IN CONVENIENCE

JOSHUA NEVES AND MARC STEINBERG

The felt sense that we inhabit a convenience economy and culture is by now widespread. Nested in this understanding are ideas about ease and comfort, perpetually new technologies, and empowered consumers, on the one hand, and growing inequalities and frictions between the speed and exhaustion that convenience engenders, on the other. Popular critics of Big Tech such as Tim Wu name this the 'tyranny of convenience', where the adoption of modern conveniences like the washing machine or the smartphone has the 'ability to make other options unthinkable'.[1] Academic and journalistic assessments of the rise of platforms like Amazon, Netflix, and Uber, but also Meituan, Grab, Jio, LINE, WeChat, Gozem, and Flipkart, among many others, paint a similar portrait. Amazon's conflation of speed with convenience, Sara Jones argues, 'is destroying us'. She adds, 'Someone has to pay for speed, and it will either be the customer or the worker. Amazon, like most companies, decided to shift the cost to workers'.[2] Another study finds that convenience outstrips commodities themselves, noting that viewers subscribe to platforms like Netflix for the 'convenience of on-demand streaming programming'[3] and not because of the rather narrow content offerings. Arjun Appadurai and Neta Alexander similarly note the 'prominent promise of convenience, with its emphasis on immediacy and instant gratification' at the heart of the appeal of both Silicon Valley and Wall Street.[4] This provision of total convenience, comedian Ronny Chieng jokes in his Netflix special,[5] is key to the lure and excess of the American dream and its global cognates: 'How much more convenience can we get?' Convenience is so pervasive that it has become the object of parody.

A striking aspect of such assessments is their focus on speed, the reduction of trouble or work, and ease of access or personal comfort. But they also suggest a surfeit of convenience. A willingness and meritocratic pretense to encourage or require some among us to do the heavy lifting in order to create time for privileged others. This includes gig economy services like: on-demand delivery, shopping, laundry, driving, and much else. This familiar division of labor and social relations is exacerbated by networked devices and organization, which are understood to disrupt prior inconveniences by making them smarter. Yet, while we agree that conveniences involve the social production of inequality, in what follows we argue that ease, time, and technologized efficiency are not sufficient to grasp and critique this shared sense of a divided world. Convenience instead resonates with Frederic Jameson's account of postmodernism as the *cultural logic* of an epoch—a constellation of 'aesthetics, knowl-

1 Tim Wu, 'The Tyranny of Convenience', *The New York Times*, 16 February 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/16/opinion/sunday/tyranny-convenience.html.
2 Sarah Jones, 'Convenience Is Destroying Us', *Intelligencer*, 2 April 2021, https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2021/04/amazons-convenience-is-destroying-us.html. Emily West, *Buy Now: How Amazon Branded Convenience and Normalized Monopoly*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2022.
3 Amanda D. Lotz, *Portals: A Treatise on Internet-Distributed Television*, Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, 2017, p. 30.
4 Arjun Appadurai and Neta Alexander, *Failure*, Medford: Polity Press, 2020, p. 21.
5 Ronny Chieng, *Asian Comedian Destroys America!*, Netflix Comedy Special, 2019.

edge, and political economy'.[6] Paraphrasing Jameson, we might say: 'if [convenience] is a historical phenomenon, then the attempt to conceptualize it in terms of moral or moralizing judgements must finally be identified as a category mistake'.[7] Convenience is a condition we inhabit within contemporary capitalism, and must be submitted to rigorous analysis, historical and conceptual. That even proponents of radical politics assume that convenience will be part of a post-capitalist society, as exemplified by Aaron Bastani's promethean treatise on 'fully automated luxury communism', suggests the relational nature of what we term *in convenience* in this chapter and book.[8] In-convenience bears something of privilege and even boredom, something of the compulsory, and something of the 'predatory inclusion' Tressie McMillan Cottom finds at work in Internet-accelerated racial capitalism. Responding to this condition requires us to think beyond simply *not* clicking 'buy now'.[9]

To say that convenience is a condition is also to underscore its affective dimensions. Like Jameson's account of postmodern 'euphoria', Sianne Ngai's post-Fordist 'zany', or Anna Kornbluh's 'immediacy', convenience is a privileged form of experience under data capitalism, including its platformed iterations. At the economic level, writers such as Nick Srnicek describe platform capitalism as a moment when 'capitalism has turned to data as one way to maintain economic growth and vitality',[10] or where, as *The Economist* puts it, data is the new oil and platforms name 'a new business model, capable of extracting and controlling immense amounts' of it.[11] Convenience is an implied and under-examined user-side driver of this shift, even if it's ultimately folded back into production, creating new demands on workers. Such conveniences come in app-mediated services from food delivery and taxis to therapy and autopay. As commonly noted, these perks come with tradeoffs, such as one's data being tracked for a faster search result. Draper and Turow call our acquiescence to networked surveillance 'digital resignation';[12] we name this relationship to platforms *in convenience*. The state of living in convenience shapes the protocols that make everyday life 'smart', wherein 'each small moment of convenience—be it answering a question, turning on a light, or playing a song—requires a vast planetary network, fueled by the extraction of

6 Nico Baumbach, Damon R. Young, and Genevieve Yue, 'Introduction: For a Political Critique of Culture', *Social Text* 34.2 / 127 (2016): 2.

7 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1991, p. 46.

8 We render the relation 'in convenience' by the hyphenated 'in-convenience' when grammar requires it.

9 West, *Buy Now*, pp. 110-11. West offers an important consideration of this compulsory aspect of convenience, especially in relation to the model of subjectivity she calls the 'served self'. Yet, in our view, her return to consumer activism by way of conclusion, as a presumed counter to the passivity of the served self, assumes a model of the autonomous, consuming, liberal subject that we argue the compulsory nature of 'in convenience' makes untenable.

10 Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, Malden: Polity Press, 2017, p. 6.

11 'The World's Most Valuable Resource is No Longer Oil, but Data', *The Economist*, 6 May 2017, https://www.economist.com/leaders/2017/05/06/the-worlds-most-valuable-resource-is-no-longer-oil-but-data. Given this close relation between data and platforms we use 'platform capitalism' interchangeably with 'data capitalism' in what follows, with the caveat that data capitalism is more capacious in describing a longer set of transformations.

12 Nora A. Draper and Joseph Turow, 'The Corporate Cultivation of Digital Resignation', *New Media and Society* 21.8 (2019): 1824-1839.

non-renewable materials, labor, and data'.[13] In today's platform capitalism, convenience is the often unstated explanation and material organization for why things are as they are; why user-citizens understand data tracking, express delivery, global supply chains, climate-warming energy consumption, rare mineral mining, waste, toxic working conditions, and much else, as a necessary evil, the infrastructure supporting everyday work, leisure, and self-fulfillment.

Our basic argument in this essay is that convenience's consequence stems from its perceived inconsequence—which is significant precisely because of the relationships to inconvenience that it consolidates. Convenience is boring (habitual, just the way things are), imperceptible (like infrastructure, and often *as* infrastructure, it is most noticeable when it fails), or downright embarrassing (we lie about subscriptions to Amazon Prime, for instance). It also exacerbates existing inequalities by further partitioning society. This includes the ways that our relationship to convenience shifts over the course of a day or week inasmuch as we are workers, consumers, or (non)citizens. Drawing out this tension, we approach convenience as a peculiar constellation of service, logistics, and affect that exceeds narrow approaches centered on either political economy or cultural practices and artifacts. Indeed, our aim is to bring discussions of data capitalism more squarely into conversation with everyday calculations and experience. We locate these shifts not in the glamorous industries of high-tech and finance, but instead in examples like home appliances, the convenience store, and the endless Netflix or Tik Tok scroll—examples that ground each of the following sections. With this focus on retail and the ordinary objects and spaces of convenience, we aim to add nuance to recent interventions that emphasize only the most conspicuous forces of networked life and industry.

