

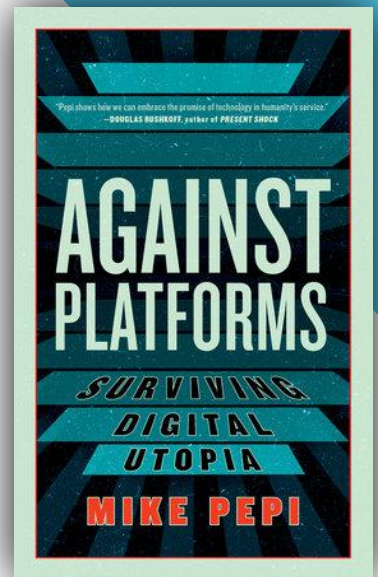
# AGAINST PLATFORMS

## Surviving Digital Utopia

Mike Pepi

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“ Mike Pepi shows how we can embrace the promise of technology in humanity’s service without getting swept away into the utopianism of the tech bros or the cynically proffered fantasies of venture capitalists. Yes, we can transcend our love-hate relationship with the net.

—**Douglas Rushkoff, author of *Present Shock: When Everything Happens Now***

“ *Against Platforms* is a searing critique of the platforms that hold our culture, politics, media—and lives—in an increasingly tight stranglehold. Mike Pepi makes a passionate argument against Silicon Valley’s utopian vision, and offers hope that technology can still be deployed in our best interests. This fascinating book is a timely and meticulous examination of a supremely important topic.”

—**Peter Ward, author of *The Price of Immortality: The Race to Live Forever***

## NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I was somewhat fortunate to fall into working in technology. It was a time when the tide of digital utopia was high, and my natural skepticism led me to be a kind of insider-outsider. It's here where I started to develop a theory of Silicon Valley ideology. While this drew on existing writings, there were some specific new malformations that were employed during the long march through institutions that came to a kind of peak in 2014. Then the so-called “tech lash” hit, spurred, of all things, by the election of Donald Trump. Even after the dust of the tech lash settled, digital utopianism lives a kind of zombie afterlife. I felt the need to go deeper into a counteranalysis of the tenets of digital utopianism and its establishment in culture through platforms. Thus *Against Platforms* was born. —Mike Pepi

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Introduction and Ideological Foundations

1. **What is techno-utopianism, and how does it relate to the rise of digital platforms? What is the history behind techno-utopianism and how does it justify the logic of platforms?**
2. **How does the author critique the notion that technology alone can create a better society?** Explore the limitations and failures of techno-utopian promises. What are the key arguments the author presents against the belief that technology can solve all social problems?

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## The Impact of Platforms on Society

### 3. In what ways have digital platforms disrupted traditional institutions?

Analyze the effects of platforms on institutions such as journalism, education, and government. How have platforms damaged the way these institutions operate and serve the public?

### 4. What are the consequences of the "cult of data" as described in the book? Discuss the implications of datafication and the belief in data as an objective truth. How does the author argue that data is inherently biased and socially constructed?

## Decentralization and Its Delusions

### 5. How does Pepi debunk the myth of decentralization in the context of blockchain and Web 3.0?

Examine the promises of decentralization made by blockchain advocates. What are the practical and ideological flaws that the author identifies in these claims?

### 6. What is the role of financial incentives in the proliferation of blockchain technologies, and how does this impact their purported goals?

Discuss the influence of venture capital and financial speculation on the development and adoption of blockchain technologies. How do these economic factors undermine the idealistic goals of decentralization?

## The Human Element in Technology

### 7. On what basis does the author claim that "algorithms are made of people"?

Explore the biases that underlie algorithmic systems. How does this perspective challenge the perception of algorithms as objective and neutral?

### 8. What are the ethical and social implications of relying on algorithms for decision-making in various aspects of life?

Discuss the harms and limitations of algorithmic decision-making. How can society address these issues to ensure fair and just outcomes?



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## Reimagining Institutions

9. **Discuss the hypothetical proposal of StateBook as a publicly funded social media platform.**  
What are the potential benefits and challenges of such an initiative?
10. **Discuss the author's vision for reformed institutions in the age of digital platforms.**  
Does the author suggest building technology in a way that supports, rather than undermines, institutional values?
11. **How does Pepi's critique of platform capitalism align with or differ from other contemporary critiques of digital technology?**  
Compare these arguments with those of other critics such as Evgeny Morozov, Shoshana Zuboff, or Jaron Lanier. What unique perspectives does the author bring to the debate?
12. **What steps can individuals and communities take to resist the negative impacts of digital platforms and support the revitalization of institutions?**  
What are some starting points that Pepi's book suggests? Can you think of others? Brainstorm a list of practical first steps: examples: get a library card, print out photos and mail them to people, donate to LOCAL community organizations, subscribe to your local newspaper, start a book club, etc.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Mike Pepi** is a technologist and author who has written widely about the intersection between culture and the Internet. An art critic and theorist, he self-identifies as part of the “tech left” – digital natives who want to reshape technology as a force for progressive good. His writing has been published in *Spike*, *Frieze*, *e-flux*, and other venues.

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