

# Resistant Transparency and Nonprofit Labor: Challenging Precarity in the Art + Museum Wage Transparency Campaign

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## Abstract

Drawing upon contemporary academic debates about nonprofit worker precarity combined with needed theoretical re-orientations toward transparency, this paper explicates the situated communication practices and politics of resistant transparency. Resistant transparency describes communication aimed at revealing and publicizing previously obscured or hidden wage data and employment conditions to challenge powerful actors. Resistant transparency involves dynamic shifts in control over information, modes of in/visibility, and surveillance of powerful actors. We develop the case of Art + Museum Transparency, a collective of arts and museum workers employing Google spreadsheets and Twitter to publicize salary information and challenge norms of self-sacrifice and unpaid labor. Moving beyond an understanding of transparency as an institutional demand, our analysis develops how technical affordances shaped the collective's efforts. We argue that transparency functions as a resistant communicative practice with potential for increasing worker voice and furthering the goals of collective resistance to precarious work across sites of employment.

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Although often associated with volunteerism within academic and popular discourses, the nonprofit sector is also a source of low wages and uncertain work. Nonprofit workers are increasingly turning to social media to develop collective analyses of their employment conditions, to challenge norms of unpaid labor, and to share information about discrimination, wages, and benefits. We develop the case of the wage transparency campaign by museum workers to highlight issues of power at the site of the nonprofit workplace, including the dynamics of collective worker resistance to increasing precarity. In line with previous research addressing worker activism and online organizing (Gossett & Kilker, 2006; Linabary et al., 2019), our study illustrates how nonprofit employees are mobilizing *resistant transparency* to organize across employers and contest their working conditions.

Increased understanding of how employees are enacting resistance is critical given increasingly precarious work conditions, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Precarity is characterized by uncertain work conditions, low pay, short term contracts, layoffs, furloughs, and increasing expectations around unpaid labor through volunteering or unpaid internships. The arts and museum sector has seen the troubling rise of project-based temporary jobs lacking job security or benefits (Umney & Symon, 2019). Increased competitiveness for shrinking jobs, poor work conditions, and growing pressure to demonstrate skills via voluntary labor leaves individual workers with little power to demand change. Despite historically low rates of unionization (Smith & Wallender, 2019), several recent successful unionization efforts in the nonprofit sector indicate emergent collective efforts.

Wage transparency has emerged as a powerful communication-centered tool aimed at transforming power relations between employers and employees. Wage transparency involves publicizing information about the wage relation and other working conditions to increase workers' power relative to their employers. Secrecy around wages limits workers' ability to negotiate for wage increases and better working conditions (Ban, 2018). Developing the case study of Art + Museum Transparency (AMT), we provide an account of the situated communication practices and politics of wage transparency. Participants mobilized multiple meanings and practices of transparency to challenge a dominant work narrative emphasizing self-sacrifice in the name of the arts. Their efforts were shaped by the technological features and

affordances of Twitter and Google spreadsheets. Developing the broader concept of *resistant transparency*, our findings enhance an understanding of organizational transparency, (in)visibility, and accountability (Christensen & Cheney, 2015; Cruz, 2017; Dempsey, 2007). The goal of resistant transparency is to challenge and transform existing power relations. It operates through communication aimed at sharing, publicizing, and controlling information about working conditions and employment relations. In the case of AMT, resistant transparency explains the dynamic practices of how and with whom wage data is shared as a challenge to employer power.

## **Nonprofit Labor and Norms of Volunteerism**

The status of nonprofit labor reflects broader cultural assumptions within capitalism about the relative value of certain forms of work. Within neoliberal forms of governance, nation-states abdicate responsibility for ensuring basic reproductive labor needs like food, housing, and healthcare (Brown, 2015). Nonprofit organizations have become the dominant providers of social services (Eliasoph, 2013). This feminized reproductive labor, particularly work associated with caring for others, is poorly compensated within a capitalist system prizing profit-making (Federici, 2012). Because the nonprofit sector is tied to meaningfulness, its assumed intrinsic value provides justification for unpaid labor and low wages (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Hinton & Maclurcan, 2017; Marchiori & Buzzanell, 2017). Discourses of meaningfulness function as a compensatory move within conditions of generalized precarity.

Like their for-profit counterparts, nonprofit workers experience changes due to increased precarity, or uncertain employment (Kalleberg, 2011; Vosco et al., 2009). The proliferation of unpaid labor (e.g., unpaid internships combined with short-term work contracts) reflects funding structures aimed at lowering overhead expenses. The reliance on unpaid labor is embedded within museums and the arts; U.S. museums rely on at least 3 million volunteers (American Alliance of Museums, 2017). Funders ensure a nonprofit starvation cycle by enforcing austerity measures that affect overhead and salaries (Gregory & Howard, 2009). Nonprofits conform by reducing salaries and benefits in favor of part-time, short term contracts, and unpaid labor of volunteers or interns (Pettijohn et al., 2013). The ongoing reduction in paid work solidifies an expectation of temporary, low paid, or unpaid labor.

