UAB
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

DOCTORAL THESIS

**The Erosion of the Middle Class in the Age of
Information:
Navigating Post-Capitalist Paradigms of Power**

Author:

MARCO POLONI

Director/Tutor:
Daniel Gamper Sachse

Doctorat en Filosofia

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Academic year:
2023/2024

"A fire broke out backstage in a theatre. The clown came out to warn the public; they thought it was a joke and applauded. He repeated it; the acclaim was even greater. I think that's just how the world will come to an end: to general applause from wits who believe it's a joke" [1]

---

[1] Søren Kierkegaard and Alastair Hannay, *Either/or : A Fragment of Life, Penguin Classics TA - TT* - (London, England SE: Penguin Books London, England, 1992), doi:LK - https://worldcat.org/title/27084685.

INTRODUCTION

As I embark on this journey of exploration and inquiry into the realm of scholar philosophy, I find myself reflecting on the unique path that has led me to this moment. Born and raised in Italy, my academic journey began with a deep-rooted passion for philosophy, which eventually culminated in the pursuit of higher education in the field. After completing my undergraduate studies and obtaining a degree (Laurea) in Philosophy (Filosofia, L-5), I felt a profound desire to delve deeper into the complexities of philosophical thought. It was during this time that I made the pivotal decision to pursue a Master's degree (Laurea Specialistica) in Philosophical Sciences (Scienze Filosofiche, LM-78), further honing my analytical skills and expanding my intellectual horizons. However, it was not until 2019 that I embarked on the current transformative chapter of my academic and personal journey. Accepted into the doctoral program in Philosophy at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), I found myself facing the prospect of living alone and abroad for the first time. This pivotal moment marked a significant transition in my life, both academically and personally. Moving to Barcelona from a small town in Italy (Macerata) was a transformative experience that profoundly influenced both my personal growth and scholarly pursuits. The vibrant and multicultural atmosphere of Barcelona provided me with a unique perspective on the world, exposing me to diverse cultures, languages, and ways of thinking. My experiences in Barcelona served as a catalyst for my intellectual curiosity and exploration, prompting me to reevaluate my preconceived notions and delve deeper into the complexities of political philosophy and sociology. While I initially envisioned my thesis as an examination of the social dynamics within this urban environment, I didn't realize how much my own journey and encounters in Barcelona would shape the trajectory of my research. Living in Barcelona challenged me to confront unfamiliar perspectives and engage with issues of identity, belonging, and power dynamics in new and profound ways. The city's diverse social fabric provided a fertile ground for exploring

themes of globalization, urbanization, and political agency, enriching my understanding of the complex interplay between individuals, communities, and institutions in contemporary society. As I delve into the pages of this thesis, I invite readers to join me on a journey of exploration and discovery, as we navigate the intersections of theory and practice in pursuit of a deeper understanding of political philosophy in the modern world. As I immersed myself in the academic community at UAB, I was inspired by the diverse range of ideas and perspectives that surrounded me. My personal and academic background shapes not only the lens through which I approach this study but also my deep-seated commitment to unraveling the complexities of political philosophy. Through this thesis, I endeavor to contribute to the ongoing discourse in the field, offering a unique perspective informed by both scholarly rigor and personal introspection. Writing this thesis served as a form of therapy, offering me a space for introspection and self-exploration. This dual role allowed me to correspond myself to the identikit of the thesis's subject matter, blurring the lines between academic inquiry and autobiography. Before I embarked on this intellectual journey, I was aware of the intimate connection between my personal experiences and the theoretical frameworks I was exploring. It was this recognition of the inherent intertwining of theory and lived experience that initially drew me to pursue this thesis. With this awareness, I approached each chapter of the thesis not as a detached observer but as an active participant, drawing upon my own experiences and emotions to inform my analysis and interpretation of the theoretical concepts at hand. This intentional integration of theory and personal reflection not only facilitated a deeper understanding of academic material and subjective reality but also brought to light the inherent contradictions and complexities of my role as both a researcher and a subject of inquiry. As I delved deeper into the interplay between theory and personal experience, I became increasingly aware of the myriad elements of hypocrisy inherent in this autobiographical endeavor. Rather than experiencing a sense of liberation, I found myself grappling with intellectual doubts and ethical dilemmas regarding my integrity as a scholar, a worker, and a citizen. This

heightened awareness of my own complicity in systems of power and left me feeling vulnerable and exposed, challenging my sense of identity and calling into question the ethical, economical and psychological implications of my academic pursuits. Many times I was forced to confront the uncomfortable truth that, despite my best intentions, I was complicit in perpetuating the very systems of inequality and injustice that I sought to critique and dismantle. Moreover, writing the thesis provided me with a sense of agency, allowing me to reclaim my narrative and make sense of the complexities of my own existence. However, this newfound agency also paradoxically led me to confront the limits of agency itself. As I delved deeper into the intricacies of theoretical frameworks and personal reflection, I found myself increasingly drawn to the notion of silence as a coherent form of expression. Rather than viewing silence as a form of traumatic silencing or disempowerment, I began to see it as a deliberate and intentional choice – an assertion of autonomy and self-possession in the face of overwhelming complexity and uncertainty. In this sense, silence and inactivity became forms of resistance.

Exploring the intricacies of my thesis, it becomes apparent that my personal journey intertwines deeply with the theoretical terrain explored within its pages. Three key elements of my life serve as foundational pillars that inform and enrich the analytical framework of my research:

- I am a digital native
- I am a member of the *classe disagiata*
- I am somebody who has grappled with depression

Through an exploration of these lived experiences, I aim to shed light on the intersectionality of power, technology, and mental health within the context of neoliberal capitalism. As a digital native, I have been intimately acquainted with the transformative power of technology throughout my life. Growing up in the digital age, I have witnessed firsthand the rapid evolution of communication, information, and social interaction in an increasingly interconnected world. This experience has not only shaped my understanding of contemporary society but has also informed my analysis of the biopolitical dimensions of digital culture explored in my thesis.