Convenience has appeared as a chief value under many guises, in many eras; below we account for one such lineage. Contemporary platformed convenience, we suggest, participates in a broader shift to the service economy and its retrofitting by just-in-time manufacturing and distribution, such that all work is reconfigured as part of a service-logistics-affect logic.[14] In what follows, we trace a particular genealogy of the emergence and place of convenience in data capitalism today, focusing on three entangled axes and transitions: (1) timing and individuation via the home appliance during industrial modernity and especially the postwar period; (2) spacing and optimization via retail convenience and the service sector from the 1970s onwards; (3) feeling and logistical form via the platform as enclosure, since the 2000s. Finally, we conclude by observing how the relation of in-convenience is not simply a luxury we can choose to indulge or not; it is the normative condition of life and politics today.

13 Kate Crawford and Vladan Joler, 'Anatomy of an AI System: The Amazon Echo as an Anatomical Map of Human Labor, Data and Planetary Resources', *AI Now Institute and Share Lab* (2018): 3, https://anatomyof.ai.

14 For our approach in what follows, it matters that logistics is taken up by a wide range of fields, from business studies and operations research to geography and to Black studies. For some key texts informing our approach here, see Deborah Cowen, ***The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade***, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014; Ned Rossiter, ***Software, Infrastructure, Labor: A Media Theory of Logistical Nightmares***, New York: Routledge, 2016; Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, ***The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study***, Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013; Kee-hung Lai and T.C. Edwin Cheng, ***Just-in-Time Logistics***, London: Routledge, 2009.

Timing: Home and the Rise of 'Personal Logistics'

Why, we might ask, is convenience so often recognized as a basic value of modernity, associated at once with the fruits of hard work and self-actualization and, at the same time, tied to banality, guilt, cynicism or even desperation: 'the future we all chose, but that nobody seems to want'.[15] Before turning to more recent scholarship about convenience, it's worth remembering etymologies that precede its twentieth century associations with appliances and effortlessness. As Thomas Tierney describes in *The Value of Convenience: A Genealogy of Technical Culture*, prior to the 17th century, understandings of convenience in English remained linked to their Latin roots, indicating a sense of agreement, conformity or harmony; a coming together (as in: to convene). In modernity, this semantic link shifted, such that 'the value of technology in modernity is centered on technology's ability to provide convenience'.[16] What matters here is both the persistence and rupture between convenience as structures of agreement and proximity, on the one hand, and the contemporary provisioning of the individual self and population, on the other. Rather than social harmony, modern convenience is about 'personal comfort or ease'.[17] It is, for Tierney, a process that is always about making life easier; a configuration that spreads from the West to the Rest and assumes a neo-Heideggerian view of technology as inherently dominating nature.

Tellingly, Tierney begins his examination with the modern household: the sphere where 'convenience reigns'.[18] This insight, echoed by later scholarship, also relies on a conceptual shift from *production* to *consumption* as what matters for understanding the work of convenience in technical culture. More than the expansion of this realm, Tierney emphasizes how it 'becomes narrow and pointed', penetrating modern individuals and their values.[19] This narrowing, however, is tied to an entangled expansion of necessity that parallels concerns about modern trespasses into the private domain. Such problems are central to Hannah Arendt's critique of private and public realms in *The Human Condition*, especially her concern that their boundaries are blurred by capitalism and the rise of the social.[20] Two points about convenience and the household are worth emphasizing here. First, as many commentators have noted, that Arendt's distinction necessarily brackets how the overcoming of necessity relies on slavery and rigid gendered divisions, among other violences, is hardly inconsequential. Indeed, this elision remains central to how convenience organizes society. Further, the tension between classical and contemporary formulations suggests a related shift in the imagination of the human body. This distinction moves from understandings of 'ancient necessity [as] primarily concerned with satisfying

15 Colin Horgan, 'The Tyranny of Convenience', *OneZero*, 29 April 2019, https://onezero.medium.com/the-tyranny-of-convenience-2e7fa145ab4.
16 Thomas F. Tierney, *The Value of Convenience: A Genealogy of Technical Culture*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 6.
17 Tierney, *The Value of Convenience*, p. 39.
18 Tierney, *The Value of Convenience*, p. 11.
19 Tierney, *The Value of Convenience*, p. 4.
20 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, trans. Margaret Canovan, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

the *demands* of the body', to a modern preoccupation with 'overcoming [its] *limits*'. If the former stresses basic needs like food, clothing and shelter, the latter seeks to command and reorder the body in order to minimize or eradicate 'inconveniences, obstacles or annoyances'.[21] In other words, convenience, by now, *convenes* us (and the more-than-human world) differently.

In the so-called developed world in the 20th century, the mitigation of inconveniences became the task of labor-saving domestic appliances such as washing machines and electric ranges, televisions and toasters, refrigerators and freezers, that promised convenience by reducing work, stretching time, and providing for new desires. The restructuring of daily rhythms and the reduction of time spent on ordinary tasks is essential to the promise of convenience.[22] In *Comfort, Cleanliness, and Convenience*, Elizabeth Shove shows how prior associations of convenience with ease and the saving of time are, in the latter half of the twentieth century, supplanted by the new 'capacity to shift, juggle and reorder episodes and events'.[23] Here, 'things that are "convenient" are those that enhance peoples' control over the scheduling of activity'.[24] In light of growing temporal pressures and the historical rise of the consumer society, Shove continues:

> contemporary usage relates convenience to the scheduling and co-ordination of people and objects in time and space. Understood in this way convenience is about timing, that is, the ability to shift and juggle obligations and to construct and determine personal schedules. From this point of view, the really important benefit of convenience food is not that it saves time but that it makes it possible to prepare and eat a meal at very short notice.[25]

Convenient devices allow for better management of time. They are not about saving time as such but rather about the ways modern conveniences allow for a *control over the timing of domestic activities*. Timing over time.

The rise of convenience as a value is also synchronous with shifts in labor and productivity over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries. Control over one's time or 'temporal sovereignty' is, as Melissa Gregg writes, 'a historically specific form of freedom'.[26] This freedom is deeply enmeshed with shifts in work time and place, aligning with the rise of the neoliberal subject who must manage themselves and take a new responsibility

---

21 Tierney, *The Value of Convenience*, p. 30.

22 This promise was often structured around women's work in the home. And yet these new conveniences, as Ruth Cowan points out, often resulted in 'more work for mother'. See Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*, New York: Basic Books, 1983.

23 Elizabeth Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: The Social Organization of Normality*, Oxford: Berg, 2003, p. 170.

24 Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience*, p. 170.

25 Shove, *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience*, p. 171.

26 Melissa Gregg, *Counterproductive: A Brief History of Time Management*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, p. 7.

for their temporal resources. Gregg calls attention to two aspects of this shift that help draw out the implications of timing. First, she tracks how practices of time-management emerge not only from the default sites of workplace efficiency—the office and factory—but also, crucially, from the management of the home. This is suggestive of a longer history of 'women's role as managers and efficiency engineers' that remains vital to the ways that home economics feed into models of efficiency.[27] Convenience's facilitation of time management parallels, we note, the flexibilization of work that begins with the postwar restructuring of women's employment on a temporary or contingent basis (e.g. in the US and Japan), suggesting a prehistory of the gig economy's destructive flexibilization of labor, which is so often framed as convenient for workers. Second, these shifts drive an emergent sense of timing that Gregg calls a 'new kind of *personal logistics*'.[28] Amidst the rise of new forms of precarious work, the temporalities of convenience also shift from the household to become services and service jobs, including those now provided by companies like Amazon and UberEats. This is to link the gigification of labor and the flexibilization of work schedules to contemporary habits, aspirations, and bodily norms.