From the perspective of nonprofit workers, generalized work precarity increases pressure to demonstrate “employability” through unpaid internships and volunteering (Smith, 2010). Unpaid work provides a means to gain networking and experience, increasing the chances of securing paid work

even when the volunteering is unrelated (Stefanick et al., 2018). But the ability to engage in unpaid labor is unevenly distributed, highlighting broader gender, race, and class privileges (Vosco et al., 2009). In a vicious cycle of volunteering as future employability, precarity creates a barrier for volunteering which lowers the chances of finding employment premised on prior volunteering experience. Thus, volunteering in the nonprofit sector introduces a cruel paradox: while the ability to engage in unpaid labor is vital to securing future employment, those without economic and cultural resources are marginalized.

Much organizational communication research focuses on the discourses and practices of volunteering, emphasizing the complexities of volunteer relationships (Ganesh & McAllum, 2009, 2012; Kramer et al., 2015; McNamee et al., 2015). Discourses of volunteerism intersect with professionalization, questioning who, and under what conditions, can shift from unpaid roles to paid employment within nonprofit organizations (McAllum, 2018). Forms of unpaid work become linked to discourses of meaningfulness and professional “service,” whereby volunteering functions as credentialization for career advancement (McNamee et al., 2015). We consider how the normalization of volunteerism and unpaid work contributes to low attention to nonprofit labor and precarious employment conditions. An unquestioned focus on volunteerism without an account of generalized precarity risks naturalizing expectations of unpaid or low paid work, in effect de-politicizing the status of labor within the nonprofit sector. Calls for greater transparency by workers have emerged as a collective response to these conditions.

## **The Contested Politics of Transparency**

Transparency has long been understood as a communicative practice tied to democracy, participation, and accountability. Transparency appeals aimed at the nation state assume an automatic process whereby the state is made legible to the public and, as such, subject to democratic transformation (Fenster, 2015). However, an enduring “transparency ideal” relies upon a problematic conception of communication as simple transmission of information and harbinger of accountability. Transparency is best understood as an ambiguous and dialectical process of representation (Christensen & Cheney, 2015). Communication scholarship has highlighted the dangers associated with visibility amidst uneven power relations (Berkelaar, 2014; Cruz, 2017; Dempsey, 2007; Rand, 2013; Woods, 2014). Visibility allows surveillance and control, exposing vulnerable groups to harm. Workers are increasingly subject to changing transparency expectations that demand new forms of digital visibility including cybervetting (Berkelaar, 2014). As Cruz (2017) argues, the

consistent bias toward visibility attaches negative meanings to hidden forms of organizing. Practices like bounded voice involve the strategic limiting of voice within a field of unequal power relations, challenging the positivity associated with visibility (Dempsey, 2007). Building on this work, we develop an understanding of resistant transparency as a situated, evolving communicative practice, with a politics of visibility that must be explained rather than assumed.

## **Online Activism and Technological Affordances**

Workers are increasingly exerting voice and developing collective forms of organizing through online activism and social media (Arora & Thompson, 2018; Gerbaudo, 2012; Masip et al., 2020, Vats, 2015). Activists' use of hashtags to address racism (Vats, 2015), build solidarity (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015), and develop feminist identities (Laughlin, 2020) exemplify the multiple uses of such technologies. Similarly, crowdsourcing platforms have emerged as tools for sharing information about labor rights and fostering dialog among workers (Arora & Thompson, 2018). Despite their potential for collective organizing, technologies have built-in affordances and features shaping their uses (Evans et al., 2016; Nagy & Neff, 2015). Technological affordances include the potentials and constraints emerging within user-technology relations, particularly regarding anonymity and visibility. We distinguish affordances from features of technology (e.g., entering or accessing data) and from the outcomes of affordances (e.g., protecting or exposing identities, worker voice, and collective organizing) (Evans et al., 2016). The uses of social media technologies by activists are still evolving (Youmans & York, 2012), highlighting the need for attention to their possibilities and limitations, particularly as the technologies are employed by workers in the nonprofit sector. We distinguish between crowd-sourced information, a form of collective information gathering and input facilitated by social media, and resistant transparency, which we define as a situated communicative practice aimed at creating visibility, often involving the strategic control over information. Our conception of resistant transparency emphasizes its flexibility as well as the seemingly contradictory relationship between in/visibility.

## **Nonprofit Museum Workers, Wage Transparency, and @AMTransparency**

We develop the case of the U.S.-based Art + Museum Transparency spreadsheet and associated Twitter account @AMTransparency. Investigating

AMT's use of social media immediately prior to the massive layoffs and closures within the arts and museum sector during the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2020) offers timely insights. While worker organizing in the non-profit sector is not new (Capulong, 2006), recent efforts have focused on organizing across sectors via online technologies. Museums, too, have a history of worker organizing, with recent unionization efforts refueling museum labor movements (Wagley, 2019). Public scrutiny of museum work conditions may pose a greater threat given their association with wealth and status. Also true is that the strategy of "going public" about working conditions and wages may be limited for workers in occupations that have been systematically devalued and stigmatized.