Similarly, as a member of the *classe disagiata,* I have navigated the socio-economic challenges and inequalities that characterize middle class communities in the advanced west. These insights have informed my critical analysis of neoliberal capitalism and its impact on individual and collective well-being. Finally, as a person who has grappled with a light form of depression, I have confronted the existential challenges and psychological pressures inherent in modern life. My own relationship with my mental health has deepened my understanding of the biopolitical mechanisms of control and normalization explored in my thesis, shedding light on the ways in which power operates through affective and emotional channels to shape subjectivity and behavior. This interdisciplinary approach has allowed me to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering a more holistic understanding of the socio-political dynamics at play in contemporary society. Without the financial support of a scholarship, I found myself compelled to work tirelessly to cover my expenses, often stretching my time and energy to their limits. Navigating the rigorous demands of academia while simultaneously juggling full-time employment has been a formidable challenge throughout my doctoral journey. This situation, while far from ideal for the timely completion of a doctoral thesis, underscores my unwavering commitment to scholarly pursuits and my determination to overcome obstacles in pursuit of academic excellence.

Moreover, the isolation imposed by quarantine measures during the Covid-19 pandemic plunged me into a deeper state of depression, posing additional hurdles to my research endeavors. However, rather than succumbing to despair, I channeled these experiences into my scholarly pursuits, using them as catalysts for deeper introspection and exploration within the realms of biopolitics and mental health. In reflecting on these challenges, I am reminded of the resilience and fortitude that have guided me thus far. Despite the myriad obstacles encountered along the way, my dedication to the topic remains unwavering, fueled by a steadfast determination to see this journey through to its culmination. Understanding the demands of a PhD program revealed to me that scholarly pursuit extends far beyond the realm of pure research. In addition to

conducting rigorous academic inquiry, I quickly learned that networking, engaging in formative activities, publishing articles, and participating in conferences are integral components of the doctoral experience. These activities not only contribute to the expansion of knowledge but also serve as avenues for professional development and recognition within academic circles. As I immersed myself in these diverse facets of academic life, I gained a nuanced understanding of the various forms of capital at play within the scholarly ecosystem. However, amidst this realization, I also developed a critical perspective towards academia and its mechanisms of funding scholars. Indeed, the complex interplay between academic pursuits and institutional structures shed light on the inherent power dynamics and inequalities embedded within the academic landscape. As a final personal element, I want to highlight my exchange period in Jakarta, which profoundly influenced my academic journey. During this transformative experience, I engaged in on-field research and teaching at Binus University, providing me with unique insights into diverse cultural perspectives and societal dynamics. This immersive experience broadened my understanding of global issues and deepened my appreciation for cultural exchange, fostering personal and academic growth that will resonate throughout my future endeavors.

In my thesis, I primarily adopted a descriptive approach, which involved expanding and theorizing a topic that had been touched upon by various authors but had not been thoroughly explored or treated as a central focus of inquiry. Specifically, I delved into the concept of time in post-capitalist society and its influence on the subjectification of the individual. While this topic had been addressed by numerous scholars, it was often mentioned in passing or treated as a secondary aspect within broader discussions. The eclectic and unorthodox nature of my bibliography can be attributed to this approach. Rather than limiting myself to a narrow selection of sources directly related to the topic at hand, I cast a wide net to gather insights from diverse fields and disciplines. This allowed me to draw upon plenty of perspectives, theories, and empirical studies that shed light on different facets of time, capitalism, subjectivity, and social dynamics. By synthesizing

ideas from philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, psychology, and arts, I was able to construct a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the interplay between temporality and subject formation in contemporary society. Each author and work included in the bibliography contributed valuable insights and theoretical frameworks that enriched my analysis and facilitated a deeper exploration of the research questions at hand. In essence, the eclectic nature of my bibliography reflects the interdisciplinary nature of my research and the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon under investigation. Rather than adhering to a rigid disciplinary framework, I embraced a more flexible and inclusive approach that allowed me to engage with a diverse array of perspectives and methodologies. This approach not only enriched the depth and breadth of my analysis but also fostered a more holistic understanding of the complexities inherent in the relationship between time, capitalism, and subjectivity.

In my thesis, I deliberately chose not to engage in quantitative or qualitative analysis. Instead, I pursued a purely theoretical approach to explore the complexities of the subject matter. This decision was informed by several factors, including the recognition of the inherent limitations and biases associated with data analysis methods. Researchers must make decisions about what data to collect, how to interpret it, and which statistical or analytical techniques to apply. These decisions are inevitably influenced by the researcher's own perspectives, assumptions, and preconceptions, leading to potential distortions or oversights in the analysis. Moreover, the act of selecting and analyzing data inherently involves a degree of reductionism and simplification. Researchers must necessarily focus on specific variables, indicators, or patterns while overlooking others, which can limit the scope and depth of the analysis. Instead of relying on empirical data, I drew upon existing theoretical frameworks, concepts, and ideas to develop my arguments and insights. This allowed me to engage in more abstract and speculative forms of inquiry, exploring the underlying dynamics and mechanisms that shape social phenomena without being bound by the constraints of empirical evidence. In essence, my decision to forgo quantitative and qualitative analysis in favor of a purely theoretical

approach was driven by a desire to maintain intellectual rigor, critical reflexivity, and openness to alternative perspectives.

First and foremost, it's essential to recognize that the conceptual framework of this thesis mirrors the thematic divisions outlined within its structure. This intentional alignment ensures coherence and clarity in the exploration of the underlying theoretical underpinnings across different domains of inquiry. In the chapters addressing digitization and those focusing on the intersection of the *classe disagiata* and temporality, the narrative is subtly influenced by the presence of certain authors whose voices resonate throughout the discourse, albeit implicitly. These "silent" authors serve as foundational pillars, shaping the underlying theoretical framework and lending depth to the analysis without necessarily being explicitly cited or referenced. Their ideas, theories, and perspectives permeate the discussions, guiding the exploration of key concepts and facilitating a nuanced understanding of the subject matter. In the realm of digitization, Marshall McLuhan's insights serve as a silent but influential presence, shaping the theoretical underpinnings of the discourse. While not explicitly cited, McLuhan's ideas permeate the discussion, informing our analysis of the ways in which digital technologies mediate our experiences, relationships, and modes of perception. Similarly, in the exploration of power dynamics and temporality, the intellectual lineage traces back to the seminal works of Karl Marx and Michel Foucault. Although their names may not be prominently featured, their theoretical contributions resonate throughout the discourse, shaping our understanding of the intersection between power structures and temporal frameworks. In essence, while these authors may remain in the background, their ideas serve as the silent scaffolding upon which the conceptual framework of the thesis is constructed. Their theoretical contributions inform and enrich our analysis, offering critical perspectives on the complex interplay between digitization, power, and temporality in contemporary society.

