Beginning with the printing press, technological innovations have enabled the dissemination of more and more media forms over broader and broader audiences. This mass media built and maintained a unidirectional relationship between a few trained professional media producers and many untrained media consumers. This model, which reached its peak in the middle to late twentieth century, began to shift in the 1980s with the widespread use of photocopiers, home video cameras, and mixtapes and evolved further with desktop publishing, home computing, and increased Internet access. By the early 2000s, the cost of computers, software, and Internet access decreased, allowing individuals access to the same tools of production used by professionals. In this period, new media forms such as blogs and social networking sites have focused squarely on active audience participation, uprooting the established relationship between media producer and media consumer. At the end of this first decade of the twenty-first century, the line between media producers and consumers has blurred, and the unidirectional broadcast has partially fragmented into many different kinds of multidirectional conversations.

Access to tools and the invention of new media forms allow formerly passive media consumers to make and disseminate their own media. New technological frameworks have arisen that center on enabling this media creation: message boards, audience-driven review sites, blogs and comment systems, photo- and video-sharing websites, social networks, social news sites, bookmark-sharing sites, and microblogging platforms, to name some of the more prominent ones. These new frameworks have become more and more focused on enabling media creation, as this so-called amateur media becomes the raison d’être of these very professional media organizations. These sites are pointless without audience participation: from the audience’s perspective, in order to experience the site you have to become a media producer, and from the organizations’ perspective, without audience production their sites will fail. These media forms include a spectrum of engagement
from elaborate videos uploaded to YouTube to a simple “like” on Facebook. While old forms coexist with these new audience-driven forms and hybrids of the two, media participation is now part of media consumption.

Despite the widespread participant engagement and scholarly interest in this phenomenon, it has no definitive name. It has been given many names, a selection of the most prevalent of which include the corporate media favorite “user-generated content,” Henry Jenkins’s media-industries-focused “convergence culture,” Jay Rosen’s “the people formerly known as the audience,” the politically infused “participatory media,” Yochai Benkler’s process-oriented “peer production,” and Tim O’Reilly’s computer-programming-oriented “Web 2.0.” Each of these terms defines one separate aspect of the phenomenon and does so from the specific point of view of the different actors in this system. In order to understand the system as a whole, it is necessary to understand each of these separate terms and the perspective it comes from.

“User-generated content” stands out in this list of terms, as it refers to the material product, not the tools or process of this product’s creation; it does address the author but only as an effect of its focus on the product, and it seems to retain a vision of a passive audience in which the users who are generating the content are not synonymous with the audience as a whole but are merely individual members of the audience that step into an intermediate role. This corporate term is very popular with commercial media organizations looking to explain their business plans to investors, but it is reviled by many of these so-called users, foregrounding a general conflict over the line in the sand between amateurs and professionals. Derek Powazek deconstructs the term in his 2006 post “Death to User-Generated Content”:

User: One who uses. Like, you know, a junkie.
Generated: Like a generator, engine. Like, you know, a robot.
Content: Something that fills a box. Like, you know, packing peanuts.

So what’s user-generated content? Junkies robotically filling boxes with packing peanuts. Lovely.¹

He then proposes yet another term for the phenomenon, “authentic media.” His deconstruction is intentionally cartoonish, but it expresses its point: the term is machine-like and disregards the personal nature of the media these individuals are creating.

As Henry Jenkins has argued in Convergence Culture, these new media forms converge with existing forms and with the media industries built around those forms, in an often uneasy coexistence.² These inversions of the tradi-
tional amateur/professional dialectic blur clearly defined author and audience roles. Powazek’s critique is rooted in a proindividual, anticorporate ethos that privileges the authenticity of the individual amateur creator, but four years after his post, professional content has become a much larger part of the social media ecosystem. One marker of this transition is the makeup of the all-time most viewed videos on YouTube: in July 2010 only three of the top-twenty videos were nonprofessional, and the majority of the professional videos were studio-produced, high-budget music videos added to the site in the previous eighteen months. This inversion is well represented by “Lonelygirl15,” a series of amateur-style videos of a fictional teenage girl named Bree; though the main character was played by an actor, led by a team of independent directors/producers, for the first four months the YouTube channel claimed the videos to be the authentic work of a individual amateur. The goal for many of these media creators, including the creators of “Lonelygirl15,” is to become professionals through their amateur participation in these social media platforms.

