagram accounts for more private and public use that alternated between Finnish and English.

Those participants who highlighted relational labour and/or the promotional value in their use of Instagram showed an awareness of platform logic including the workings of the algorithm, describing how the platform’s algorithm prioritises accounts that use as many platform features (e.g. Instagram videos, reposts, links, quizzes) as possible, interact as much as possible, generate traffic and establish connections. These insights may invite an actor to adopt a strategic attitude towards social media presence, encouraging them to ‘game the algorithm’ as well as to test, feed and consciously direct it. The actors in our data were not strategically pursuing new followers, and their complex and ambivalent approach to visibility was more often based on the actor’s perception of their followers’ activities than on systematically assessing the ‘algorithmic visibility’ of their content. Here, the participants echoed the discourse of platform companies, foregrounding authenticity and moralising over algorithmic optimisation (Petre et al., 2019).

For most participants, context collapse was not an issue of losing one’s privacy or maintaining the borders between different spheres of life. While the actors were careful to protect their partners and children, their main anxieties had to do with visibility in the eyes of their professional colleagues. The insecurity regarding whom one was visible to, when and how one could influence this visibility occupied the actors’ thoughts:

If you have been away for a month, you are not hot stuff in the eyes of the algorithm. But, on the other hand, someone has said that the algorithm of Facebook operates in such a way that if you have been away for a month and then you suddenly update something, it highlights it to all – ‘Look at this, a miracle has happened, s/he has posted again after a long pause, everyone, read this’ – because it benefits Facebook’s wallet. In that way it binds, stimulates users by illustrating that it is worth being there: ‘Do you notice how many people I showed your post to, although I didn’t show your previous post to hardly anyone?’ It is unbelievable that after you write your next post, it is visible to only one-third of the users compared to the preceding post. And you can’t have any influence on whom it is visible to in the first place.

Recounting feeling pressured to post regularly on social network sites, this participant described the difficulty of predicting the operations of the Facebook algorithm and how the algorithm regulated the visibility of posts. In the interview excerpt above, the algorithm is portrayed as an insatiable and manipulative figure that persuades the user to behave in a way that benefits the platform; simultaneously, it offers visibility as a reward for interaction (see Bucher, 2018: 1174). Here, anxiety over visibility is attributed both to the demands and the uncontrollability of the algorithm.

For some participants, concerns over the algorithm’s functions amounted to an existential question regarding their membership in the professional community. One participant described their Facebook updates as a ‘visibility test’ and an ‘existence test’ in relation to actual and imagined audiences. In their words,

For actors, more for some and less for others, but the point that you exist, I think all people have this desire to show they exist, so if you do not exist in any other way, you can test it, post a picture and see how many will find it or like it, or then you can share some work that is important to you or things like that.

This participant's perception of their visibility echoed the social media tactics of editing, managing and curating one's online presence (e.g. Lehto and Paasonen, 2021) while being primarily characterised by hesitance and unpredictability rather than strategic attempts to construct a brand-like self. Their act of posting indicated an ambivalent desire for recognition and an 'unbearable' insecurity regarding reciprocity (Bollmer, 2018) regarding how a post would be received by colleagues. Rather than utilising a popularity-based strategy, their social media presence entails tentative experiments directed at an imagined audience or cautiously optimistic attempts to get attention from colleagues and friends. Some participants, including both freelancers and theatre employees aged 29 to 49, often felt hesitant about visibility within one's professional networks, whereas participants in their 50s and 60s did not similarly agonise over recognition from their peers.

Our data shows that many participants described feelings of insecurity regarding the effects of public social media accounts on their employment, which resulted in regular considerations of how to express oneself in front of one's potential future co-workers. When the participants posted updates regarding their ongoing projects and professional collaborations, they often imagined the evaluative gaze of their previous, current or forthcoming co-workers (see Lasén and Puente, 2021). They also emphasised the importance of liking, reacting to, reposting and commenting on the work of their colleagues as peer support. In this sense, our data confirms Patel's (2017) argument that creative workers favour mutual support on social media and perceive social media as securing potential collaborations.

Participants discussed social media presence as potentially resulting in employability, but simultaneously expressed insecurity over the former's actual importance. While some contracted theatre actors described their efforts to remain employable, which reveals a sense of job insecurity, one such actor also described how the lives of freelancers with many ongoing projects on social media appear much more exciting than their own. However, social media as a potential tool for recruitment and casting was a more pressing issue for freelance actors who were in the position of 'algorithmic precarity' (Duffy, 2020). In the words of one participant,

I would not feel pressured to post anything if I had a monthly salary. It is a cold fact that if some institution would give me three thousand [euros] each month, I would be much lazier with my social media use. But now when I need to invent my income each month, it is quite pertinent to report that now I make this children's TV programme, now I am moderating again, next I have a certain TV series and after that. . . That they know that, ah, this person is active in that.