Launched in May 2019 and circulated by social media users, the AMT Google spreadsheet allowed anyone with its link to anonymously disclose a wide range of employment data about arts and museum organizations. The spreadsheet asked contributors to share what they felt was "comfortable and safe," noting that no identifying information was required. Entries include organizational type, job descriptions and roles, departments, city, country, salary, type of employment, benefits, years of experience, education, and race or gender identifiers.<sup>1</sup> Although spreadsheet administrators and contributors remained largely anonymous, Michelle Millar Fisher, a Philadelphia Museum of Art curator, became the public figurehead. By the time the spreadsheet's creators closed submissions in Winter 2019, there were more than 3,300 entries. Today, people can view the data but not add new entries. Using the data, however, requires permission from the administrators and providing contact and project information published in the spreadsheet. After describing our own interest in researching their campaign, AMT gave us permission to proceed with our analysis. AMT gave us access to the spreadsheet data provided that our names and contact information would also be publicized—a practice aimed at increasing transparency over the various uses and users of the spreadsheet. AMT's Twitter account, active since June 2019, furthers the spreadsheet's aims by sharing resources, flagging news about employment conditions, and highlighting worker organizing for its 3,441 followers (recorded February 16, 2020). To highlight the situated practices of resistant transparency, our first research question asked to what extent wage transparency allows for collective organizing among nonprofit workers within a broader context of precarity. As AMT utilizes Twitter and a Google spreadsheet, our second research question considered how the technical affordances of these technologies shaped transparency efforts. Lastly, given the multifaceted and situated nature of resistant transparency, we examined the multiple meanings and communicative practices of transparency emerging within this movement.

## Data Procedures and Analysis

We focused on the AMT spreadsheet itself as a technical object with distinctive features (Light et al., 2016) Given our emphasis on transparency as a tool within collective worker organizing efforts, we focused on the form and the reception of the spreadsheet itself, conceiving it as the initiating artifact for the larger campaign. We tracked the campaign within media coverage (Phillips, 2020). Employing the search terms “museum workers, salary, spreadsheet,” we reviewed articles focused on the AMT spreadsheet, narrowing further analysis to 10 articles from art focused platforms (e.g., Artsy, Hyperallergic), and newspapers (e.g., The New York Times). We organized these chronologically, then thematized around portrayals of ATM, portrayals of employment conditions, quotes from AMT, specific salary and internship data, questions about the “truth” or believability of the data, and worker activism or collective organizing. Our second site of analysis included the @AMTransparency Twitter handle, building upon an approach to social media as public performances of identity, discourse, and activism (Gerbaudo, 2012; Papacharissi, 2014). Research on Twitter often employs hashtag ethnography to follow themes across user bases (e.g., Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Laughlin, 2020; Vats, 2015). However, AMT employs a different strategy of hashtags, discussed further below. Thus, we analyzed their collective tweets. We used the package *rtweet* (version 0.7.0) (Kearney, 2019) to collect their entire timeline of tweets, a total of 1,978 tweets as of January 27, 2020. Each tweet included its date, whether it is a retweet or an original tweet, text, image, number of likes, number of retweets, username if it contained a quote,<sup>2</sup> the original text quoted, original number of likes of quoted text, and the original numbers of retweets of the quoted text.

After importing the Twitter data into MAXQDA, the first author selected the codes Text, Image, QuoteWho, QuoteText, and WhoRetweet to see initial patterns, employing open coding to allow the participants’ language to determine meanings and importance (Price, 2010). Both authors moved iteratively between thematizing the media coverage surrounding the spreadsheet and the Twitter account. For example, “solidarity” emerged as an important concept in interviews about the AMT spreadsheet (Kinsella, 2019). The first author used the Lexical Search tool in MAXQDA to find tweets including wage transparency and pay transparency in line with the AMT project focus. After reviewing the data at this stage, both authors added salary transparency. In the second round, we employed flexible coding to explore emerging topics and themes (Sun, 2020). We assigned categories to tweets, including “resources” (sharing tips and links), “going viral” (growth of spreadsheets), “project highlight” (of workers organizing), and “invite” (inviting museums



to address their practices). We further developed a grid of subthemes that included solidarity, coalition-building, and worker voice. Following our initial analysis of selected tweets, we used open coding for related topics (e.g., “job/jobs,” “recruitment/hiring practices,” “unjust/injustice, justice,” and “disparity”) which we combined in the broader theme of challenging the culture of precarity. Throughout the coding process, we wrote memos for codes, assigning them to potential themes in MAXQDA. The phrases and language in the tweets drove the coding and development of themes, grounding our contribution in the data. We engaged in iterative discussion to achieve agreement around themes, selected tweets, and findings of the analysis. Our review of the AMT spreadsheet provided contextualization of the emerging campaign, resulting in a major theme of how the technical affordances of the spreadsheet mattered in this case. Our findings highlight: (1) AMT’s use of wage transparency to forward a collective critique of precarious work within the museum and arts sector, (2) AMT’s navigation of the dilemmas of control and visibility created by the technical affordances of Google spreadsheet and Twitter, and (3) the communicative practices allowing AMT to mobilize “transparency” to further collective organizing across employers. Drawing on these three key findings, we develop how *resistant transparency* and the publicizing of wage data and information about working conditions can function within collective organizing.

### *Resistant Transparency*

Resistant transparency is an evolving practice that includes dynamic shifts in control over information, modes of in/visibility, and surveillance of powerful actors. By navigating what information to publicize and for whom, resistant transparency establishes credibility for different audiences and generates cross-sector coalitions. In the following analysis, we illustrate how resistant transparency manifests in the Art + Museum Transparency wage transparency campaign. Resistant transparency aims at transformation, furthers worker voice, questions power relations, and holds institutions accountable. The case of AMT illustrates how resistant transparency can function as a tool for collective worker resistance to conditions of precarity.