Convenience, in other words, is not equally available to all. The rise of timing and personal logistics relies on, indeed generates, peculiar forms of social untimeliness. Put simply, convenience is produced by inconvenience—a term that needs to be re-operationalized to capture its present purchase as much more than minor discomfort or frustrating inefficiency; signifying social inequity, exploitation, and oppression. Sarah Sharma makes this point sharply in *In the Meantime*. There she interrogates the myth of the culture of speed, pointing to how speed is unevenly distributed and inhabited by those who labor to create it, including taxi drivers who must wait in their cars at the airport for hours to produce the sense of timeliness and convenience for those who can afford it.[29]

To put it in Shove's terms, 'scheduling and co-ordination of people and objects in time and space' relies on complex inconveniences that extend far beyond appliances or current fears of automation. It also anticipates the increasing emphasis on scheduling associated with the shift to 'on-demand' services, hybrid work, and so on, wherein the on-demand is itself an iteration of the paradigm of convenience as a matter of scheduling and timing of activities.

Spacing: The Convenience Store

Beyond timing, platformed convenience relies on a logistical mastery of space and *spacing*. The convenience store, especially in its development in Japan from the 1970s to the present and subsequent re-exportation around the world from the 1980s onwards, is, in our view, an emblematic example of this spatialization of convenience.

---

27 Gregg, Counterproductive, p. 34.

28 Gregg, *Counterproductive*, p. 129 (emphasis ours). An important work that engages with QR codes and their facilitation of 'convenient efficiency', also engaging with the history of productivity, is Dang Nguyen, 'Convenient efficiency: A media genealogy of QR codes', *New Media & Society* (2022): 1-21.

29 Sarah Sharma, *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2014, p. 56.

While first established in the US South, in Texas, in the 1930s, what became 7-Eleven established the convenience store format that would have its heyday in the US in the 1960s. This attracted the interest of both large Japanese retailers and the Japanese government, both captivated by the idea of rationalizing retail and reorganizing under a single franchise banner the many small stores across Japan. Over the 1980s and into the 1990s, the Japanese convenience store chains overtook their US models to become the cutting edge of spatialized convenience. Hence, global chains like 7-Eleven offer a pre-history of logistically enabled forms of convenience that transform and intensify the time-centered approaches noted above. They continue to influence the present in significant ways, focusing our attention on ordinary sites and experiences of convenience that both condition and are often overlooked by digital and platform studies. 7-Eleven, among similar examples, also reminds us of the longer histories of both retail and automobile manufacture (a precursor to platform capitalism),[30] as well as the continued economic and social impact of service- and logistics-driven 'lean' management techniques that integrate retail 'store operations, product development, distribution and information systems'.[31] As such, the global-Japanese convenience store is our point of departure. To focus on the Japanese convenience store means emphasizing *franchises* as a crucial origin in the consolidation of convenience culture.[32]

The Japanese convenience store impacts retail convenience worldwide, from East and Southeast Asia to the North American 7-Eleven stores remodeled to resemble their Japanese counterparts (Figure 1). Its mundane amplification of convenience as a structure of experience serves as a model for understanding the emergence of platforms like Alibaba and Amazon, iQiyi and Netflix. A focus on retail allows us to emphasize the regular, repeat visits that have as much of a role in the transformation of habits and expectations of convenience as the more rarefied platforms and e-commerce sites that are touted as their replacements. The convenience store makes visible a shift from home appliances to neighborhood services as a locus of convenience, which is in turn part of a larger transformation of manufacture in the image of the service sector.[33] If approaches to timing in the previous section suggest a shift in attention from production to consumption, our interest here is the way that service industries fuel an emergent organizational sphere—and a production of distribution—that brings into view a new set of concerns. Notably, the place of convenience shifts from the domestic sphere to public and semi-private spaces, and with a corresponding shift of emphasis *from timing to spacing* as convenience's crucial offering.

---

30 Marc Steinberg, 'From Automobile Capitalism to Platform Capitalism: Toyotism as a Prehistory of Digital Platforms', *Organization Studies* 43.7 (2022): 1069-1090.

31 David Marutschke, *Continuous Improvement Strategies: Japanese Convenience Store Systems*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 23.

32 This, of course, is not to forget about the many informal corner stores (from the bodega to the dépanneur) or automobile-centric gas stations that are also part of this story but beyond the scope of this chapter.

33 Rutvica Andrijasevic, et al., *Media and Management*, Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2021.

Figure 1: Map of 7-Eleven stores worldwide as of January 2020. 7-Eleven Inc., '7-Eleven is 70,000 Stores Strong', PR Newswire, 23 January 2020, https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/7-eleven-is-70-000-stores-strong-300992154.html.

Consider the global career of 7-Eleven, which now operates 71,000 stores around the world, only 9300 of which are in the United States.[34] Founded in the United States in 1927, it was imported to Japan in 1973, with the first store launched in 1974. 7-Eleven played a key role in reinventing the convenience store in Japan alongside chains like Lawson and Family Mart. By the 1980s, the renovated Japanese convenience store model was re-exported around the world, particularly within East Asia, but also to the US and European markets. The chain's success led 7-Eleven Japan's parent company to purchase most of the Southland Corporation in 1991, making it a fully owned subsidiary of the Japanese firm in 2005. With this takeover of the original US company, the ascendancy of the Japanese convenience model was complete. At the heart of its success was a new mode of spatial organization that reaches far beyond the store itself.

This spatial organization starts with the ubiquity of convenience stores in Japan, with over 50,000 outlets nationwide that receive an estimated 16.7 billion visits per year.[35] Wherever they are located, they are hubs of daily life, providing fresh prepared foods and a variety of basic amenities, as well as array of services including, as Marutschke enumerates, 'bank, postal and delivery services, acting as ticket agents, accepting utility payments and even handling laundry, home cleaning services, printing services, garbage pick-up tickets and online shopping'.[36] Fresh foods account for both a large amount of sales and a large proportion of the chains' product devel-

34 Ron Chang, '7-Eleven Opens 71,100th Store in S. Korea', *TBS*, 9 July 2020, http://tbs.seoul.kr/eFm/newsView.do?typ_800=J&idx_800=3395420&seq_800=20387997. 7-Eleven is the largest convenience store operator in the world by far. Japanese FamilyMart, with a large footprint in Japan and elsewhere in Asia, comes in second place with around 24,000 stores, followed by Mexican OXXO. Of the top 10 chains worldwide, it is significant that Japanese-owned chains account for 3 of the top 5 and 4 of the top 10.

35 Mieko Shirai, Takeshi Kojima, and Masashi Oguri, 'Konbini Wo Kagaku Suru' (Doing the Science of Convenience Stores), *Shūkan Diamond (Diamond Weekly)*, 29 October 2016, 28.

36 Marutschke, *Continuous Improvement Strategies*, p. 5.

opment strategies.[37] Because of their small footprints and prepared fresh food sales, stores receive at least 7-10 deliveries per day,[38] and their model and margins require an immense circulation of goods and people into and out of the store. This distribution is known as logistics. Most discussions of logistics focus on the transformations in production they enable, with 'transportation conceptualized as a vital element of production systems rather than a separate domain or the residual act of distributing commodities after production'.[39] 7-Eleven stores, among others, give further texture to this perspective by focusing on how distribution not only transforms production but the very idea and experience of convenience.