As for existing on Instagram and Facebook – surviving the algorithm and hence existing in and for the professional community – the power of selfies was repeatedly discussed as an affective dilemma. While selfies get likes and positive responses from both

peers and the general audience, shame and awkwardness over the genre were recurrent topics in our data. The sense of social media presence not as a matter of self-branding but as a question of belonging to one's professional community problematises selfies as an updated genre.

Sharing selfies emphasises self-representation in the eyes of others and involves continuous negotiations between shame and visibility (Pastor, 2021); even professional performers cannot escape this negotiation. Taking photos of oneself, seeing oneself in them and sharing these photos generates mixed feelings, which range from pleasure at playing around with one's image to estrangement and shame (Lasén and Puente, 2021). Whereas one participant described elaborate tactics that involved the use of props as a way of managing the selfie genre, another participant referred to updating and sharing selfies on social media as a gradual process of unlearning shame by getting used to the process and managing its ambivalent affects: 'At some point, I took my hundredth selfie, and after that, it hasn't felt weird or strange anymore'. Significantly, many participants described sharing group photos as a positive alternative that reduced their concerns of appearing too self-centred in the eyes of others. The collective nature of group photos offers a respite on social media, as promoting collegial work feels more justified than pure self-branding. While manifestations of mutual support read as performances of professional networks and friendships to the general audience, they are simultaneously important acts of community building that signal belonging and aspirations among peers.

In and out of roles: openness and professional secrecy

Platformed intimacies pose fundamental questions about actors' professional selves as artists. Social media presence implies a need to balance the different roles of being a collaborative person, a member of professional teams and a creative worker managing one's professional reputation. Furthermore, the actors in our data negotiated their professional agency from the perspective of their ongoing role(s). In a diary excerpt, one participant pondered the timing and appropriateness of their social media presence in relation to the size of their role and the production in question:

I was shooting for a very long time, and so I used social media a lot. I have always felt it is easier to post on work issues, and during the shoot it is nice to share videos of myself and my co-workers. I shared several Instagram stories and took many photos. Afterwards, I wondered whether I had shared too much material because my role in that production was small. Anyway, I know that the channel is always happy if I share content on social media, so probably I was entitled to do that.

What worried the participant was not oversharing as an unnecessary disclosure of one's everyday life details; instead, they wondered whether they had exceeded the appropriate amount of content to be shared while still satisfying the expectations of the public relations and marketing team when playing only a supporting role. This participant agonised over their visibility on social media but felt entitled to post after a long, pandemic-induced break. The section above indicates that sharing in platformed professional

cultures involves a complex interplay of tacit rules and the balancing of social relations, desires and expectations (Kennedy, 2018: 266).

While Facebook and Instagram invite all users to present themselves as personas, which provokes questions over authenticity and openness, professional actors – who already play roles and embody fictive personas in their work – experience special, overlapping tensions on the platforms. Platform architectures that feature individual profiles and updating as livestreaming and disclosure (Marwick, 2013) accentuate the distinctions and conflicts between openness and authenticity in artistic professions and on social media (see Baym, 2018). Actors post on social media as themselves, instead of interacting as their characters (Hadley, 2017). These professional actors' online presence obeys the codes of social media authenticity; however, they cannot use their roles as shields against the gazes and comments of their audiences. At the same time, the actors in our study acknowledged that the general audience is prone to interpreting and judging their posts in relation to their fictive roles or social positions rather than their private selves (see Baym, 2018: 172).

Signalling professionalism on social networking sites entails further issues for actors. Some participants saw their profiles as a means for making their professional agency more transparent, whereas others found the openness regarding the artistic process disturbing. Theatre employees were the strongest supporters of opening the production processes, as they believed that social media offered an opportunity to demystify theatre making and to change the image of theatre as a 'dusty' institution. According to one participant, who considered Instagram an appropriate space for sharing everyday situations from rehearsals and dressing rooms, social media requires courage to dispel the mysteriousness of the profession:

Several of my colleagues think, instinctively, that as their goal has been to act, their job is enough for them. For some reason, I don't have that feeling of security myself, though I have an employment as an actor, I don't trust that it is adequate [for my needs]. It has never been enough, and I think that I would do social media in a pretty similar way whether I were a freelancer or an actor with a contract. And some actors, not all freelancers, do social media, especially if they already have high visibility, so then they don't and some others do, although they have [high visibility]. So, I think it depends more on the person than on a working position. In a way, what it comes down to is whether you want to communicate, whether you have the courage to leave behind your mystique, whether you have enough self-irony, whether you have the nerve to descend from the ivory tower [laughs]. This is my analysis.

Communicating on Instagram enabled this participant to self-ironically question the myths about the acting profession. While the participant was employed, a sense of job insecurity cast a shadow over the profession, and social media presence enabled the actor to broaden their professional profile as a versatile performer.