In the chapter dedicated to digitization, my primary references revolved around the works of Luciano Floridi and various scientific papers that offer a neutral, objective perspective on the concept of the infosphere. Rather

than adopting a stance of digital evangelism or antagonism, I sought to maintain a balanced and impartial approach to the subject matter. By drawing upon Floridi's insights and leveraging scientific research, I aimed to present a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the digital landscape, exploring its complexities and implications without bias or preconceived notions. This approach allowed for a more objective analysis of digitization, enabling me to navigate through its multifaceted dimensions while avoiding the pitfalls of ideological extremes.

In the chapters discussing the end of work, my primary reference point was the work of Jean Baudrillard. Building upon a post-Marxist, leftist perspective, I delved into the writings of authors such as Franco Berardi, Christian Marazzi, and Andrea Fumagalli, among others, to explore the evolving dynamics of labour in contemporary society. These thinkers provided valuable insights into the shifting nature of work and its implications for individuals and society at large. Furthermore, when examining the concept of human capital and its relationship to time, I turned to the works of Pierre Bourdieu and once again referenced Baudrillard. It is important to note the prevalence of Italian authors in this discussion, which can be attributed not only to cultural and linguistic affinity but also to my interest in the *movimento operaio* of the 1960s and 1970s. This socio-political movement remains a significant aspect of Italian history and has profoundly influenced contemporary debates surrounding labour and social justice.

In the final section of my thesis, which adopts a prescriptive and apodictic approach, I drew inspiration from Jean Baudrillard's anarchist, accelerationist, and realist cultural offspring. On the collective front, I found resonance with the ideas put forth by the Comitè Invisible, whose writings offered insights into decentralized forms of organization and resistance. Their emphasis on collective action and autonomy resonated with my exploration of guerrilla tactics against capitalist hegemony. Conversely, on the individual level, I was influenced by the writings of Mark Fisher, particularly his examination of depression and capitalist realism.

My approach to incorporating direct quotations from various bibliographical sources stems from a deep appreciation for the intellectual contributions of scholars who have influenced my thinking. Rather than viewing it as a shortcut or a form of laziness, I see it as a deliberate choice to honour and acknowledge the voices that have shaped my understanding of the subject matter. Moreover, my penchant for direct quotation reflects a commitment to transparency and integrity in scholarship. By presenting the words of other scholars in their original context, I strive to maintain fidelity to their ideas and avoid misrepresentation or distortion. Ultimately, my goal is to create a scholarly work that not only advances original insights but also pays homage to the diverse array of thinkers who have contributed to the intellectual landscape.

In this thesis, I embark on a journey to explore the dynamics of contemporary society and its profound impact on individual experiences and societal structures. At its core, this exploration is driven by three fundamental questions that seek to uncover the complexities of our modern existence:

Firstly, I delve into the notion of epistemic responsibility in the information age. In a world inundated with an unprecedented abundance of information yet plagued by attention scarcity, I aim to unravel the implications for individuals' epistemological responsibility. This inquiry is grounded in an examination of how individuals navigate the digital landscape, confronting challenges such as information overload, filter bubbles, and algorithmic biases. By shedding light on these challenges, I seek to elucidate the responsibilities inherent in discerning the various degrees of epistemic authority.

Secondly, I turn my attention to the shifting dynamics of work and consumption in the era of human capital. As our economy increasingly valorizes human capital, I explore the profound transformations occurring in labor practices, employment relationships, and consumption patterns.

Lastly, I delve into the post-capitalist account of time and its implications for the subjectification of the individual. In a world where time is commodified and fragmented, I investigate how the restructuring of

temporal frameworks shapes individuals' experiences of selfhood, agency, and psychological coherence.

In delineating the objectives of this thesis, it's crucial to emphasize that my aim is not to prescribe practical political or social solutions. Instead, I endeavour to equip readers with the analytical tools and conceptual frameworks necessary to deepen their understanding of their place within society and to confront the inherent incoherence of the modern condition. Furthermore, I aspire to cultivate reflexivity and self-awareness among readers, encouraging them to interrogate their own behaviours within the broader socio-political context. Through rigorous analysis and introspection, readers may gain a deeper understanding of the forces that shape their identities, aspirations, and relationships with others.

In delineating the scope and limitations of this thesis, it's important to acknowledge both its broad theoretical underpinnings and its specific focus on a particular socio-economic cohort. At its core, this thesis engages with a tendency that has been recognized by sociologists of risk for at least the past five decades: namely, the notion that the apex of modernity coincides with the onset of its own decline. This historical reality manifests differently across various regions and contexts, with the advanced Western world currently experiencing this phenomenon in real-time. The cohort under examination in this thesis is the *classe disagiata* – a specific segment of the middle class that faces extinction due to the erosion of the socio-economic structures that fuel their aspirations and dreams. This group represents a microcosm of the broader societal shifts occurring within contemporary capitalism[2].

The structure of the thesis unfolds across three major distinct yet interconnected parts, each delving into key themes and theoretical frameworks that shed light on the contemporary socio-economic landscape.

---

[2] There is a deliberate exclusion of gender and sexual orientation considerations in this thesis. While these factors undoubtedly intersect with class dynamics and shape individual experiences, the focus here is primarily on class-based analysis and the broader implications for social stratification and subjectification. By concentrating on the class dimension, the thesis aims to elucidate the broader structural forces at play while recognizing the intersecting axes of identity that shape lived realities.

The first part of the thesis critically examines the phenomenon of the information society, exploring the implications of living in a world saturated with data and information yet marked by a scarcity of attention. This section interrogates the role of digitization in shaping our epistemic responsibilities and the nature of human subjectivity within the infosphere. By navigating through the complexities of digital culture and its impact on societal structures, this part sets the stage for a deeper exploration of contemporary capitalist dynamics.