A signal, if under-theorized, aspect of convenience today is hence the reorganization of space or spacing. Spacing calls attention to the positioning of a store in a neighborhood or city, its proximity to distribution hubs, the management of logistical networks supplying just-in-time delivery of fresh foods and inventory, as well as the layout and design of stores for ease of customer use. The aspects of convenience crucial to 7-Eleven all speak to a conjugation of timing with spacing: long opening hours; proximity of stores to consumers; the ability to 'buy all essential goods in just one place'; and 'quick shopping' wherein the 'layout of the store is ideal for customers to locate their required products easily'.[40] Convenience is treated as a logistical problem—a problem of optimizing distribution in real time.[41] Spacing is, then, always also about timing. Inspired by the Toyota Production System and its emphasis on just-in-time delivery (which has always been about the optimizing of space via as-needed delivery of auto parts),[42] 7-Eleven and other convenience stores in Japan elaborated the principles of auto production into retail empires. Dependent not upon a network model of infinite connectability, the convenience store's *convenience* is a kind of proto-platform premised upon proprietary logistical and information systems, point-to-point transportation services, total coordination of circulation of people and things, and the enclosure of the store space nested within the larger enclosure of the logistical system itself: the 7-Eleven franchise.

Like Amazon, Alibaba, or Walmart, 7-Eleven is a logistics company as much or more than a retail enterprise.[43] It focuses on the planning of stores, the development and procuring of mer-

---

37 Tai Negō and Kyōichi Hiraki, *Konbini Gyōkai No Dōkō to Karakuri Ga Yoku Wakaru Hon (A Book for Really Understanding the Trends and Mechanisms of the Convenience Store Industry)*, Tokyo: Shuwa Shisutemu, 2015, p. 122.

38 Akira Ishikawa and Tai Nejo, *The Success of 7-Eleven Japan: Discovering the Secrets of the World's Best-Run Convenience Chain Stores*, Singapore: World Scientific, 2002, p. 55.

39 Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics*, p. 40.

40 Ishikawa and Nejo, *The Success of 7-Eleven Japan*, p. 14.

41 As Halpern and Mitchell's account of 'smartness' teaches us, optimization is a future-oriented, open-ended, never-ending process; one that, like convenience, relies on a particular epistemology of smartness. Orit Halpern and Robert Mitchell, *The Smartness Mandate*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2023.

42 Shinji Naruo and Sorin George Toma, 'From Toyota Production System to Lean Retailing. Lessons from Seven-Eleven Japan', in Jan Olhager and Fredrik Persson (eds) *Advances in Production Management Systems*, New York: Springer, 2007, pp. 387-395.

43 Jesse LeCavalier quotes a Walmart manager making a similar point: 'The misconception is that we're in the retail business, [but really] we're in the distribution business'. See Jesse LeCavalier, *The Rule of Logistics: Walmart and the Architecture of Fulfillment*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016, p. 11. On Amazon and logistics, see Armin Beverungen, 'Remote Control. Algorithmic Management of

chandise, and most especially the delivery of this merchandise to its owner-operated stores. The emphasis on distribution affects the very organization of stores within city space, with store locations planned according to delivery routes to ensure savings on delivery costs and times. The centrality of logistics and optimization also determines the layout of stores. Like Walmart, convenience stores are designed to ensure that consumers circulate as easily as the daily deliveries that restock them. Store layout is itself optimized for legibility. All stores, even across chains, adopt a familiar inverted 'C' layout, with magazines at the entrance, drinks at the back, and fresh foods across from the entrance near the cash register. While store products change every year, the layout is constant over decades.[44] As a result, the average consumer spends less than three minutes in a convenience store. Convenience fades into the background as a vague feeling, with muscle memory and habit guiding users as they shop.

Convenience stores are themselves a response to both the expansion of work hours and the destructuring of work routines in recent decades. Consider that the name 7-Eleven, which clearly states the original store hours, is already anachronistic. Its hours have long since extended to meet the demands of a 24/7 lifestyle. The stores both rely on part time and temp workers for staffing and also cater to the irregularities of the increasingly precarious workforce that makes up its consumer base.[45] 'Starting in the latter half of the 1990s', Gavin Whitelaw notes, convenience stores 'have been referred to as "life infrastructure" (*seikatsu infura*), akin to critical public services such as water, gas, and electricity'.[46] 7-Eleven even brands itself as an infrastructure: 'Electricity, gas, water, and 7-Eleven', reads the company's landing page. This recognition of *convenience* as infrastructural to daily life is crucial to our understanding of the timing and spacing of the present, but also asks new questions about convenience as a cultural and logistical form.

Figure 2: Convenience stores are widely associated with immigrant labor in North America and Europe, as captured in the Toronto-based sitcom, Kim's Convenience. The production itself was marred by 'diversity issues, unfair pay and racist storylines'.[47] Promotional material from the television show.

Circulation at Amazon', in Marcus Burkhardt, Mary Shnayien, and Katja Grashöfer (eds) *Explorations in Digital Cultures*, Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2021, pp. 5-18.

44 Shirai, Kojima, and Oguri, 'Konbini Wo Kagaku Suru', 32.

45 Ishikawa and Nejo, *The Success of 7-Eleven Japan*, p. 5.

46 Gavin H. Whitelaw, 'Konbini-Nation', in Katarzyna J. Cwiertka and Ewa Machotka (eds) *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan*, p. 79.

47 Chris Gardner, ''Kim's Convenience' Stars Simu Liu and Jean Yoon Open Up on "Painful" Lack

Feeling: Convenience as Logistical Form

If the prior section understands convenience as a fusing of timing and spacing—which together define logistics—our interest here is to examine convenience as a cultural and aesthetic form. That is, a mode of address, an affect, a feeling, and a judgment about our encounters with an accelerating techno-economic world. The convenience store offers one suggestive genealogy of this contemporary sensorium. A bright white cube with unchanging hours, recognizable design and reliable offerings, it is peculiarly antiseptic and homey. In Japan, it is the rare place where one can go in pajamas. And yet despite this, store space is also distinctly depersonalized. The habitual *irasshaimase* greeting called out to customers as they enter the store—a 'Welcome' that is decidedly not a 'Hello'—is distance-producing and unidirectional. Here the banality of convenience as a structure of feeling or experience begins to come into view. It is at once a social infrastructure and, at the same time, a kind of calculated un-care (like 'contactless' delivery) that drives immaterial and affective labor, or what we call *logistical form*. This phrase points to the ways cultural forms are themselves determined by logistical systems under platform capitalism, shifting the very place of analysis from the form of a content to the form of distributed experience.

Our discussion of logistical form draws inspiration from Sianne Ngai's crucial expansion and reformulation of aesthetic categories with particular attention to minor or compromised aesthetics. No longer limited to purified or sublime encounters, Ngai suggests that in late capitalism aesthetics become 'part of the texture of everyday social life'.[48] In particular, she focuses on a set of aesthetic categories or feelings like the zany, the cute, the interesting, and more recently, the gimmick. These categories, she argues, are two-sided and mediated, including 'the judgment we utter, a way of speaking; the form we perceive, a way of seeing' and are 'sutured by affect into a spontaneous experience'.[49] Put simply, an aesthetic category is composed of a felt sensation and a verbal response that elicits some agreement from one's interlocutor. At the same time, these minor aesthetics tend not to move observers much, and are instead characterized by a 'deficit of power'.[50] This last point is key to Ngai's intervention: aesthetic categories are *interested* and are deeply informed by economic processes; classical disinterest is displaced by ordinary attention and proximity.[51] In many respects, convenience foregrounds the weakness and banality described in Ngai's aesthetic categories, its very ordinariness shaped by the dulling effects of social standardization and expanded calculation. This includes conflicting senses of ease and exhaustion, comfort and cynicism, mundane habitation and righteous condemnation.

of Diversity, "Overtly Racist" Storylines', *The Hollywood Reporter*, 6 June 2021, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/kims-convenience-netflix-cancelation-1234963806/.

48 Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012, p. 29.

49 Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020, p. 1.

50 Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, p. 18.

51 Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, p. 27.