Jay Rosen has theorized this phenomenon as a shift in audience and has contextualized this shift in terms of democratic theory. In his blog post of the same name, he speaks in the voice of “the people formerly known as the audience,” who want to announce their active presence to the media and to let the media know that they are not going away (see Rosen, chapter 1 in this volume). Rosen closes his missive with a warning from “the people formerly known as the audience” that they are not just “eyeballs” that can be owned. Rather than thinking of “the people formerly known as the audience” as a market, Rosen wants the media to think of them as the public made real; in referring to the public, and the political processes that it implies, Rosen is engaging the same principles behind the term “participatory media.” “Participatory media,” and the closely related “citizen journalism,” focus on news reporting and the political power involved with destabilizing the one-directional broadcast from a reporter to an audience into a multivoiced conversation among participants. In discussions of “participatory media,” participation in the media-creation process is often correlated with participation in the political process. Yochai Benkler’s term “peer production” refers to the collaborative process of creating media over software-mediated platforms of the networked information economy, such as Wikipedia, Digg, and Slashdot. Benkler’s focus is on the process itself, including the presence of socially or technologically mediated rules and the possibility that these new processes are inherently more democratic.

The term “Web 2.0” is derived from O’Reilly Media’s Web 2.0 Conference, first held in 2004. Tim O’Reilly, in his follow-up article “What Is Web
“Web 2.0” defines “Web 2.0” as an upgraded computer-programming model that has enabled a set of participatory websites built on lightweight server-based applications that move rich data across platforms. The dense computer-programming jargon in this last sentence highlights the industry white-paper origins of the term. The term “Web 2.0” describes the tools for making this new media; it does not address the process, product, author, or audience. Though it was coined to describe a specific type of web programming, its prevalence outside the coterie of geeks shows how influential the term has become. This popular buzzword has been widely adopted by the marketing departments of Internet startups (supplanting the tainted “dot-com”), media outlets, and academics analyzing the phenomenon. In the process, the term has lost its tether to the web-programming models it espoused and has become just as closely linked to a design aesthetic and a marketing language. Emptied of its referent, it is an empty signifier: it is a brand. The many “Web 2.0 Bullshit Generator” web pages are poignant critiques of Web 2.0 as brand. These simple applications generate random short sets of Web 2.0 terms. These phrases, such as “reinvent rss-capable communities,” “incentivize citizen-media blogospheres,” and “beta-test embedded wikis,” combine these buzzwords to create meaningless, but convincing, marketing materials for a hypothetical Web 2.0 site. The phrases seem to work by deploying the signs of hip inclusive social-medianess, and yet they don’t actually mean anything: they are the manifestation of Web 2.0 as branding material.

Each of these terms encapsulates a different aspect of, and comes from the different perspectives of the multiple actors of, the phenomenon of social media. This book uses the term “social media,” both in the title and in this introduction. The goal of this book is not to argue for the term “social media” at the expense of all these other terms. The goal of this book is to bring examples from the multiple disciplines, perspectives, and agendas into one space. “Social media” is a broad enough term that it can encompass, while preserving, each of these perspectives and their respective terms.

The essays in this book are divided into six thematic parts: “Mechanisms,” “Sociality,” “Humor,” “Money,” “Law,” and “Labor.” The one question that runs through every one of these essays is whether social media is a good thing: is it beneficial for democracy, culture, law, labor, and creative expression? The field of technology studies asks this question of every new technology; the implicit and explicit answers to this question often veer to the extremes of techno-utopia and techno-dystopia, and social media is no exception. Notable examples at the extreme ends of this dialectic include beatific works like What Would Google Do? which walks through the hypothetical appli-
cation wisdom of crowds-based algorithms to every possible area of society, to predictions of social destruction in works like *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today’s Internet Is Killing Our Culture.* While all the essays in this book address this theme in some way, some focus on it more than others. The hope for sharing, expression, and the power of new web tools appears strongest in the writings of Chris Anderson, Tim O’Reilly, Jay Rosen, and Clay Shirky. Conversely, C. W. Anderson, Ashley Dawson, Henry Jenkins, and Felix Stalder argue that the unfettered information flow, without the means to control it, turns into a spectacle that does anything but build meaningful political, social, or labor relationships between individuals.