*Challenging precarious work.* AMT enacts resistant transparency by drawing on participants’ lived experiences, stories, and meanings to publicize a collective critique of the precarious work conditions existing within the arts and museum field and the broader nonprofit sector. In a revealing example, AMT sought to amplify the experiences of those at the margins and call for collective



organizing against shared precarity. In November 2019, the Marciano Art Foundation (L.A.) closed unexpectedly, firing around 70 workers. These actions were widely reported as retaliation against the workers' efforts to unionize (Moynihan, 2019). AMT reacted with a statement concerning a broader lack of employer commitment to workers and its consequences. They tweeted:

They need us to run their museums & institutions - but when we ask for the ability to pay rent or feed our families they lock the gates & shut us out. Which begs the question. . .

What do they think their roles or responsibilities to the community are? (2019-11-06 12:22:53 EST)

This tweet frames the events in terms of employer-worker relations amidst ongoing precarity, problematizing employer responsibility. They reference the reality of museum workers as largely “at will” workers with few protections. The specifics of a double-bind between paying rent or food describe workers' attempts to survive on poverty wages. Here, problematizing pay serves to question labor conditions, uncovering the systemic inequities in the field. The payment of rent surfaces as a recurring topic attesting to the housing insecurities of nonprofit workers. In July 2019, the AMT group tweeted:

But if proximity to wealth \*did\* pay our rent, boy, we museum workers would be set! We're surrounded by extreme wealth all the time. The disparity between our pay and the amounts expended daily on our buildings, our collections, is eye popping. (2019-07-11 07:18:56 EDT)

Connecting low wages to rising housing costs (Casselmann, 2018), the tweet also indicates workers' awareness of the discrepancies between prices museums are willing to spend on art and buildings in comparison to pay. In another example, AMT shared a tweet concerning the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, where staff report “no raises of any kind in over 10 years (10 years!!) (2019-09-03 12:15:29 EDT).” The tweet corroborates media coverage with concrete data and links them to insights into pay and benefits across positions. Publishing salary data facilitates its further sharing, allowing for increased virality across (social) media. AMT draws on simple transmission of salary information to connect nonprofit workers around shared precarity within a history of worker exploitation at museums. Such examples also illustrate transmission of actionable data to catalyze collective action. AMT wrote:

Remember Santa Barbara? Last week, we wrote their HR on behalf of an applicant concerned about the lack of salary info on their jobs board. It's so important, particularly for jobs in a city as expensive as SB. No reply from @sbmuseart. No excuse?

<https://t.co/rKJGR2BgUI> (2019-09-25 12:00:20 EDT)

Generating actionable data to further collective action on the behalf of workers across employers is emblematic of AMT's situated practices of resistant transparency. AMT acknowledges that not all arts and museum workers have equal access to unionization given divergent state legislatures. Instead, they circumvent these limitations by navigating anonymity and visibility, advocating for transparency and equity on workers' behalf.

By repeatedly highlighting wage stagnation and the need for workers to have access to salary information, AMT questioned norms of self-sacrifice and meaningfulness underlying nonprofit work and the practice of unpaid/low-paid internships and volunteerism. The magnitude of the problem of unpaid labor, made evident in the spreadsheet's documented volunteer hours and unpaid internships, prompted AMT to develop a dedicated internship spreadsheet to publicize the prevalence of structural inequities. A major focus of their tweets situates volunteerism and unpaid labor in relation to broader work precarity. AMT demanded:

Pay your interns, folks. And pay them a \*living wage.\* Unpaid- or poorly paid-internships are discriminatory and perpetuate the culture we're trying to dismantle. If we want diversity and equity, WE have to clear the obstacles. Not ask people to hurtle them. <https://t.co/w1kIU5XVHQ> (2020-01-16 14:13:42 EST)

Aiming to change the assumption of volunteerism within museum culture, AMT argues that low pay or unpaid labor preserves inequity and maintains a lack of diversity within their workplaces, limiting museum work to those affluent enough to work for free. As AMT highlighted in a November 2019 tweet, these practices depress wages:

Recommending that people volunteer or do unpaid internships to get their foot in the door (or doing it yourself) is actively contributing to wage depression in the museum field.

Labor is valuable, even if they have to train you. Do better. (2019-11-05 19:39:02 EST)

Throughout, AMT uses the spreadsheet data to critique the relationship between unpaid labor and future employability. In a thread on ghosting (i.e., communication stops without warning or explanation) by institutions after job applications, several users engaged with AMT on Twitter, sharing stories of receiving rejections that included the suggestion to volunteer at the museum instead. Performing employability relies on building and using social and human capital, having information about future employment positions, and learning necessary skills (Smith, 2010). Performing employability is tied to the question of who has sufficient resources to access these opportunities. As AMT tweeted:

2/ Museums literally rely on staff having personal wealth. . .

Many major American museums solicit annual donations from their staff. The same staff they are paying \$30,000 a year. And people do it, people donate! Their parents do too.

God bless their hearts. We didn't know. . . (2019-08-21 09:01:21 EDT)

Through such tweets, AMT also challenges the reliance by employers on workers' existing forms of capital. The group troubles the relationship between wealth and access to education and work. For example, AMT jokingly wrote:

rip to all the editors and managers who died instantly from including the salary range in the job listing, we love you and we miss you and we will honor your sacrifice forever (2020-01-07 11:13:58 EST)

AMT casts the cultural sector as reluctant to provide wage information. They mock editors and managers by exaggerating the consequences of sharing salary ranges, echoing popular business literature calling wage transparency a dire threat (e.g., Zenger, 2016). Resistant transparency allows AMT to scrutinize the practices and attitudes of employers, challenging the norm of obscuring data to maintain unequal access to information and negotiating power. At the same time, AMT's reliance on Twitter and an online spreadsheet based on anonymous data introduced communication complexities related to control and anonymity.

