

CALL FOR CHAPTER PROPOSALS
Creative Tools and the Softwarization of Cultural Production

Edited by Frédéric Lesage and Michael Terren

As part of Palgrave Macmillan's "Creative Working Lives" series (edited by Susan Luckman and Stephanie Taylor)

Deadline for proposals: 31 October 2022

The tools, instruments, and media used to create cultural artefacts have always played a key role in culture: they enable and constrain how creators express themselves through their works, and in doing so shape our understanding of skill, formal conventions, and the social order of culture and creativity. An increasing number of these tools for creative practices are software whose use is a near-compulsory aspect of the contemporary working lives of their practitioners. Despite the ubiquity of software tools in contemporary cultural production, and while there are studies that consider individual fields or industries, there have been few opportunities to consider this condition from an interdisciplinary perspective.

This book will explore how creativity is increasingly designed, marketed, and produced through these digital products and services — a process we refer to as softwarization. We use this term as a kind of provocation that speaks to historically and materially specific sensibilities that shape contemporary cultural practices and creative industries. While softwarization draws particular attention to application software as the quintessential contemporary creative tool, we use the term to encompass a more complex digital assemblage that includes complementary processes in the composition of creative tools including their remediation, platformization, and datafication (to name only a few). If, as we argue, creative tools and softwarization are key to understanding contemporary cultural production, it is essential that we understand them as articulations of political forces, economic interests, and cultural forms in their own right.

Creative Tools and the Softwarization of Cultural Production aims to advance this concept from a variety of creative disciplines and practices, toward a more holistic understanding of the relations between cultures and their contemporary means of production. By bringing disparate creative and methodological traditions together in one volume, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of approaches for understanding this complex, emerging, and dynamic field that speaks beyond the disciplinary-specific categories of 'tool,' 'instrument,' and/or 'software'. This edited book will make a unique intervention in the fields of cultural production and the cultural and creative industries.

This edited volume is to be published in late 2023 in Palgrave Macmillan's "[Creative Working Lives](#)" series, edited by Susan Luckman and Stephanie Taylor. We welcome contributions from researchers, instructors, and creative practitioners from any discipline. We also welcome contributions from anywhere in the world.

Examples of creative tools:

We acknowledge that 'creative tools' and 'software tools' are imprecise terms that point to the lack of shared vocabulary across disciplines — thus, we find it appropriate to suggest example types of tools that we are particularly interested in:

1. Digital audio workstations (Pro Tools, Ableton Live, GarageBand), plug-ins, software synthesisers, and peripheral hardware
2. Image editors (Photoshop, Sketch) and historical visual editors (e.g. Flash, Corel Draw)
3. Video editors (Premiere Pro, Final Cut)
4. Game engines (Unity, Unreal), middleware (Wwise), and in-game creative tools (Roblox, Minecraft)
5. 3D modelling (CAD, Blender) and animation software (Maya)
6. Bespoke text editors (e.g. Scrivener, Ulysses) and mainstream text editors used in literary production (Microsoft Word, Google Docs, LibreOffice)
7. Suites, software bundles, and parent companies (Adobe Creative Cloud, Avid, Apple, Autodesk) and historical examples (Macromedia)

8. Presentation software (PowerPoint, Canva)
9. Social media content creation functionality (e.g. video editing in TikTok)

The chapters for this book will be between 6000-7500 words and will be organised into the following broad areas:

1. Creative tools and technologies for cultural production: theoretical perspectives

Chapters in this section will examine various definitions of creative tools and their implications for cultural production along various theoretical and methodological perspectives (ex. historical, ethnographic, political economic, etc.). How can scholars of cultural production take the role of media technologies and digital tools seriously without falling into technological determinism? In what ways does the softwarization of artistic and creative practice shape cultural production? What theories of techno-social relations can account for the rise, proliferation, and in some cases hegemonic status of softwarization? How can we reconcile changing conceptions of creativity and artistic agency with advancements in theories of technological mediation? How do existing conceptions of creative tools reproduce existing gendered and racialized inequities (to name only two)? How might we better critique such conceptions?