Yet as we suggest in what follows, if convenience starts as an aesthetic category—a punctual, momentary experience that may be followed by the declaration: 'this is so convenient'—it also very often recedes into the calculative background. It becomes an ambient feeling. In this way convenience offers something like Brian Massumi's early account of fear as an affect: not an emotion but rather '*the objectivity of the subjective under late capitalism*'.[52] Convenience undergoes a phase shift from being a momentary experience ('this is convenient') to being an underlying, ongoing structure of feeling or a cultural logic. Here we are interested in both the punctuality of convenience as an aesthetic category and the way in which it becomes a cultural and economic background—feeling and form. Here we might recall Shove's point, above: that the production of conveniences is never finished. Once habituated to a convenience, lives become dependent on it, expectations are heighted, and new conveniences must be invented to allow us to cope with the increased temporal pressures put on all of us. In this sense, the convenient is also tied to Massumi's account of fear—the fear of falling behind, or of falling out of time in late capitalism.

Murata Sayaka's award-winning novel *Convenience Store Woman* (*Konbini ningen*) offers one point of departure for understanding convenience as an aesthetic or vernacular style in the sense Ngai describes. The novel opens:

> *A convenience store is a world of sound. From the tinkle of the door chime to the voices of TV celebrities advertising new products over the in-store cable network, to the calls of the store workers, the beeps of the bar code scanner, the rustle of customers picking up items and placing them in baskets, and the clacking of heels walking around the store. It all blends into the convenience store sound that ceaselessly caresses my eardrums.*[53]

Told from the first-person perspective of a shop employee, the framing description both illuminates the convenience store's sensorium as well as its dependable conventions and address. Working there is a bodily experience, a set of routines embedded and embodied as habits: 'Speed is of the essence, and I barely use my head as the rules ingrained in me issue instructions directly to my body'.[54] Tired of struggling with social cues and implied norms in the outside world, for example, the narrator is relieved to find a place where all behaviors and social interactions are prescribed by management—allowing her to 'transform into the homogeneous being known as the convenience store worker'.[55] She finds comfort in its peculiar repetitions: 'we had greeted the same morning 6,607 times'.[56] In this way, the novel is a strange ode to the standardization and social legibility that the convenience store as a life infrastructure provides. But it also suggests that convenience is produced through routine, even cold intimacy. This allows customers to experience each store as the same,

52 Brian Massumi, 'Everywhere You Want to Be: Introduction to Fear', in Brian Massumi (ed) *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, p. 12.

53 Sayaka Murata, *Convenience Store Woman*, trans. Ginny Tapley Takemori, New York: Grove Atlantic, 2018, p. 1.

54 Murata, *Convenience Store Woman*, p. 2.

55 Murata, *Convenience Store Woman*, p. 16.

56 Murata, *Convenience Store Woman*, p. 73.

and to navigate them as efficiently as the store workers trained to recognize their most minute gestures, if not to learn their names. Like the soundscape, bright fluorescent lights, and familiar layout, the feeling of convenience suggests the inverse of anxiety or uncertainty: it is habitual, reliable, efficient.

While Murata's novel offers an important aperture, the focus on the convenience store as distribution network above and the platform in what follows necessitates a methodological expansion. Understanding logistical form requires that we look beyond interfaces of consumption and discrete modernist texts or works of art, like the novel, film, or video game.[57] Here we build on Patrick Jagoda's engagement with network aesthetics, which both provocatively theorizes the emergent 'sensibilities of distribution' tied to the rise of the internet, among other network imaginaries, and yet takes as its evidence 'artworks that experiment with network aesthetics' rather than everyday logistical space or affective relations.[58] At stake here are the very parameters for what constitutes the ordinary, including its spatial, temporal and sensory form or arrangement, and their relations to critique. The point is not that everyday sites or texts are somehow unmediated, or that we ignore novels or artworks, but rather, by focusing only on particular kinds of mediation—and the familiar or privileged objects of film and media studies—we fail to appreciate what is distinct about the feeling of convenience, and platform aesthetics more generally. More to the point: logistical form suggests that existing understandings of late capitalism and network cultures are out of sync with our present challenges and current configurations of logistically-informed platform capitalism in consequential ways that a grappling with convenience brings into view.

This is to underscore an alternate history of the platform—traced through service, logistics and retail, rather than histories of cybernetics, TV networks, net art and social networks—and calls into question media studies' continued fascination with particular network diagrams and aesthetics. What matters here is that while actual and imaginary networks may take many forms, received understandings have sedimented into inert images and interventions. This includes the persistent fascination with distributed networks, web 2.0, and the residual claims of cyberspace, as well as the influence of certain critical responses like Deleuze's 'control society' or Jameson's 'cognitive mapping', including the latter's claim that the complexity of the world system overwhelms our sensorium, making it difficult if not impossible to grasp its totality and prepare as political actors. Our aim is to hold onto these problems while shifting attention away from the infinite network, the rhizome, and the fetish of (dis)connectivity, and toward the platform's dominant logic of standardization, habituation, and enclosure. That these platform logics are deeply bound up with their modes of value creation and political economy, should also remain top of mind.

The idea that platforms standardize and enclose is hardly novel. Many scholars have noted this tendency and discussed its impact on existing understandings of the internet, its material

---

57 A break with this focus on discrete texts separates our consideration here from Ngai's otherwise generative approach to everyday aesthetics.
58 Patrick Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, pp. 18-19.

form and everyday practices.[59] The present emphasis includes Joss Hands' claim that '[t]he Internet is vanishing'. He continues, 'as its ubiquity increases, it has also become less and less visible in the production and experiences of network culture. Indeed, many of the operations that used to typify the Internet are now funneled through so-called "platforms"'.[60] Drawing on such typical accounts, our argument here is that, contrary to familiar assumptions, *platform enclosures operate by standardizing the experience or feeling of convenience.* They also do so to explicitly economic ends; enclosure is a means of value creation. Following on the 19th century standardization of time, and the 20th century standardization of space,[61] we argue that 21st century standardization takes feeling, experience, and affect as its object.[62] The implications of this for our aesthetic sensibilities and political orientations are manifold.

If the rise of the convenience store offers one example of how distribution, countability, and calculation transforms everyday experience—constituting a life infrastructure—the rise of Netflix, among other video platforms (from Showmax to Douying/Tik Tok), offers an instructive example of how they change culture. Growing out of a landscape of video shaped by brick-and-mortar VHS and DVD rental stores, Netflix, founded in 1997, initially distinguished itself with its online catalogue, flat rate subscriptions, and DVD-by-mail service, before launching its streaming services in 2007. The company can both be understood to emerge from the logistical space of the convenience store (being a distribution firm much like 7-Eleven), and to amplify its material and affective transformations. Despite its shift into streaming and its investment in producing or licensing so-called Netflix Originals, what remains constant from its days as a DVD distributor is both its interface and its concern with distribution. This very shift is itself narrated in terms of the augmented provision of convenience, wherein the 'collapse of Netflix's [DVD] browsing interface into a viewing interface removed even the trip from the computer to the mailbox'.[63] While too easily framed in terms of the laziness critics of convenience decry, this should be viewed as a persistent focus on distribution over content, and the prioritizing of convenience as a cultural form or structure of experience.

Consider the suggestion that people subscribe to Netflix for the convenience it offers rather than its small, and by some accounts, shrinking content catalog. This simple observation, familiar to users through the experience of endlessly scrolling or 'watching' the site's interface, only to find the same titles repeated in different categories, brings into focus a key change associated with logistical form. Logistics is the primary emphasis of Netflix from its mailed-DVD days to its 'Netflix Originals'. And while its programming remains important, we take Ed Finn's position that '[r]eading Netflix as a series of algorithms, interfaces, and discourses is

59 The enclosure of the internet is actually ongoing, growing out of 1990s 'walled gardens' like AOL and i-mode. Marc Steinberg, *The Platform Economy: How Japan Transformed the Commercial Internet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019.

60 Joss Hands, 'Introduction: Politics, Power and 'Platformativity'', *Culture Machine* 14 (2013): 1.

61 Nigel Thrift, *Knowing Capitalism*, London: Sage, 2005.

62 Joshua Neves, 'Social Media and the Social Question: Speculations on Risk Media Society', in Bhaskar Sarkar and Bishnupriya Ghosh (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Media and Risk*, New York: Routledge, 2020, pp. 347-361.