In the second part, the focus shifts towards an exploration of the end of work and the reconfiguration of temporalities in the age of human capital. This section probes into the ways in which capitalism's relentless pursuit of efficiency and productivity reshapes individual experiences of time and labor. By examining the intersection of work, consumption, and subjectivity, this part elucidates the precarious nature of contemporary employment relations and the challenges posed to traditional notions of identity and agency.

Finally, the third part of the thesis ventures into the realm of prescriptive analysis, offering potential pathways for emancipation from capitalist domination.

Each part builds upon the preceding one, culminating in a comprehensive exploration of the techno-economic forces shaping our present moment and the potential avenues for transformative change.

[Note on citations] in-text citations did not include page numbers due to the sourcing of information from eBooks, which often lack stable pagination. Instead, citations are based on chapter or section headings, along with any available location indicators provided by the eBook platform.

CHAPTER 1 – THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

1.1 – THE INFORMATION SOCIETY: AN INTRODUCTION

"It is a very sad thing that nowadays there is so little useless information"[3]

The Information Society stands as a testament to human progress and innovation. It's a world where data flows like water, shaping every aspect of our lives. In this data-driven era, the words of Oscar Wilde (used as a starting quote) take on a new meaning. Uselessness gives way to value as every piece of data, no matter how seemingly trivial, holds potential insights and opportunities.

Marshall McLuhan's claims that

> When we put our central nervous system outside us, we return to the primal nomadic state. We have become like the most primitive Paleolithic man, once more global wanderers, but information gatherers rather than food gatherers. From now on, the source of food, wealth, and life itself will be information [4]

In today's interconnected world, our status as global wanderers and avid information gatherers reverberates throughout the expansive digital landscape. Our contemporary voyage is woven into the tapestry of information pursuit, and the internet stands as our boundless hunting ground, where we roam without geographical constraints. We have evolved beyond the confines of physical boundaries, emerging as intrepid explorers of virtual domains where the sovereignty of knowledge reigns supreme. In this digital epoch, the ceaseless quest for wisdom pushes us forward, propelling us into the uncharted territories of the virtual realm, where the boundaries between reality and the digital frontier blur.

---

[3] Oscar Wilde, "Complete Works of Oscar Wilde," 2015, https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=27D1B7E5-A68B-4A4D-9DCB-BFD01F33E321.
[4] Marshall McLuhan, "The Agenbite of Outwit," *McLuhan Studies* 2 (1998).

Shoshana Zuboff's deep dive into the concept of 'Big Other' unveils the far-reaching influence of data within the fabric of our daily existence. As we actively partake in computer-mediated transactions, often unaware, we find ourselves unwitting subjects in a monumental experiment of profound consequence. At the heart of this bold new era lies the pivotal pillars of data extraction, meticulous analysis, personalized content delivery, and perpetual adaptation. Our actions themselves serve as the architects of the digital footprints, etching the contours of our individual and collective experiences in this data-driven age.

> The data from computer-mediated economic transactions is a significant dimension of 'big data.' There are other sources too [...] Among these, we can include a second source of computer-mediated flows that is expected to grow exponentially: data from billions of sensors embedded in a widening range of objects, bodies, and places [...] A fourth source of 'big data,' one that speaks to its heterogeneous and trans-semiotic character, flows from private and public surveillance cameras [5]

As Zuboff astutely observe, this mosaic of data sources contributes to the exponential expansion of information, reshaping the Information Society with each passing moment.

"There will be more words written on Twitter in the next two years than contained in all books ever printed"[6]. Within this expansive sea of tweets, a veritable treasure trove of invaluable insights lies concealed, each one patiently awaiting the discerning eye of discovery. These insights, brimming with multifaceted value, resonate across diverse sectors of society, finding their primary utility in the commercial sphere, where they not only fuel the

---

[5] Shoshana Zuboff, "Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization," *Journal of Information Technology* 30, no. 1 (March 2015): 75–89, doi:10.1057/jit.2015.5.
[6] Christian Rudder, *Dataclysm : Who We Are When We Think No One's Looking*, 1st Editio (New York: Crown, 2014).

engine of customer profiling but also orchestrate the anticipation of emerging trends.

At the epicenter of this narrative, the dynamism of big data emerges as a central motif, transcending mere magnitude to encompass the complex tapestry of data diversity, the relentless tempo of its continuous updates, and the astonishing celerity of its boundless expansion. The digital landscape, an ever-evolving realm, remains in perpetual motion, compelling us to pivot and progress ceaselessly, all in pursuit of unlocking the limitless potential it holds.

Moreover, it's paramount to emphasize that our primary focus here centers on the web of how this data contributes to the formation of a collective social global intelligence. This emerging collective wisdom, intricately shaped by the thoughts, ideas, and emotions expressed in tweets, transcends individual interests, fostering a deeper connection among us as global citizens and enriching our comprehension of the sophisticated dynamics that define our society.

With the advent of the internet and digital technologies, accessing information has become remarkably convenient. Today, individuals can effortlessly search for information, conduct research, and access educational resources from the comfort of their homes. This accessibility has empowered people worldwide by democratizing knowledge. However, as information floods the digital realm, challenges arise. The sheer volume of data available poses a new hurdle: information overload.

David Weinberger's exploration of data sorting reveals the complexity of managing information[7]. The multifaceted nature of handling data in the Information Society is epitomized by the duality of data management approaches. 'Sorting in the way in' entails structured data entry with predefined categories for organization, while 'sorting in the way out'

---

[7] This is a fundamental difference that Weinberger (2007) captures by the terms 'sorting in the way in' versus 'sorting in the way out'. "'Sorting in the way in' implies a clear structure and information architecture of data collection whereby data is ordered, and its location fixed once-and-for-all at the moment it enters a system or data infrastructure. "Sorting in the way out" entails the capacity to meaningfully categorize and assemble unstructured and miscellaneous data and information that have been gathered or generated on loose premises". Ioanna D. Constantiou and Jannis Kallinikos, "New Games, New Rules: Big Data and the Changing Context of Strategy," *Journal of Information Technology* 30, no. 1 (March 2015): 44–57, doi:10.1057/jit.2014.17.

involves making sense of data after collection, forging meaningful categories from diverse and unstructured sources. This dichotomy underscores the traditional paradigms of data collection and utilization in both corporate and societal contexts.