The essays in part 1 provide analyses of the technical and social practices that lay the groundwork for social media. As discussed earlier, Jay Rosen speaks in the voice of “the people formerly known as the audience,” who wish for the media makers to know that they exist and are not going away. In doing so, Rosen highlights the change in audience participation, with is the central shift in social practices; this social shift is enabled by technical shifts that are discussed by Tim O’Reilly. Yochai Benkler theorizes the social practice of sharing, a fundamental requirement for social media. Benkler offers models for what can be shared and asserts that these sharing economies can self-organize the use of these surpluses better than an exchange economy can. Siva Vaidhyanathan charts the cultural influence of the open-source software model, touching on the power of copyrights and alternative licenses, which is discussed at length in the section on the law. Tim O’Reilly describes the software models that have enabled the creation of social media platforms. As described earlier, a change in software-development practices, from isolated desktop application to a collaborative web-based platform, defines Web 2.0. In the collaboratively written essay “What Is Collaboration?,” Adam Hyde, Mike Linksvayer, kanarinka, Marta Peirano, Sissu Tarka, Astra Taylor, Alan Toner, Mushon Zer-Aviv, and I trace the contours and processes of collaboration from the weak associations to the strong bonds. The essay argues that sharing is a necessary precondition for collaboration but that strong collaboration requires intentionality and coordination.

Part 2 addresses how social media changes the social dynamics of its participants. danah boyd weighs the merits of being perpetually connected to a wireless network, and the information overload and responsibility that results from the deluge of information. boyd accepts the negative aspects of being always on in exchange for the positives, as many of us do, though psychologists and neuroscientists are beginning to reach different conclusions. C. W. Anderson looks at journalism’s changing perception of its audience and
how that reflects both journalism’s and the audience’s relationship to democracy. The rise of the algorithmic journalism performed by content farms may satisfy the search-query-based needs of its readership, but it undermines the democratic effect of journalism.

“Lulz” is the term of choice to describe the pleasure of the ends-justify-the-means pranks and humor that pervades chatrooms and image boards. E. Gabriella Coleman traces an alternate genealogy of hackers that does not start at MIT and end with open-source software but, rather, moves from phone phreakers through countercultural politics and ends with “Anonymous,” the lulz-seeking Internet trolls on 4chan’s infamous /b/ board. This alternate history presents a subculture of computer hackers birthed outside the university and invested in politics and transgression. Patrick Davison traces the evolution of the meme from its origins in Richard Dawkins’s writings on evolutionary biology to the fast-track transformations of Internet memes on the anonymous image boards of 4chan. For Davison, the key to the success of Internet memes and their generative nature is the explicit removal of authorship, which he calls the “nonattribution meme.”

In most histories, the Internet began as a self-defense mechanism for communicating during a nuclear war. In the late ’80s and early ’90s it became a haven for academics, geeks, and other subcultures of the command line. By the mid-’90s money and profit had taken over; the dot-com bubble and crash, the current Web 2.0 balloon, and the Great Recession have marked the Internet alternately as a profit machine and an epic failure as such. Though money appears at the edges of many of the essays here as an explicit goal, a constraining factor, or an effect to be eliminated, Chris Anderson’s “The Long Tail” takes it on directly, identifying one of the new business models of online retailers. These retailers stock inventories many times larger than those of brick-and-mortar stores. These long-tail businesses manage to make money off books, records, and other goods that were much too obscure for any previous retailer to stock, leading to a previously unimaginable number of audience choices. On the flip side, recent studies suggest that, though these businesses can profit from selling a very small amount of media objects from each of a very large number of creators, those creators may be worse off in this new system. Other repercussions reverberate from these shifts in what we value and how we value it—including Anderson’s exploration of free (as in beer) services in his book Free! Why $0.00 Is the Future of Business—the exponential growth in the cost of unique objects, and the rise of real economies for virtual goods.