*Technological affordances: Control and visibility.* While the use of an anonymous crowd-sourced spreadsheet allowed the possibility to create actionable data around wages and unpaid labor, it also raised dilemmas of control and visibility. In what at first might seem counter-intuitive, AMT limited the degree of

editing of the spreadsheet, regulated data access, and shielded identities in the name of transparency. These moves illustrate a recognition of uneven power relations by the group, illustrating the situated uses of resistant transparency as a communicative practice that moves beyond simple transmission. They also demonstrate the need to navigate the technical affordances of online spaces and tools.

*Controlling access for the sake of transparency.* The fAMT spreadsheet circulated quickly, addressing an emerging demand for transparency around wages in a sector tied to meaningful work, fraught with opaque employment conditions, and increasingly interested in developing capacity for unionization efforts. On its first day, at least 100 entries were documented (Kinsella, 2019), followed by 660 submissions documented on June 3 (Small, 2019), 1,800 entries documented on June 6 (Kanayama, 2019), and 2,500 entries documented on June 18 (Reyes, 2019a). By December 2019, there were more than 3,300 entries. As the entries continued, the spreadsheet grew from a regional focus to a national and then international project containing salary information of renowned institutions including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum (Reyes, 2019a). The appeal of a Google spreadsheet lay in its collaborative and transportable potential, including the possibility of sharing its contents beyond a single social network. Additionally, its allowances for anonymity exposed members to less abuse compared with to other online and social media platforms (Linabary & Corple, 2019). Yet disruptions and harassment within collaborative documents exist, as studies of gaming culture demonstrate (Chess & Shaw, 2015).

Initially, the creators of the AMT spreadsheet pursued a democratic approach allowing users to edit the form and enter data. However, the affordances of the chosen technology introduced challenges. One feature is that no more than 100 people can edit shared documents simultaneously. Once 100 people are editing, even the creators can be locked out (Friedman, 2017). In response, AMT developed practices to retain control over what data can be entered and how the spreadsheet could be accessed. In late summer of 2019, the creators locked the editing function following an accidental data deletion by contributors; entries were then only possible via a Google form.

AMT's response indicates the nuances of their resistant transparency practices within the technical affordances of the shared spreadsheet. The implementation of degrees of editing and entering rules not only protects against data loss but also limits contributors' ability to participate in decision-making processes. Yet, the constraints shifted responsibility for maintaining data coherence back to the mostly anonymous creators of AMT. Consequently,

AMT shields its contributors from possible judgment. Managing data emerged as a necessary mechanism ensuring the usefulness of the spreadsheet and the credibility of the group for broader audiences. AMT developed additional procedures to limit access of the data over time. Notably, these procedures include emailing the AMT group and requesting access to the data. As we describe above, access to data is only granted once AMT publishes names, email-addresses, and a description of the project in a second sheet of the spreadsheet for everyone to see. By listing the data users, AMT alerts these users to the public scrutiny of their project and holds them accountable to contributors. Consequently, resistant transparency includes managing control of the spreadsheet regarding its transparency of users and use serves to demonstrate accountability and credibility on multiple levels. AMT avoids the risks faced by other groups who have tried to use spreadsheets to organize but who have compromised the integrity of the data by not maintaining control over it (Friedman, 2017).

Notably, AMT navigates the situated politics of transparency within Twitter as well, specifically in their use of hashtags. At times, AMT engaged in #MuseumMeToo—initially a response to a Museum director charged with sexual harassment (Pogrebin & Small, 2020)—and #MuseumsAreNotNeutral—a campaign that confronts museums’ neutrality considering systemic racism and the exclusion and marginalization of Black artists, artists of color, and museum employees (Autry et al., 2018). Both hashtags are specific to the museum field but also relate to larger discourses of the #MeToo movement and the concerns about racial discrimination by public institutions. Interestingly, AMT rarely uses hashtags in their tweets addressing issues and concerns related to the salary spreadsheet. By avoiding hashtags for the main purpose of their campaign, AMT uses resistant transparency to control the discourses of the spreadsheet. The avoidance of hashtags impedes finding conversations, confining them to users already invested in the topic. Thus, avoiding hashtags shielded contributors and the campaign from unwanted public scrutiny for “lacking complete transparency,” an issue we address in our discussion of anonymity next.

*Managing anonymity: A threat to transparency?* Initial media coverage of the spreadsheet was favorable, focusing on its virality and on museum workers’ low pay (Kanayama, 2019; Kinsella, 2019). Later reports described the spreadsheet as a form of “radical transparency,” because the shared information was perceived as unfiltered (Small, 2019). Reyes (2019b), for example, praised the spreadsheet as “the most powerful tool for labor in 2019.” Despite the positive reception of the AMT spreadsheet, concerns about verifiable data and accountability also emerged. In fact, coverage (Reyes, 2019b; Small,

2019) emphasized that the data was *unverified*, suggesting that it matters how and by whom the data is entered. This coverage questioned the information because of its anonymity, appealing to a transparency ideal of simple transmission and visibility. Here, only the verification of identities would render the information accurate, and thus more believable.