In these paradigms, data collection has historically followed well-trodden paths, guided by established and expertise-based practices, serving particular corporate purposes like control, finance, or marketing. Such endeavors often relied on established systems, classifications, and thematic or alphabetical data organization schemes. This systematic tradition, deeply rooted in the concept of 'sorting in the way in', continues to be valued by organizations, embedding data within broader cognitive structures furnished by categories, classifications, or other cognitive placeholders.

With the advent of computer technologies, particularly databases, these traditional approaches saw significant innovations, adding sophistication to data management models. However, the Information Society introduces new challenges, including vast volumes of user-generated content, tagging, and various forms of social data. "Closely associated with large data volumes are the diversity of such data, the frequency by which it is updated and, more generally, the speed by which it grows"[8]. These data sources do not easily align with established data collection methodologies, raising questions about their relevance and the processes of data reduction and aggregation required to harness their potential for business purposes. In contrast to traditional decision-making processes guided by experience and intuition, today's decisions rely on data analysis. Vast datasets are mined for insights that inform choices and strategies. This approach enhances decision accuracy, fosters innovation, and improves efficiency across various sectors, from business and healthcare to education and government. In this modern context, even seemingly haphazard data collection necessitates an underlying technical infrastructure, consisting of data fields, data structures, and architectures for data capture and storage. The choice of data types and the presence or absence of a carefully planned cognitive

---

[8] Constantiou and Kallinikos.

(semantic) architecture during data collection and storage significantly influence the usefulness of the data for subsequent purposes. These considerations are central to navigating the evolving landscape of data management in the Information Society.

Luciano Floridi's perspective on the economic value of information emphasizes its semantic content. Regardless of its physical form, information's worth derives from the meaning it conveys. To quote directly:

> clearly, when we talk about the economic value of information, the information in question is semantic. Although it is mathematically constrained and physically implemented - e.g. as a telephone call, an email, an oral message, a radio signal, a chemical formula, a Web page, or a map - it is the meaning conveyed by the information that is of value to the agents involved, who assume it to be correct or veridical [9]

Quality, timeliness, relevance, and accuracy are the metrics by which we measure its value. In an age of information abundance, discerning the valuable from the superfluous is paramount.

> The economic value of information is the expected utility that results in the willingness to pay a corresponding price for it. In both cases, the information in question must have some features that are value-adding and valuepreserving, such as timeliness, relevance, and updateness. Nobody pays for yesterday's newspaper or the wrong kind of information. Such features go under the general term of information quality [10]

The quote encapsulates a fundamental concept in the realm of information economics: the economic value of information. It explores the factors that drive individuals and organizations to invest in and pay for information resources. At its core, this value is contingent on the expected utility that information offers, a utility significant enough to justify the associated cost.

---

[9] Luciano Floridi, *Information: A Very Short Introduction, Essays in Philosophy*, vol. 11 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), http://commons.pacificu.edu/eip/.
[10] Floridi.

For information to possess economic value, it must exhibit two critical attributes: it must add value and preserve value over time. Several essential attributes contribute to the economic value of information. Timeliness is one such factor; information gains economic worth when it remains up-to-date and relevant to the prevailing context. Stale or outdated information, akin to 'yesterday's newspaper', typically loses its economic value. Relevance is equally pivotal; information must directly align with the needs or interests of those seeking it. Irrelevant or extraneous data holds little economic worth because it does not contribute to decision-making or problem-solving. Additionally, up-to-dateness plays a crucial role; in a dynamic world, information must stay current to sustain its economic value. Collectively, these attributes fall under the encompassing term 'information quality'. It serves as a pivotal determinant of economic value, with high-quality information exhibiting timeliness, relevance, and up-to-dateness. Information that meets these criteria not only adds value but also preserves that value over time. Consequently, individuals, organizations, and markets are willing to pay for information resources that meet these criteria, recognizing the intrinsic economic value they bring. This concept forms a cornerstone in understanding the dynamics of information economics and its implications for decision-making and resource allocation.

As Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen's clearly state on their work (*The New Digital Age : Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business*)[11], our actions in the digital realm leave indelible traces. In today's interconnected world, we find ourselves, consciously or not, sharing the minutiae of our lives with a global audience. Every online interaction transforms us into public figures, and the consequences of our digital actions ripple far and wide, often lingering in the virtual landscape long after we've moved on. Amidst this digital revolution, it becomes increasingly imperative to examine the profound influence of the internet and social media on how we construct our identity and subjectivity. These digital platforms have not

---

[11] "If we are on the web we are publishing and we run the risk of becoming public figures—it's only a question of how many people are paying attention, and why". Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen, *The New Digital Age : Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business* (London: Murray, 2014).

only revolutionized communication but also fundamentally reshaped our self-perception and the way we craft our online personas. In the forthcoming sections, we will embark on a journey to unravel the ways in which our online presence molds our sense of self and profoundly impacts our evolving understanding of identity within the context of the digital age. In an attention-scarce world, Eli Pariser suggest that "the best way to do that[12] was to provide content that really spoke to each person's idiosyncratic interests, desires, and needs. In the hallways and data centers of Silicon Valley, there was a new watchword: relevance." (The Filter Bubble Pariser, Eli). Technology giants in Silicon Valley have made relevance a guiding principle. Personalized content, tailored to individual interests and desires, has become the cornerstone of digital platforms. Algorithms work tirelessly to surface the most relevant information, creating filter bubbles that influence our online experiences. In the Information Society, we're navigating an ocean of data, and mastering this art is crucial. Techniques like data mining and filtering are essential tools for extracting value from the deluge of information. As we sail these waters, we must not only survive but thrive in the sea of data. This is to prevent what we can call *information overload*. Information overload is a phenomenon unique to the Information Society. While we enjoy unprecedented access to information, we must grapple with the overwhelming volume of data. Coping with this deluge requires tools and strategies to sift through the noise and extract valuable insights. Search engines, data analytics, and personalized content recommendations are invaluable aids in navigating this sea of information. They help individuals and organizations find relevant data amidst the vast ocean of digital content. The transition to the Information Society has also disrupted established economic structures. The digital economy has emerged as a dominant force, redefining the value of information and data. Businesses and industries that harness data-driven strategies thrive in this new landscape. As a result, job markets have shifted, creating demand for roles related to technology, data analysis, and digital marketing. While this