Not all participants shared this idea of transparency as a professional ideal. Many wished to stay offline and protect the production process, as well as the roles they are preparing, from the glances and questions of the audience (see Turner, 2019). Like musicians who fret over the fact that giving away too much information about themselves can detract from audiences' experiences (Baym, 2018: 179), some actors wish to maintain a

sense of the profession's mystique and secrecy to ensure audience affection and engagement. They protect their performances as public rituals, something that provokes intense feelings towards the roles they perform (see Leidner, 2016). They reject online disclosure because it is unpredictable and potentially risks disrupting interactions with the general audience. One participant praised production companies that forbade the posting of anything to do with the set or the costumes because, according to this participant, such sharing breaks the enchantment of movies. In this case, platformed intimacy as a professional community involves balancing between maintaining the mystique of productions by limiting posting in shootings and rehearsals and carrying out the employers' wishes to share material from the set.

According to a freelance participant who was reluctant to post material from sets and production processes, social media, plays and movies are fictional worlds that should not be mixed. In the participant's words, when an actor transforms from an observer to someone to be observed on social media platforms, the profession loses important values, such as long-term storytelling; additionally, social media did not allow for the articulation of any serious thoughts about the stories or roles that they were working with. Another participant believed that an actor is always at risk of acquiring similar roles and becoming typecast; in their mind, social media posting as self-branding could potentially reinforce the notion that one is always the 'same'.

Both the participants who emphasised transparency and those who valued the secrecy of the acting profession shared one goal: credibility in the eyes of their colleagues. According to our participants, credibility involved posting in appropriate styles and tones to perform and protect one's professional self and to maintain both one's colleagues' and the general audience's interest. For some participants, this meant choosing not to post even when they had something interesting occurring in their professional lives; they found that social media presence entailed continuous ambivalence and contradictory impulses – a desire to be both visible and invisible.

Conclusion

The intimate work of connecting on social media platforms requires continuous reflexivity regarding distinct and overlapping audiences. Our data indicate that to understand the complexities and ambivalences involved in creative workers' social media presence, it is important to broaden the investigation from self-promotion to questions of professional identities, belongings and communities. The actual or imagined relation and exposure to peers and colleagues, future collaborators and employers on social media further complicates Baym's (2018) versatile notion of relational labour. While the concept accounts for how, for creative workers and performing artists, platform engagements engender relationships with the general audience, and while the concept captures their continuous negotiations of platform affordances and algorithms, our data highlights the importance of peers and professional communities as the primary interaction horizon. Admittedly, we collected our data during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic at a time of constantly shifting restrictions concerning productions and performances. This context probably heightened, but in our assessment did not engender, the importance of professional communities and social networks among the participants. It rather appears as an essential

aspect of their social media presence. We hope that future research shows if the distinctive orientation towards peers on social media and community building also characterises other creative workers and if it applies beyond the context of the current pandemic.

Our study confirms the finding of previous research that, in the context of precarious work lives, an actor's identity does not depend on income or the current project. Instead, as Lingo and Tepper (2013: 338) suggested, artists engage in symbolic work 'to build reputations, convince others of their legitimacy as artists and professionals, and, importantly, to make sense of their precarious existence, find worth in what they do, and persist in spite of daunting personal and professional challenges' (see Patel, 2017). Our data support the findings of Leidner (2016), who, studying how actors manage job insecurity, detected a durable commitment to occupational identity. In the case of Finnish actors, managing precarity involves protecting one's profession and agency by either making professional practices and behind-the-scenes aspects more transparent to social media audiences or by regulating communication about one's work in progress to avoid revealing too much.

From the perspective of professional identity and belonging, social media platforms are experienced as 'grey areas' in which every creative worker has to intensively negotiate their presence and actions. In our study, the distinctive feature of the Finnish actors' accounts was the pervasive uncertainty about the meaning of social media presence for employability. While almost all participants acknowledged the potential relationship between social media presence and job opportunities, many found it to be a source of anxiety. They agonised over the reputational disadvantages of social media presence, and feelings of shame after posting updates were a recurrent experience. Some participants considered their digital traces and social media archives to be potential threats to future employability, while others found these to be resources that must be updated to achieve new work contracts.

Our concept of platformed intimacy highlights how Finnish actors adjust to the unpredictability and tacit rules of social network sites. For them, social media presence produces a sense of proximity and belonging, as well as feelings of discomfort and anxiety, which emerge in imagined and actual encounters with peers in specific platformed contexts. This simultaneous importance and ambivalence of mobile attachments characterises online intimacies, illustrating the hard-to-escape and affective power of platforms.

With the concept of platformed intimacies, we have shown that relational labour – beyond exchanging messages with fan followers, which, over time, comes to feel like a relationship – foregrounds professional interpersonal networks that may have existed before or beyond social media networking but which sometimes result from social media interactions. Anxieties, ambivalences and uncertainties related to one's social media presence are intimately entangled with creative workers' sense of their professional identities and belongings. While acts of mutual support are read as performances of professional networks and friendships to the general audience, they are simultaneously important acts of community building and signal belonging and aspirations among peers.

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