Lawrence Lessig and Fred von Lohmann address the way that the law impacts the creation of social media. Lessig’s essay describes a shift in how
our culture writes, and the way that copyright law is at odds with this shift. Lessig compellingly argues that “writing” has evolved to include sound and moving image but that the copyright law governing writing has not evolved to reflect this cultural shift. This conflict between social practice and legal precedent criminalizes these new forms of expression. Lessig calls for legal reform and for the embrace of the licenses created by Creative Commons, an organization he helped found. Creative Commons licenses allow creators to exercise the rights guaranteed to them under their copyright: instead of “all rights reserved,” these works have “some rights reserved.” This book and all its essays are Creative Commons licensed. Fred von Lohmann approaches this legal conflict by looking at the different way the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) treats these new forms of expression and how that affects their transmission. Existing laws governing non-Internet-based media distribution allow large monetary penalties for breaking “strict liability” copyright law, preventing the distribution of works that relies on fair-use provisions, unless the creator can prove compliance before distribution. The DMCA has a safe-harbor provision that allows sites like YouTube to publish these works and requires them to maintain a mechanism to adjudicate claims by copyright holders after distribution. This has allowed an explosion of online content and has allowed some creators to identify who is not going to sue them, but it has also led to massive removals of media from sites such as YouTube. Fred Benenson and I consider the shifts in ideology and methodology when applying these licenses to cultural works. Benenson looks at the intricacies of applying software-derived free-culture ideology to nonfungible creative works. In arguing that not all cultural works should have the same license, Benenson identifies a key difference between the utilitarian software tools that pioneered these license models and nonfungible works that are not intended to be further modified. Extending this discussion, I present three case studies that explore the failures and successes of applying open-source methodologies to Creative Commons–licensed noncode projects. Though this process takes its cues from software development, the arts and design communities have a different set of challenges in the process of creating peer-produced works.

The creation of a participatory audience foregrounds labor dynamics; when an audience participates in creating the media that it consumes, it links audience dynamics and labor relations and sometimes renders them interchangeable. Though these labor dynamics are more central in social media's production model, they are not new. Henry Jenkins has written extensively about fan culture and the tensions between creative fans and the proprietary
media empires they are fanatical about. In his essay here, which comes from his book *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins articulates some of the pitfalls of fan culture online and the instability of the trust between creative *Star Wars* fans and LucasArts’ wavering support for fan fiction online. Clay Shirky considers the untold possibilities of our coming cognitive surplus. Cognitive surplus is the excess thought power available to society when we convert passive spectatorship into participation in social media. To put this massive capacity in context, the amount of time it has taken to create the entirety of Wikipedia is one hundred million hours, which is equivalent to the amount of time the population of the United States spends watching advertisements on television on any one weekend. Shirky sees this cognitive surplus, released from the drudgery of passive spectatorship, as a force (a *workforce*) that will transform media and society in ways we cannot yet conceive. Conversely, Felix Stalder considers the pitfalls of how our labor accumulates in databases and server farms. Stalder articulates how our labor is often exploited by the “surveillance economy” of analytics software and server logs. Lastly, Ashley Dawson self-reflexively returns us to the very enterprise of this book: academic publishing. Starting from a letter from his editor at University of Michigan Press announcing its digital publication initiative, Dawson asks whether the shift to digitally published scholarship and other forms of computationalism can really provide an escape from the dystopian reality of contemporary academic labor’s reduced budgets, informal labor exacerbated by the asymmetry of power-law relationships, pressures of publishing conglomerates exacted through journal subscriptions, and the outcomes-focused mandate on professors to publish or perish. Dawson does see potential in some initiatives but warns that academics are unprepared for digital transformations. He emphasizes that technology, without changing the social context of its implementation, merely reinforces existing inequalities.

The process by which this book was created could never have happened without the use of social media as a tool for creation. Most of the essays in this volume exist on the Internet in one form or another; they are included here by virtue of their Creative Commons licenses. It is because these works have been licensed with free-culture licenses that I can bring them together in this collection, excerpting a few, editing others for print, and remixing Lessig’s *Remix* talk into a written essay. In other cases, I was able to ask authors to extend shorter blog posts or to codify informal presentations documented by online video. The print form of these digital texts is but one of their transformations, transformations that you, the people formerly known as the audience, are free to continue: it is social media after all.
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NOTES


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