---

[12] Cashing in the information.

shift offers exciting opportunities, it also poses challenges, as traditional employment models adapt to this evolving economic paradigm. Erik Brynjolfsson's observation, "information is costly to produce but cheap to reproduce"[13], serves as a poignant commentary on the profound dynamics at play in the digital age. The democratization of information production has ushered in a paradigm shift, reshaping entire industries and dismantling traditional business models. At the core of this transformation lies the remarkable reduction in the cost of generating, storing, and disseminating digital content. This accessibility has democratized the creation process, leveling the playing field for individuals and small entities to rival their corporate counterparts in reaching and engaging global audiences. Industries such as publishing and music have felt the tremors of this revolution, as content creators now possess the means to connect directly with their consumers, bypassing the constraints of conventional gatekeepers. This monumental change isn't confined to mere cost savings. It extends into fundamental alterations in power dynamics within various sectors. Consumers now wield more influence, thanks to their ability to share opinions, create user-generated content, and influence market trends through social media and online reviews. This shift has prompted businesses to regard data as a paramount strategic asset. Analyzing data can unearth invaluable insights into customer behaviors, market trends, and operational efficiencies, thus informing decision-making and bestowing competitive advantages. The evolving landscape of democratized information necessitates adaptation and innovation for businesses to thrive. Companies unwilling to embrace these changes risk obsolescence, while those agile enough to navigate this new terrain find opportunities for growth and innovation. In summary, the democratization of information production, as encapsulated by Brynjolfsson's insight, has not only lowered production costs but also heightened accessibility, reshaped power structures, fostered innovation, and underscored the paramount

---

[13] Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee, *The Second Machine Age : Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), https://www.worldcat.org/title/second-machine-age-work-progress-and-prosperity-in-a-time-of-brilliant-technologies/oclc/1110857170&referer=brief_results.

importance of data in today's rapidly evolving business landscape. The advent of the Information Society has catalyzed profound and far-reaching social and cultural transformations. At the forefront of these changes are the vibrant online communities that have flourished, effortlessly connecting individuals with shared interests across the globe. The borders of culture have blurred as digital platforms facilitate cultural exchanges that transcend geographic limitations, giving rise to a dynamic and globalized cultural landscape. Yet, perhaps one of the most pivotal consequences of this digital revolution lies in how individuals consume information. In the digital age, personalized algorithms wield remarkable power, tailoring content to suit the unique preferences of each user. This shift has fundamentally reshaped how we experience culture, entertainment, and information. Diversity and customization have emerged as central themes, heralding a new era of individualized content consumption.

However, it's important to note that the following pages will delve deeply into the transformative impact of the Information Society on the very idea of citizenship. I will explore how digital technologies have generated new spaces for civic engagement and how real-time communication, while offering exciting possibilities, also poses significant challenges to democratic processes. The unprecedented speed and reach of information dissemination in the digital realm have opened up new avenues for citizen participation, but they have also created potential pitfalls and dangers for civic discourse. My research will navigate these terrains, shedding light on the evolving relationship between digital technologies and the concept of citizenship in the Informational age. First of all, education has undergone a dramatic shift in the Information Society. Online courses, e-learning platforms, and digital resources have made education more accessible and flexible than ever before. Lifelong learning is encouraged, and individuals can customize their educational experiences to match their needs and goals. Traditional classroom-based learning now coexists with digital alternatives, offering learners a wealth of options to acquire knowledge and skills. In today's Information Society, the rapid dissemination of information has brought about a pressing need for robust information verification processes.

Unlike in the past, where trusted sources like newspapers and television provided credible information, the current digital landscape allows unverified information to spread swiftly. Fact-checking organizations and tools have assumed a pivotal role in safeguarding the integrity of information. They employ rigorous methods to verify claims and furnish the public with reliable information. However, my research seeks to expand the discourse surrounding information verification in the Informational society. It contends that the prevailing debate on fake news has primarily revolved around the binary assessment of verifiability (true or false). What my contribution endeavors to propose is a more nuanced understanding. Fake news, it posits, should be viewed as an integral component of, and contributor to, an infrastructure of meaning. To comprehensively grasp its significance, we must consider fake news as a speech act, assessing its meaning within a given cultural ethos rather than merely its factual accuracy. On a broader scale, as multiple narratives vie for attention, we are no longer grappling solely with a proliferation of falsehoods. A more profound issue emerges: a pervasive disagreement on what constitutes truth and falsehood. This is not a purely logical dilemma; it is fundamentally sociological. The erosion of consensus on authoritative verification procedures has reached a critical juncture. In an environment where direct verification becomes impractical due to the sheer volume of information, a secondary level of heuristics comes into play. The uncertainty surrounding the content of information underscores the relevance of our opinions on others in establishing the credibility of such content. This transformation does not imply increased gullibility among netizens; rather, it acknowledges that the web functions as a decontextualizing system where we share digital spaces but lack shared cultural references. Hence, there is a pressing need to place renewed emphasis on an epistemology of indirect knowledge of the world. The ascent of the post-truth era represents a revolution that has dismantled the old media ecosystem, leaving us to grapple with the ensuing crisis. As we navigate this complex landscape, understanding the role of meaning, context, and cultural ethos in shaping our perceptions of truth and falsehood becomes increasingly vital in the Informational society. This

importance is heightened by the fact that we are concurrently inhabiting multiple social worlds at once, both spatially and temporally. Social life, as we have discussed, is an accumulation of signs that we interpret. Consequently, we bear a twofold epistemic responsibility: firstly, to comprehend and interpret the information presented to us, and secondly, and, most significantly (as emphasized in this section of my thesis), to decipher the second level of information - the social signs. This aspect will be a central focus of my research. We find ourselves at a crossroads, where the Information Society demands not just technological prowess but ethical and societal responsibility. As Eli Pariser aptly concludes, "at the moment, we're trading a system with a defined and well-debated sense of its civic responsibilities and roles for one with no sense of ethics"[14] In this transformative era, we must navigate not only the vast sea of data but also the uncharted waters of ethical and civic responsibilities.