AMT developed its own situated practices, manifest in resistant transparency, to navigate between competing demands for anonymity and visibility. Notably, some of the administrators of the spreadsheet wished to remain anonymous, to not jeopardize their contingent jobs (Small, 2019). For that reason, Fisher remained as the spokesperson for the campaign. In a tweet, AMT tagged Fisher's personal account and wrote:

@michellemfisher will represent all of us at the Ulises event. As before, so so grateful to Michelle for agreeing to be a public voice when one is needed for this collective enterprise we've been calling @AMTransparency. We're all working to organize and will be there in spirit! (2019-08-20 17:00:43 EDT)

It is significant that there is one museum professional speaking on behalf of the group. On a U.S. national level, Fisher participates in events, giving quotes to newspapers and media outlets. Like the data entry restrictions, limiting the voice of the group to one member serves as a protective measure against retaliation by obscuring participants' identities. Here, AMT's situated use of resistant transparency involves careful navigation between moments of anonymity and the use of a visible spokesperson. Finally, it is noteworthy that contributors of data remain anonymous and protected, while those using data are exposed and held accountable for their use of the data, as discussed above. These practices point to an underlying notion of solidarity shaping their communicative practices of resistant transparency, discussed in more detail below.

*Transparency aimed at collective organizing.* The final theme concerns AMT's communicative practices of resistant transparency aimed at mobilizing the spreadsheet and its associated Twitter account for collective organizing. Our analysis details how AMT engaged multiple audiences to build relationships within and across industries. We argue that their uses of resistant transparency were aimed at building worker power and inciting change on the institutional level of museums and the level of nonprofit work generally.

*Solidarity: Mobilizing transparency for worker power.* We argue that the simple dissemination of salary information cultivated forms of solidarity based on the recognition of a shared class interest. AMT shared information

to build worker power via ongoing nonprofit unionizing efforts and tilt power to workers. Workers could use salary data to improve their wage negotiating position within an industry characterized by norms of unpaid internships and low pay. AMT sought to make this information actionable by providing resources and highlighting events or successful collective organizing efforts across employers within the U.S. For example, in early 2020, AMT wrote:

Why a Google spreadsheet was the most powerful tool for labor in 2019

Workers used the spreadsheet data to negotiate raises. Entire museum departments have sat down & reassessed their pay scales, sometimes to the tune of tens of thousands of dollars.

<https://t.co/EPpTmyfs7F> (2020-01-01 12:36:24 EST)

In this tweet, the group shared an article documenting the successful use of the spreadsheet data for pay negotiations. It indicates how AMT's aspiration for more worker power relies on wage transparency. Here, the anonymous entries of salaries for the use of others facilitate direct action of workers to improve labor conditions. Whereas the above message implies the possibility of success, other tweets directly advocate for workers to unionize.

Union(s) and unionizing occur in 443 tweets by AMT. Primarily retweets about workers forming unions functioned to build solidarity. In the case of the Marciano Art Foundation workers, AMT wrote:

We stand in solidarity with Marciano Art Foundation (MAF) workers who were fired after unionizing. UNAC/UHCP member Elizabeth Pianka, a Kaiser San Diego ED RN, braved the #BlackFriday crowds at Fashion Valley Mall to help us get the word out about this important fight. #MAFunion <https://t.co/ba8C795HCj> (2019-12-02 12:12:15 EST)

AMT moved between simple transmission of salary information to cultivating solidarity practices among museum workers. Here, the rare use of hashtags amplifies the reach of this topic beyond their followers aimed at increasing awareness. Whereas this tweet highlights the national dimensions of building relationships and performing solidarity, AMT also operated at local scales. They posted about events or protests related to museum labor in cities across the USA.<sup>3</sup> They shared information about unionization panels and meetings and Art Workers Lab events. AMT's tweets about unions in the museum sector normalize collective worker organizing, like their retweet of Tim Newman (@Tnewmanstweet, a worker at CoWorker.org) in early 2020



outlining the growth of professional unions by over 90,000 members from 2018 to 2019.

AMT also used media coverage to further solidarity. Invited to contribute to the Walker Art Center website, AMT developed additional resources aimed at coalition-building beyond the museum sector (Art + Museum Transparency, 2019). The article covered unionizing, a pregnancy discrimination lawsuit, art labor podcasts, working conditions of museum professionals, ongoing worker campaigns and protests, and, finally, their critique of The New York Times' lazy coverage of art world issues. Through these actions, AMT engages non-profit workers more broadly by drawing on shared precarity, discussed next.