63 Colin Jon Mark Crawford, *Netflix's Speculative Fictions: Financializing Platform Television*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021, p. 48.

far more instructive for understanding its role as a culture machine than reading the cultural products produced by the system'.[64] To this we might add distribution systems. Netflix videos load instantaneously because of its proprietary content delivery network, 'which stores video and audio content in servers located close to end users'.[65] This network also transforms the very nature of content by gathering viewing data at a scale hitherto unimaginable in the network TV era, and customizing content based on viewing habits. Patterns of distribution hence work back into content. Standardization and calculability are here crystalized as a set of generic codes, including some '76,897 genres' identified by Netflix, many 'still waiting for content'.[66] This generic quality across categorical differences is captured in a statement by a former Vice President of product engineering: 'Netflix seeks the most efficient content. Efficient here meaning content that will achieve the maximum happiness per dollar spent'.[67] Here we come close to a definition of logistical form: calculation, standardization, and the primacy of distribution animate Netflix, among many other platforms, as a particular kind of culture machine. Companies like Netflix hence both expand the discourse and offerings of personal logistics, noted above, and transform this individuating tendency into a widely *shared* form of logistical experience.

Streaming platforms like Netflix now account for a large percentage of global internet bandwidth,[68] and signal an intensification of what Raymond Williams' called 'mobile privatization' to describe a new way of living in post-war industrial nations that was 'at-once mobile and home-centered'.[69] In subsequent years, Williams' observation was intensified by expanding capacities for flexible distribution, from the Walkman to the smartphone, now the center of on-demand cultures especially in the Global South. Platformed convenience now both permeates domestic life in new and old ways, and signals a diffusion of mediation. As one recent article puts it, 'Home is where your Netflix is'.[70] In this sense, global streaming services are neither domestic nor public technologies but rather organize and permeate sociality on a planetary scale. This is also to build on Thomas Lamarre's claim, itself drawing on Williams, that distribution, far from being neutral or simply secondary to production, is itself productive and creates new formal and sensorial relations. It 'entails a sense of affective possession' that emerges 'in conjunction with the mapping of the transmedial onto a geopolitical domain'.[71]

Beyond distribution capacities or infrastructures, in other words, the production of distribution demonstrates novel aspects of the platform economy, which, like Jameson's *cultural logic*, may help us to apprehend the work of form and feeling under data capitalism. Put simply,

64 Ed Finn, *What Algorithms Want: Imagination in the Age of Computing*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2017, p. 103.
65 Ramon Lobato, *Netflix Nations: The Geography of Digital Distribution*, New York: NYU Press, 2019, p. 94.
66 Finn, *What Algorithms Want*, p. 94.
67 Finn, *What Algorithms Want*, p. 108.
68 Lobato, *Netflix Nations*, p. 88.
69 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 18.
70 Barbara Maly-Bowie, ''Home is where your Netflix is' – From Mobile Privatization to Private Mobilization', *Literary Geographies* 5.2 (2019): 216-233.
71 Thomas Lamarre, 'Regional TV: Affective Media Geographies', *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 2.1-2 (2015): 94.

ordinary experience is reorganized and becomes newly logistical. Lamarre's emphasis is on the creation of affective media geographies—a pre-personal feeling of being-in-common that anchors experience into zones of affiliation that precede and exceed physical geography (like the fandoms of *Hana yori dango* or BTS). By contrast, the affective sense produced by the distributive systems of Netflix—not to mention WeChat, Grab, Doordash, etc.—is one of convenience. Like many platforms, this feeling starts as a conscious experience, or aesthetic judgment: the novelty of viewing at whim from the content library available *is convenient*.

But this immediate aesthetic experience quickly shifts to the background or default. Further, as video stores have long since disappeared in most cities, and pirate networks become increasingly specialized and difficult to access, the default of media experience becomes compulsorily convenient. Convenience moves from being a punctual, conscious feeling—that which is felt when one first clicks on a Netflix title and a video begins to load—to being infrastructural to experience in toto. As Anna Kornbluh summarizes the style of too late capitalism: 'immediacy swallows everything'.[72] For many there is no alternative to home streaming, just as one cannot request 10-day Amazon delivery rather than 2-day, 1-day, or 1-hour, or whatever the standard of convenience may now be. Convenience stops being a demand consumers place on platforms, a *content* of experience as many frame it,[73] and becomes instead a demand on consumers placed by platforms. The experience of this logistical sensorium is one of in-convenience. In-convenience names the very *form* or *atmosphere* of platformed experience, at least in an era when convenience is the default timing, spacing, and feeling of the world. If platforms enclose the web, *the subjective feeling of inhabiting this enclosure is one of in-convenience*. To paraphrase Massumi, it is the objectivity of the subjective in platform capitalism. This may lead us to ask not only *what* is convenient, but *when* is convenience perceived as such and when is it merely the infrastructure or the 'affective surround' of life today?[74]

Like the convenience store, whose experience of convenience is predicated on its becoming a social infrastructure or habitual encounter, platforms produce convenience as a technologized background. What we have called logistical form is generated by computational distribution and an emergent logic of standardization, ease, and reliability that constitutes the vague feeling of platform capitalism itself. It is a structuring of experience based on the potential for an endless accounting and reorganization of time, space, and sensation. It signals the porousness of *what* is home, *when* is public, and *where* the feeling of convenience mediates and shifts these categories. Acknowledging that distribution produces so much more than the movement of people and things—and instead *moves* the very capacities to sense or feel—means understanding that what logistical systems like convenience stores, Netflix, and Amazon create is a particular distribution of convenience. Indeed, if platform capitalism were to have an aesthetic category, it would be: *the convenient*. Convenience is part of the total

72 Anna Kornbluh, *Immediacy: or, the Style of Too Late Capitalism*, London: Verso, 2024, p. 9.

73 Robert M. Pallitto, *Bargaining with the Machine: Technology, Surveillance, and the Social Contract*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020.

74 Brian Massumi, 'Fear (The Spectrum Said)', *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 13.1 (Spring 2005): 41.

aestheticization of life in late capitalism, at once immediate and infrastructural. While such experiences no doubt differ across platforms—including home delivery (Amazon, Alibaba, Flipkart, Rakuten), personal mobility (Uber, Didi), video delivery (Netflix, Hotstar, Tudou), super apps (WeChat, LINE, Grab), and social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok)—they produce and are produced by the experience of convenience. To take this argument one step further: *platforms sell convenience, not products*.

In Convenience: The Cultural Logic of Platforms

Convenience names the normative timing, spacing, and feeling of data capitalism. It is also a relational concept: what we term *in convenience* in our title. Our interest here is less to reiterate the claim that contemporary conveniences rely on and generate deep inconveniences, though that is certainly the case. Instead, in convenience describes a sensorium shored up by smartphones, logistics, and a swelling service sector that shapes the charm and demands of the present. It is how the world shows up, forms the boundaries of what is possible, and establishes new thresholds for living and working (recall that gig work was initially presented as convenient for the worker). In this context, we both want to take seriously the popular recognition of convenience's explanatory power—that we inhabit a convenience culture and economy; that convenience is killing us; etc.—and challenge the assumption that it can be explained away as mere laziness, or a problem of desire or ideology.[75] Convenience, we have begun to sketch in this essay, is not simply a consumer choice or an indulgence that can be shirked by putting down one's phone or by purchasing a new green product. It is experience, datafied. Building on this and by way of conclusion, we suggest three ways the above account of convenience requires us to reshape our approach to digital convenience and contemporary critique.