In this ever-evolving Information Society, these facets continue to shape our daily lives, challenging us to adapt, innovate, and navigate the complexities of the digital age. The Information Society's influence extends far beyond our screens, shaping the way we work, communicate, learn, and make decisions. As we stand at the intersection of technology and information, the future promises further transformation, with endless possibilities and challenges awaiting exploration.

---

[14] Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble : What the Internet Is Hiding from You* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

1.2 – A NEW CONCECPTION OF PRIVACY

"In a society based on electronics, the specific information necessary for production and distribution, from cars to computers, will simultaneously be available to everyone. Espionage will become an art form. Culture will be restructured like an electrical circuit, where all connection points will be important transmission centers. The electronic man will reject the concept of a central authority and the limitations of social rules based on interpersonal relationships. Computers, satellites, databases, and emerging telecommunications companies transmitting multiple and varied information will break what remains of the old print-based system, reduce the number of workers in workplaces, destroy what is left of personal privacy, and politically destabilize entire nations through a total transfer of unfiltered information that will cross national borders thanks to countless microwave units and interactive satellites" [15]

"The future holds in store for us a corporate man who will embrace transparency as his natural habitat - having realized that electronic espionage has already become an art form"[16]

In the ever-evolving landscape of the Information Society, the concept of privacy has become a subject of intense scrutiny and debate, driven by the relentless march of technology and the profound transformations it has brought. This paradigm shift has ushered in an era where the boundaries of individual privacy are continually tested and reshaped. To understand the dance between privacy and digitization, we must explore the multifaceted dimensions of this complex issue.

As Simson Garfinkel aptly puts it, "The concept of privacy is central [...] yet I wish I had a better word to express the aspect of individual liberty that is under attack by advanced technology as we enter the new millennium"[17]. In this observation, Garfinkel highlights the challenge of finding appropriate language to articulate the erosion of individual liberty in the face of

---

[15] Marshall McLuhan and Bruce R. Powers, *The Global Village : Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
[16] McLuhan and Powers.
[17] Simson Garfinkel, *Database Nation : The Death of Privacy in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: O'Reilly, 2000).

advancing technology, echoing the sentiments of Marshall McLuhan[18], who foresaw the struggle to adapt our vocabulary and understanding of privacy to the rapidly transforming information landscape.

In the context of the Information Age, our exploration of the evolving concept of privacy takes a significant turn as we delve into the profound insights provided by Luciano Floridi. Floridi emerges as a central reference point in our quest to comprehend the intricacies of privacy's transformation in the digital era. His scholarly work illuminates the multifaceted relationship that exists between privacy, selfhood, and the digital landscape. Traditionally, privacy was conceived primarily in terms of physical and mental boundaries, but Floridi's comprehensive analysis redirects our attention to the complexities of informational privacy. This shift challenges us to ponder deep and essential questions about the very nature of selfhood in the digital age. The interplay between privacy and information takes center stage, beckoning us to embark on a journey of exploration and understanding.

As we navigate the terrain of this chapter, Luciano Floridi's work will serve as our guiding star, shedding light on how technology and information have redefined the boundaries of privacy and identity. His insights pave the way for a comprehensive reevaluation of these concepts in the context of the ever-evolving Information Age. In the digital era, the traditional understanding of privacy has undergone a metamorphosis. It's important to recognize that there is no inherent contradiction between a society that values privacy rights and the widespread use of platforms like Facebook or other social media services. Rather, we willingly engage in the act of sharing information about ourselves within the digital sphere, not as a wholesale compromise of our privacy but as a deliberate means of constructing and projecting our identities. In this dynamic landscape, information assumes a pivotal role as a valuable currency through which we craft and express our unique individuality. Paradoxically, as we engage in this process of identity formation, we often find ourselves contending with the tension between

---

[18] Whose prophetic quotes have been used at the beginning of the chapter.

privacy and self-disclosure. Within this multifaceted context, we must acknowledge that some of these forms of capital flourish when we permit others, including the media and various online platforms, to intrude upon our privacy. These intrusions are not necessarily detrimental but rather serve as building blocks in the construction of our digital personas. To quote Floridi directly:

> we wish to maintain a high level of informational privacy, almost as
> if that were the only way of saving a precious capital that can then
> be publicly invested by us in order to construct ourselves as
> individuals discernible by others [19]

This intertwining of privacy and self-presentation underscores the nuanced and evolving nature of privacy in the 21st century, where the very act of sharing personal information becomes a tool for self-definition, social connection, and, at times, empowerment.

To address the question of identity in the Information Age, it is imperative to consider the constantly evolving nature of the self in the digital era. This perspective challenges conventional notions of a static, unchanging self and aligns with the fluidity of self-construction through digital interactions[20]. The concept of 'me-hood' signifies the unique and private aspects of one's self, which, when intruded upon or exposed, can lead to a sense of personal alienation.

The intrusion into 'me-hood' extends beyond a mere violation of personal rights or ownership; it disrupts the integrity of the informational self.

> The violation is not a violation of ownership, of personal rights, of
> instrumental values, or of consequentialist rules, but a violation of
> the nature of the informational self, an offence against the integrity
> of the me-hood, and the efforts made by the individual to construct
> it as a whole, accurate, autonomous entity independent from, and

---

[19] Floridi, *Information: A Very Short Introduction.*
[20] To push it to its extremes, we might say that in the Informational age the individual is defined as "a bundle of information". Luciano Floridi, *The Ethics of Information* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

yet present within, the world. The intrusion is disruptive not just because it breaks the atmosphere of the environment, but because our information is an integral part of ourselves, and whoever owns it possesses a piece of ourselves, and thus undermines our uniqueness and our autonomy from the world [21]

When information about us falls into the hands of others, it undermines our uniqueness and autonomy. It is vital to draw a clear distinction between public and private information in this context. While certain information is publicly known, it represents only a fraction of our selves, often serving as a social facade we present to the world.