*Coalition-building: Transparency and shared precarity.* AMT also engaged in broader coalition-building beyond the arts and museum field. AMT cited three main inspirations for their spreadsheet: The Adjunct Project which documents pay and benefits across the U.S. (June & Newman, 2013), the POWarts survey concerning art industry workers (Sussman, 2018), and Kimberly Drew's American Alliance of Museums keynote discussing her salary and questioning museums' commitments to access and diversity (Drew, 2019). AMT's practices inspired wage transparency efforts beyond the art and museum sector. In fact, Coworker.org (2019) lists 27 spreadsheets from baristas, service workers, media, publishing, design-interns, and others in various U.S. states that follow AMT's example. Here, resistant transparency functions as a replicating tool of successful collective organizing, and a practice that amplifies coalitions among workers (Coworker.org, 2019; Reyes, 2019b). AMT shared resources for nonprofit workers to get involved. In late 2019, they tweeted:

Check out an update from Art + Museum Transparency about their next steps: And if you are inspired by their efforts, check out this interview for their tips on how to work toward salary and pay transparency in your industry: <https://t.co/OLYozHSLpi> <https://t.co/qXCouUKOLR> (2019-12-09 18:14:11 EST)

Additionally, AMT frequently shared articles covering the range of the spreadsheet campaigns, including a U.S. map recording barista and coffee worker spreadsheets (Coworker.org, 2019). The group portrayed the virality of the spreadsheet as a testament to shared precarity across workers in the U.S. Such tweets validate other projects and demonstrate AMT's solidarity with these workers. They wrote:

Salary transparency spreadsheets are popping up all over! It's the best! We stand with the cafe workers who are fed up and taking steps to transform their industry through collective action.

& thank you for helping spread the good word about salary transparency

@teamcoworker! <https://t.co/cW6HVXmxgl> (2019-10-07 21:29:35 EDT)

Consequently, critiquing museum labor and nonprofit work becomes a vector for broader coalition-building aimed at changing employer norms and policies.

*Worker voice: Upending control.* AMT also used resistant transparency to marshal worker voice by directly targeting institutional power. Within a context of precarity, employers have been able to contract out work, limiting pay, and resources for workers. Consequently, employers hoard information and use it as strategic leverage in pay and benefit negotiations. AMT used wage transparency data to demand change, publicly criticizing the lack of information about decisions and conditions affecting employees and workers. AMT draws on the indisputable basic numbers of salary data to upend control over information, making it difficult for employers to prevent (public) conversations. For example, in one tweet, AMT tagged the Studio Museum in Harlem:

Hey @studiomuseum! A little surprised that salary info is not included in these job descriptions on your website knowing your overall position on social/racial justice. cc

@AMTransparency <https://t.co/uV37aJt7xW> (2019-10-16 16:30:07 EDT)

In addition to publicly shaming salary omissions in job postings, AMT connects it to broader issues of diversity, equity, and the depression of worker wages. The group regularly issued “invitations” to institutional actors to rethink and change their practices such as:

We invite @DallasMuseumArt and all American museums to consider how bad recruitment policies are undermining their missions. Know that folks are paying attention. Thanks to the anonymous tipster sent us the DMA job. /3 (2019-09-03 07:42:49 EDT)

These “invitations” function as a form of worker voice, notifying employers that they are being surveilled. In at least one case, these invitations led to governmental scrutiny. Early in 2020, AMT shared a Metropolitan Museum of Art job posting requiring applicants to submit their salary history, despite New York having outlawed this practice.

We were under the impression that “salary history” demands are now illegal in New York. What’s the story here @metmuseum? If this is some loophole, it’s still bad widely rejected hiring practice. Anyone know the story here? @NYSLabor <https://t.co/jXgFmkQ6MJ> <https://t.co/OSY3B89iym> <http://pbs.twimg.com/media/ENSUd1kXUAEcAEc.jpg> (2020-01-02 10:28:00 EST).

This tweet illustrates AMT’s strategic use of tagging institutions to exert worker voice and surveil powerful actors, in this case the offending museum and the New York Department of Labor. A Twitter conversation between AMT and the New York City Commission of Human Rights ensued, with the Commission vowing to contact the museum given this illegal practice.

Tangible results also appeared from AMT’s ongoing critique of unpaid internships. Based on the rapid growth and feedback from contributors, AMT’s collection of internship data resulted in more than 400 entries. In a post from January 2020, AMT retweeted an earlier comment from the internship spreadsheet concerning the low internship stipend at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City.

Remember these posts about @Guggenheim on the internship spreadsheet? Well the call for summer interns is circulating again and. . .

in 2019, stipends were \$500 & \$1000. In 2020 all interns will receive \$5250.

Thank you for listening Gugg & ty to all who shared their experiences! <https://t.co/QnR2jVC2Wg>

Within 1 year, stipends increased by 1050% and 525% respectively, reflecting a tacit acknowledgement by employers of the need to account for increasing transportation and housing costs as well as the potential loss in wages when pursuing unpaid internships. The above examples demonstrate AMT’s situated use of resistant transparency and wage data to exert worker voice and target powerful actors. AMT employed deliberate tagging to create public attention to the conditions of museum workers and the unequal access to and control over pay and benefit information.

## Discussion

*Resistant transparency* describes communication aimed at revealing and publicizing previously obscured or hidden data and information to challenge powerful actors. Moving beyond an understanding of transparency as an institutional demand, our analysis develops how transparency functions as a resistant communicative practice with potential for increasing worker voice

and furthering the goals of collective resistance to precarious work. Previous research has often focused on how organizations share and control information (Baker et al., 2019; Sanzo-Pérez et al., 2017). As mentioned above, organizations largely refrain from sharing salary information, reluctant to relinquish their control over wage negotiations (e.g., Zenger, 2016). In addition, within an emerging social digital contract, workers are increasingly subject to new transparency expectations from employers (Berkelaar, 2014). Resistant transparency is a strategic communication practice involving navigating between the visibility of, and control over, wage and employment information, collection, and distribution. The case of AMT demonstrates how resistant transparency also involves practices of anonymizing and opacity to protect vulnerable people and their participation in collective resistance and community building. The case also highlights the situated communication practices involved in navigating the technical affordance of online spaces within collective forms of worker organizing.