First, convenience is the ground of politics today. It is a lure to a kind of living, a call to life, and beyond this the background environment of what Peter Sloterdijk has called *pampering*, a form of living in a 'gigantic hothouse of relaxation' that he associates with the welfare state, a 'relieving process' that only becomes visible in 'the age of the radical de-scarcification of goods'.[76] Sloterdijk's reactionary politics and framing of the Global North as the norm of experience aside, his treatment of capitalism from the angle of consumption is helpful as it acknowledges the crucial place of convenience (as a kind of pampering; and a *living inside*). Further, it relies on the promise that 'comfort and convenience will never stop flowing and growing'.[77] Inhabiting convenience has also become part of the promise of platformization; in Kenya or India as much as the United States or Japan—perhaps more so as these are often the test beds for new kinds of digital convenience; what Orit Halpern and Robert Mitchell call the 'smartness mandate'.[78] Such presumptions have become the background to radical politics today, which are sometimes themselves informed by fantasies of *anti-capitalism without*

75 For an account of Amazon Go stores via ideology critique, see Jenny Huberman, 'Amazon Go, Surveillance Capitalism, and the Ideology of Convenience', *Economic Anthropology* 8 (2021): 337-349.

76 Peter Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital: For a Philosophical Theory of Globalization*, trans. Wieland Hoban, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013, p. 171, p. 212.

77 Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital*, p. 171.

78 Orit Halpern and Robert Mitchell, *The Smartness Mandate*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2023.

inconveniences. Even: convenience communism. Such is the undertone of works like *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* among other visions of automated post-scarcity or post-work politics.[79] That critiques of these works underscore the simple fact that automation is powered by millions of laborers working as Mechanical Turks, 'human-as-a-service',[80] or a 'surrogate humanity',[81] among other forms of alienation, often in the Global South, speaks to the relation 'in convenience' we highlight here. What's required is a rethinking of how convenience transforms *work,* alongside leisure and consumption, and shapes emergent aspirational horizons. While we have focused on consumption and distribution here—and a genealogy linking the convenience store and streaming platforms—a more triangular approach to convenience requires bringing these observations to bear on the productivity softwares and work cultures that *also* presume convenient lifeworlds.

Second, this also means recognizing how convenience as we unfold it here pushes us to rethink the descriptions and models of politics we inherit from critical theory and media studies, among other fields. The network, the unrepresentability of transnational capital, cognitive mapping, surveillance capitalism, and the like, may reach certain limits as they jostle against supply chains, logistical form, and platformed affect. Enclosure as border displaces the network as utopia guiding our methods and politics. This is implicitly recognized in platform studies's tendency to undertake close analyses of a single platform, whether Instagram, Twitch, or Twitter. These studies recognize that there is no longer a network, there are only segregated platforms or homophilic worlds, each of which operate with their own sets of policies, politics, resistances, and technocultures.[82] If networks signaled open borders, global interconnection, and presumptions about the movement of goods, information, and people, platforms signal closure, national boundaries, geoblocking, redlining, the return of the locked-in model of the internet, and global delinking. To these, we hope to offer a productive counterpoint, suggesting that convenience allows us to think across platforms, across sectors (like retail and streaming), and, most crucially, across geographies.

Third, convenience operates through inclusion and exclusion; animating a particular distribution of in-convenience. Convenience is not only produced by exploited, abandoned and inconvenienced workers and groups, but constitutes a kind of threshold for legitimately inhabiting society and its benefits. This was devastatingly captured during the COVID-19 pandemic, when employees at firms like Amazon and Meituan were classified in many jurisdictions as essential workers. Ordering via online services was revalued from convenience to necessity, and indeed civic duty.[83] The racialization and economic marginalization of necessary workers—workers in inconvenience—reminds us of Tressie McMillan Cottom's call for a

79 Aaron Bastani, *Fully Automated Luxury Communism*, London: Verso, 2019.

80 Phil Jones, *Work without the Worker: Labour in the Age of Platform Capitalism*, London: Verso, 2021.

81 Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora, *Surrogate Humanity: Race, Robotics, and the Politics of Technological Futures*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.

82 Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Discriminating Data: Correlation, Neighborhoods, and the New Politics of Recognition*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2021.

83 Joshua Neves and Marc Steinberg, 'Pandemic Platforms: How Convenience Shapes the Inequality of Crisis', in *Pandemic Media: Preliminary Notes Towards an Inventory*, Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2020, pp. 105-112; Andrijasevic et al., *Media and Management*.

bringing together of platform studies with racial capitalism as an analytic, this time applied to platform services globally.[84] Unequal distribution of convenience applies to racialized workers in the U.S. context and to the migrant workers in the Chinese context—both the backbone of the essential workforce. This brings to light the deeply unequal distribution of inconvenience, including how *in convenience* consolidates modes of predatory inclusion.[85] Inconvenience at once describes, and fails to register, the condition of those who labor to produce the conveniences of others. From fulfillment center workers who rush to complete orders to delivery personnel dragging large handtrucks through city streets, human workers are a crucial part of the infrastructure of convenience.

Turning our attention from appliances to services underlines the unequal distribution of convenience, including the complex ways it is generated and consumed. These positions are not mutually exclusive; a convenience store employee or Meituan food delivery worker is still a consumer at the end of their shift. The reformulation of labor and exploitation in terms of inconvenience also draws on a lineage of ideas that frame, if somewhat ironically, global climate change (*The Inconvenient Truth*) and settler colonialism (*The Inconvenient Indian*) as *inconvenient*.[86] What it means to adopt the language of inconvenience in doing so requires further exploration, but signals the political hold that convenience has on the imagination of counter-politics. We cannot think of convenience without its counterpart. Living today means inhabiting the hyphenated relation that we call *in-convenience*. To be outside of convenience is either an ephemeral privilege—the yuppie who abandons their smartphone—or an extreme form of precarity or abandonment. At an everyday level, convenience can no longer be limited to coziness, ease or comfort; it is quite simply the price of admission. Like the protagonist of *Convenience Store Woman*: embracing convenience is by now a survival strategy.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank all the contributors in this volume for their valuable feedback on this chapter. We thank David Humphrey, Diane Wei Lewis, and Sarah Sharma for their suggestions. Finally we thank Jacqueline Ristola for her early research assistance on this project.

References

Andrijasevic, Rutvica; Chen, Julie Yujie; Gregg, Melissa; and Steinberg, Marc. *Media and Management*, Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2021.

Appadurai, Arjun and Alexander, Neta. *Failure*, Medford: Polity Press, 2020.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*, trans. Margaret Canovan, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

84 Tressie McMillan Cottom, 'Where Platform Capitalism and Racial Capitalism Meet: The Sociology of Race and Racism in the Digital Society', *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 6.4 (2020): 441-449.

85 McMillan Cottom, 'Where Platform Capitalism and Racial Capitalism Meet'.

86 Al Gore, *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It*, New York: Rodale Press, 2006; Thomas King, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*, Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2012.

Atanasoski, Neda and Vora, Kalindi. *Surrogate Humanity: Race, Robotics, and the Politics of Technological Futures*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2019.

Barbara Maly-Bowie, ''Home is where your Netflix is' – From Mobile Privatization to Private Mobilization', *Literary Geographies* 5.2 (2019): 216-233.

Bastani, Aaron. *Fully Automated Luxury Communism*, London: Verso, 2019.

Baumbach, Nico; Young, Damon R.; and Yue, Genevieve. 'Introduction: For a Political Critique of Culture', *Social Text* 34.2 / 127 (2016): 1-20.

Beverungen, Armin. 'Remote Control. Algorithmic Management of Circulation at Amazon', in Marcus Burkhardt, Mary Shnayien, and Katja Grashöfer (eds) *Explorations in Digital Cultures*, Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2021, pp. 5-18.

Chang, Ron. '7-Eleven Opens 71,100th Store in S. Korea', *TBS*, 9 July 2020, http://tbs.seoul.kr/eFm/newsView.do?typ_800=J&idx_800=3395420&seq_800=20387997.