2. From tools to platforms: developing and maintaining technical ecologies

Processes of softwarization for creative tools sometimes embrace the logic of the platform, bringing creatives, third-party developers, and secondary content creators together in some sort of mediated exchange of cultural goods. Distinct from content distribution platforms like Amazon, Spotify, or Netflix, the platformization of creative tools can foster new industries, such as audio plug-ins or 3D model libraries, bringing reputation and diversity to the platform. However, developing for privatised platforms carries risks and contingencies, and, as attested by Photoshop's transition to Creative Cloud, can be captured into proprietary ecosystems. In this section, we consider the political, economic, and infrastructural effects of organising cultural production and tool development in this way. We also consider adjacent processes and structures of development such as certified educational programmes, proprietary or third-party hardware, application programming interfaces (APIs) for creative tools, and software-as-a-service pricing models.

3. Cultures of creative tools: communities of practice and their individuation

Commercial interests continue to co-opt and reify artistic and creative methods into tools as a means of establishing a particular, neoliberal kind of creative working life. This engenders new forms of community and participation, from social media platforms and forums dedicated to certain creative tools to communities of artistic and creative practitioners organising to design and disseminate and use creative tools that challenge this alienating creativity dispositif. In this section, we collect case studies and examples of collaborations, remixes, hacks, and any other alternative approaches to creative tools for cultural production.

The following is a list of potential topics:

- Bridging theories of technology and cultural production
- Categorical distinctions between software tools and digital media
- Theoretical perspectives on creative agency and its mediation/mediatization through creative tools
- Cultural/creative industries of software and creative tools
- The material assemblages of creative tools
- Affordances of softwarization and creative tools
- The marketization, financialization, and/or assetization of creative practice through software
- Cultural work of designing creative tools
- Creative labour with creative tools
- Critical pedagogical perspectives on creative tools
- (Con)figurations of creativity through creative tools
- Representations of creative subjectivities through advertising and grey literature on software tool

- Gendered subjectivities of creative tools and their communities
- Global perspectives on creative tools and their intersections with race, class, and cultural capital
- Colonizing and decolonizing creative practice through software
- Alternative uses of creative tools
- The aesthetic economies of plugins and patches
- Social media as creative tools
- Gaming and creative tools
- Music and creative tools
- Graphic design and creative tools
- Video and creative tools
- Memes and creative tools
- Presentations and creative tools
- Visualization and creative tools
- Photography and creative tools
- Conceptualizing creative tools for cultural production
- Exploring the various modalities of creative tools
- The platformization of creative tools
- Designing software tools greater creative autonomy for practitioners
- Creative tools and the culture industry

Potential list of approaches and methodologies invited to discuss these topics:

- Software studies
- The political economy of creative tools
- Comparative studies of softwarization
- Historical studies of creative tools
- Case studies of creative tools for alternative forms of co-creation and distribution
- Case studies of the softwarization of creative practices
- Communities of practice and creative tools
- Creative organizations and creative tools
- Art worlds and software tools
- Fields of cultural production and softwarization
- Cultural techniques and softwarization
- Media archaeologies of creative tools
- Ethnographies of creative software development
- Tool criticism and analysis

About the editors:

Frédéric Lesage is an Associate Professor in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada, whose research focuses on the intersections between digital culture and cultural production. His work can be found in academic journals like *Convergence*, *Fibreculture*, and the *International Journal of Communication*.

Michael Terren is an academic and musician based in Boorloo/Perth, Australia, whose research focuses on digital audio workstations and their relationship with contemporary forms of labour, venture capital, and music culture. He works at Edith Cowan University and the University of Western Australia.

Submission Instructions:

Please send a 500 word chapter proposal by **Monday 31 October 2022** to both Frédéric Lesage <flesage@sfu.ca> and Michael Terren <m.terren@ecu.edu.au>. In the subject line of your email, include “CTSCP Chapter Proposal”. In the body of your email include:

- Chapter title
- Section you are submitting to:

- Section 1: Creative tools and technologies for cultural production: theoretical perspectives
- Section 2: From tools to platforms: developing and maintaining technical ecologies
- Section 3: Cultures of creative tools: communities of practice and their individuation
- 500 word proposal
- 100 word bio of the authors
- Name of author(s), title(s), institution(s), & email addresses.

We will send out confirmations by Monday 14 November 2022. First drafts are expected by Monday 6 February 2023. All chapters will be 6000-7500 words including notes and references.