Resistant transparency can function as a tool for worker voice and surveillance of employers within a context of precarity. Museum workers mobilized wage transparency as a way of breaking up managerial control over salary data, sharing this information across institutions and challenging employability norms. As such, their practices supply a practical example of strategies aimed at building solidarity and refusing the increasing individuation of workers (Friedman, 2014). Building on previous research challenging discourses of meaningfulness (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010; Marchiori & Buzzanell, 2017) and volunteerism within the nonprofit sector (Ganesh & McAllum, 2009, 2012; Kramer et al., 2015; McNamee et al., 2015), we highlight how nonprofit workers are actively contesting the increasing demand that they engage in unpaid labor. AMT forwards a critique of volunteerism, detailing its impacts on wage discrepancies, unequal access to resources and employability, and housing and food insecurity.

The case of ATM is generative for ongoing questions concerning the status of worker resistance, including the uses of social media for relationship building across employment sites. We highlight how technological affordances of a Google spreadsheet and Twitter created dilemmas of control and visibility. AMT's navigation of these dilemmas served three purposes: protecting against data loss, limiting and protecting contributors' voice, and shifting responsibility away from individual workers to the anonymized AMT group. Controlling access allowed AMT to maintain the spreadsheet's usefulness as a tool for collective organizing. In keeping with their decision to collect anonymous data, AMT navigated between public discourses imposing a label of "radical transparency" with growing scrutiny of the truth and believability of their collected data. Whereas AMT maintained

contributor anonymity, they publicized those wanting to use the data, authors included. Additionally, ATM selectively used hashtags as a protective measure for its intended audience of workers. Technical features complicate previous understandings of transparency and accountability because of the multidimensionality of user relationships amidst shifting power relations. In fact, deliberate uses of anonymity and visibility demonstrate that resistant transparency relies on both to achieve credibility for multiple audiences. The technical affordances are of additional importance when considering resistant transparency in relation to oscillations between in/visibility (Cruz, 2017) and the use of bounded voice (Dempsey, 2007). AMT's use of a spokesperson to establish accountability reflects a tension between speaking from within and speaking for (Linabary & Hamel, 2015). Thus, we reframe control and anonymity as an essential part of—rather than threat to—resistant transparency. The evolving uses of social media for exerting worker voice remains an area ripe for further analysis.

We have focused on AMT's use of a Google spreadsheet and Twitter to forward a collective critique of precarity. These findings contribute to understanding the cultural uses of social media (Marwick, 2015), showing the evolving relationship between user, designer, and technology (Evans et al., 2016). Notably, digital divides and subsequent differences in digital literacies influence who can participate and benefit from online activism (Arora & Thompson, 2018). AMT themselves recognized potential access issues, launching a newsletter in February 2020 to reach non-Twitter users (Art + Museum Transparency, 2020). Recent efforts like #Techwontbuildit highlight emerging efforts aimed at increasing transparency around the potential uses of technical systems (Costanza-Chock, 2020). Such efforts also prompt ongoing questions about the potential harassment of marginalized groups involved in online activism, including concerns regarding the responsibilities of researchers (Chess & Shaw, 2015). Online research requires vigorous ethical considerations of privacy to curb any repercussions for vulnerable groups (Linabary & Corple, 2019). The case of ATM displays the skillful management of these concerns through the strategic use of control and anonymity. Namely, our findings demonstrate the benefits of developing strategies, like resistant transparency, aimed at protecting anonymity in online worker organizing. That these strategies emerged alongside a campaign dedicated to transparency is particularly telling.

Our study develops resistant transparency as an evolving and situated set of communication practices, highlighting possibilities afforded by social media to further worker voice. Future research should address the potential of wage transparency efforts and the use of resistant transparency across

sectors, including the adjunct or barista projects mentioned earlier. These collective efforts are increasingly important amidst accelerating precarity. We stress the need for the situated analysis of transparency, including its limits. Museum workers' relative social capital may make them more successful in forwarding their claims compared to other workers. The practices of resistant transparency that have been our focus are not easily transportable across fields and occupations. In the U.S., the nonprofit sector is organized by gendered, classed, and racialized hierarchies structuring how work is valued and compensated. The efficacy of wage transparency efforts may be limited in occupations associated with devalued work. The long-term impacts of AMT's wage transparency campaign are still unfolding, particularly in the wake of transformations in the arts and museum sector taking place alongside the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope the case of AMT spurs increased interest in attending to the wide variety of nonprofit workers' lived realities, including their multifaceted, resistant responses to precarity, and its many uneven effects.

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### Notes

1. See the Art + Museum Transparency spreadsheet at: [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/14\\_cn3afoas7NhKvHWaFKqQGkaZS5rvL6DFxzGqXQa6o/edit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/14_cn3afoas7NhKvHWaFKqQGkaZS5rvL6DFxzGqXQa6o/edit#gid=0)
2. A quote is different from a retweet as it includes additional text added by the user who retweets someone else's message.

3. While AMT largely focuses on the U.S., the group also retweets and emphasizes international examples to highlight shared worker precarity as a global phenomenon.

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