Chieng, Ronny. *Asian Comedian Destroys America!*, Netflix Comedy Special, 2019.

Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. *Discriminating Data: Correlation, Neighborhoods, and the New Politics of Recognition*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2021.

Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*, New York: Basic Books, 1983.

Cowen, Deborah. *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Crawford, Colin Jon Mark. *Netflix's Speculative Fictions: Financializing Platform Television*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021.

Crawford, Kate and Joler, Vladan. 'Anatomy of an AI System: The Amazon Echo as an Anatomical Map of Human Labor, Data and Planetary Resources', *AI Now Institute and Share Lab* (2018): 3, https://anatomyof.ai.

Draper, Nora A. and Turow, Joseph. 'The Corporate Cultivation of Digital Resignation', *New Media and Society* 21.8 (2019): 1824-1839.

Finn, Ed. *What Algorithms Want: Imagination in the Age of Computing*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2017.

Gardner, Chris. ''Kim's Convenience' Stars Simu Liu and Jean Yoon Open Up on "Painful" Lack of Diversity, "Overtly Racist" Storylines', *The Hollywood Reporter*, 6 June 2021, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/tv/tv-news/kims-convenience-netflix-cancelation-1234963806/.

Gore, Al. *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It*, New York: Rodale Press, 2006.

Gregg, Melissa. *Counterproductive: A Brief History of Time Management*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.

Halpern, Orit and Mitchell, Robert. *The Smartness Mandate*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2023.

Hands, Joss. 'Introduction: Politics, Power and 'Platformativity'', *Culture Machine* 14 (2013): 1-9.

Harney, Stefano and Moten, Fred. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013.

Horgan, Colin. 'The Tyranny of Convenience', *OneZero*, 29 April 2019, https://onezero.medium.com/the-tyranny-of-convenience-2e7fa145ab4.

Huberman, Jenny. 'Amazon Go, Surveillance Capitalism, and the Ideology of Convenience', *Economic Anthropology* 8 (2021): 337-349.

Ishikawa, Akira and Nejo, Tai. *The Success of 7-Eleven Japan: Discovering the Secrets of the World's Best-Run Convenience Chain Stores*, Singapore: World Scientific, 2002.

Jagoda, Patrick. *Network Aesthetics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.

Jones, Phil. *Work without the Worker: Labour in the Age of Platform Capitalism*, London: Verso, 2021.

Jones, Sarah. 'Convenience Is Destroying Us', *Intelligencer*, 2 April 2021, https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2021/04/amazons-convenience-is-destroying-us.html.

King, Thomas. *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*, Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2012.

Kornbluh, Anna. *Immediacy: or, the Style of Too Late Capitalism*, London: Verso, 2024.

Lai, Kee-hung and Cheng, T.C. Edwin. Just-in-Time Logistics, London: Routledge, 2009.

Lamarre, Thomas. 'Regional TV: Affective Media Geographies', *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 2.1-2 (2015): 93-126.

LeCavalier, Jesse. *The Rule of Logistics: Walmart and the Architecture of Fulfillment*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

Lobato, Ramon. *Netflix Nations: The Geography of Digital Distribution*, New York: NYU Press, 2019.

Lotz, Amanda D. *Portals: A Treatise on Internet-Distributed Television*, Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, 2017.

Marutschke, David. *Continuous Improvement Strategies: Japanese Convenience Store Systems*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Massumi, Brian. 'Everywhere You Want to Be: Introduction to Fear', in Brian Massumi (ed) *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, pp. 3-37.

______. 'Fear (The Spectrum Said)', *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 13.1 (Spring 2005): 31-48.

McMillan Cottom, Tressie. 'Where Platform Capitalism and Racial Capitalism Meet: The Sociology of Race and Racism in the Digital Society', *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 6.4 (2020): 441-449.

Murata, Sayaka. *Convenience Store Woman*, trans. Ginny Tapley Takemori, New York: Grove Atlantic, 2018.

Naruo, Shinji and Toma, Sorin George. 'From Toyota Production System to Lean Retailing. Lessons from Seven-Eleven Japan', in Jan Olhager and Fredrik Persson (eds) *Advances in Production Management Systems*, New York: Springer, 2007, pp. 387-395.

Negō, Tai and Hiraki, Kyōichi. *Konbini Gyōkai No Dōkō to Karakuri Ga Yoku Wakaru Hon (A Book for Really Understanding the Trends and Mechanisms of the Convenience Store Industry)*, Tokyo: Shuwa Shisutemu, 2015.

Neves, Joshua and Steinberg, Marc. 'Pandemic Platforms: How Convenience Shapes the Inequality of Crisis', in *Pandemic Media: Preliminary Notes Towards an Inventory*, Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2020, pp. 105-112.

Neves, Joshua. 'Social Media and the Social Question: Speculations on Risk Media Society', in Bhaskar Sarkar and Bishnupriya Ghosh (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Media and Risk*, New York: Routledge, 2020, pp. 347-361.

Ngai, Sianne. *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press,

2012.

______. *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020.

Nguyen, Dang. 'Convenient efficiency: A media genealogy of QR codes', *New Media & Society* (2022): 1-21.

Pallitto, Robert M. *Bargaining with the Machine: Technology, Surveillance, and the Social Contract*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020.

Rossiter, Ned. *Software, Infrastructure, Labor: A Media Theory of Logistical Nightmares*, New York: Routledge, 2016.

Sharma, Sarah. *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

Shirai, Mieko; Kojima, Takeshi; and Oguri, Masashi. 'Konbini Wo Kagaku Suru' (Doing the Science of Convenience Stores), *Shūkan Diamond (Diamond Weekly)*, 29 October 2016.

Shove, Elizabeth. *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience: The Social Organization of Normality*, Oxford: Berg, 2003.

Sloterdijk, Peter. *In the World Interior of Capital: For a Philosophical Theory of Globalization*, trans. Wieland Hoban, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.

Srnicek, Nick. *Platform Capitalism*, Malden: Polity Press, 2017.

Steinberg, Marc. *The Platform Economy: How Japan Transformed the Commercial Internet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019.\

______. 'From Automobile Capitalism to Platform Capitalism: Toyotism as a Prehistory of Digital Platforms', *Organization Studies* 43.7 (2022): 1069-1090.

'The World's Most Valuable Resource is No Longer Oil, but Data', *The Economist*, 6 May 2017, https://www.economist.com/leaders/2017/05/06/the-worlds-most-valuable-resource-is-no-longer-oil-but-data.

Thrift, Nigel. *Knowing Capitalism*, London: Sage, 2005.

Tierney, Thomas F. *The Value of Convenience: A Genealogy of Technical Culture*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

West, Emily. *Buy Now: How Amazon Branded Convenience and Normalized Monopoly*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2022.

Whitelaw, Gavin H. 'Konbini-Nation', in Katarzyna J. Cwiertka and Ewa Machotka (eds) *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan*, pp. 69-88.

Williams, Raymond. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, London: Routledge, 2003.

Wu, Tim. 'The Tyranny of Convenience', *The New York Times*, 16 February 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/16/opinion/sunday/tyranny-convenience.html.longer-oil-but-data.

Thrift, Nigel. *Knowing Capitalism*, London: Sage, 2005.

Tierney, Thomas F. *The Value of Convenience: A Genealogy of Technical Culture*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

West, Emily. *Buy Now: How Amazon Branded Convenience and Normalized Monopoly*, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2022.

Whitelaw, Gavin H. ‘Konbini-Nation’, in Katarzyna J. Cwiertka and Ewa Machotka (eds) *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan*, pp. 69-88.

Williams, Raymond. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, London: Routledge, 2003.

Wu, Tim. ‘The Tyranny of Convenience’, *The New York Times*, 16 February 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/16/opinion/sunday/tyranny-convenience.html.