This paradoxical dynamic underscores the value we place on safeguarding our personal data as a precious capital. Floridi's fourfold classification of privacy—physical, mental, decisional, and informational—offers a comprehensive framework to understand the multifaceted nature of privacy in the Information Age:

- **Physical Privacy:** It encompasses freedom from sensory interference or intrusion, which is achieved through restrictions on others' ability to have bodily interactions with an individual.

- **Mental Privacy:** This multifaceted dimension encompasses the profound need for individuals to experience an unencumbered realm within their own minds. Mental privacy is not merely the absence of external surveillance but the preservation of inner sanctums where thoughts, emotions, and mental processes remain inviolate. It is the freedom from psychological interference or intrusion that allows for genuine self-reflection and autonomy. Achieving mental privacy requires stringent safeguards that inhibit others from accessing or manipulating an individual's innermost thoughts and feelings, thereby preserving the sanctity of their mental space.

---

[21] Floridi.

- **Decisional Privacy:** Decisional privacy is an essential facet of individual agency and self-determination. It extends beyond the personal sphere to encompass choices related to education, healthcare, career, work, marriage, and faith, among others. In essence, it involves the freedom from procedural interference or intrusion in decisions that profoundly affect one's life. These decisions are typically made within the realm of the individual and their trusted circle of intimates. Achieving decisional privacy necessitates the establishment of boundaries that exclude external influences and grant individuals the autonomy to shape their own destinies, free from undue external pressure or manipulation.

- **Informational Privacy:** In the digital age, the concept of privacy has undergone a profound transformation, with informational privacy emerging as a critical dimension. It pertains to the protection of personal data and digital footprints, safeguarding facts about an individual that are either unknown or unknowable to others. Informational privacy is the cornerstone of preserving one's digital identity and autonomy in an era marked by extensive data collection and digital surveillance. Achieving informational privacy requires comprehensive measures to limit access to personal information, ensuring that individuals can maintain control over their digital personas and the dissemination of their personal data in the Information Age.

We established how privacy is not solely an individual matter but a dynamic, socially constructed process that takes on different dimensions within the context of various social networks and interactions. This realization gains significance in an age where participation in digital social media often means being "public-by-default, private-through-effort." Individuals navigate a world where constant surveillance is the norm, akin to the scrutiny faced by celebrities. Empowerment in this context arises not only from technology and legal regulations but from agency—the ability to actively shape one's online presence and interactions within a web of interconnected relationships.

Participation in digital social media often means public-by-default, private-through-effort. Being watched is simply part and parcel with participating. Rather than opting out or going 'off the grid', many participants are developing techniques to manage the dynamics that celebrities have faced for a long time—life under a constant state of surveillance. [...] People aren't simply individuals or in groups; they are members of social networks, connected by information, time, and space, and they must navigate life as a series of relationships [22]

In traditional societies, the breach of privacy was a concept largely rooted in reciprocal understanding, and such breaches were typically contained within the confines of the local community. The dynamics of privacy were characterized by an inherent level of intra-community transparency, where individuals were generally aware of and often accepted that certain aspects of their lives might be known to others within their immediate social circle. However, the advent of the information age and the rise of the digital realm have ushered in a profound transformation in the way we perceive and experience privacy. This shift in privacy dynamics is primarily driven by the pervasive interconnectivity that defines the digital world.

This evolving paradigm presents a striking paradox: you can now find yourself in a situation where you are a stranger to your physical neighbor, someone with whom you share a geographical proximity, while simultaneously being intimately known by external entities that possess access to your digital footprint and personal information. This reversal of the traditional social order highlights how the digital space has fundamentally reshaped our understanding of privacy and interpersonal relationships[23].

In the contemporary digital age, breaches of privacy often originate from external sources such as data-miners and hackers who can access and

---

[22] Danah Boyd, "Dear Voyeur, Meet Flâneur… Sincerely, Social Media," *Surveillance and Society* 8, no. 4 (2011): 505–507, doi:10.24908/ss.v8i4.4187.
[23] "This is quite different from today's information society, where there can be very little transparency within the communities we live or work in (we hardly know our neighbours, and our fellow-workers have their privacy rigorously protected), yet data-miners, hackers, and institutions can be very well informed about us. Breaches of privacy from outside are common. What is more, we do not even know whether they know our business. [...] We live in a single infosphere, which has no 'outside' and where intra and inter-community relations are more difficult to distinguish" Floridi, *The Ethics of Information*.

disseminate personal information without geographical limitations. Consequently, individuals are exposed to a level of scrutiny and surveillance that transcends local boundaries, as their data can be collected, analyzed, and shared globally.

This new reality underscores the critical role that external actors now play in shaping our individual and collective privacy experiences. It's a world where personal information is a valuable commodity, and the traditional notion of privacy as something that primarily exists within the confines of one's community has been upended by the boundless reach of the digital sphere.

In the contemporary infosphere, breaches of privacy primarily entail unauthorized data collection rather than immediate public disclosure. Information may not necessarily become public; instead, it can be accessed and utilized by privileged entities. Unlike the self-regulating environment of small communities, where everyone was subject to scrutiny, the digital realm lacks inherent limitations on such intrusions.

Crucially, these observations highlight that we simultaneously inhabit both the traditional paradigm and the infosphere. This coexistence presents complex challenges and opportunities for redefining privacy in the digital age. The ontology of privacy undergoes a shift as we navigate this dual existence, and our identities become increasingly intertwined with the information we choose to share and protect.

Moreover, the invasion of privacy has undergone democratization, a social revolution that has achieved an unprecedented level of self-exposure. In this context, providing one's data has become an accepted price to pay for relevance. Notably, this democratization transcends traditional nation-state boundaries, with information now in the hands of entities that do not necessarily answer to political accountability. This shift raises concerns about the control and governance of personal data in a borderless digital landscape.

As we delve deeper into the discussion, it's worth noting the perspective of Cohen and Schmidt, founders of Google, who advocate a digital perspective that underscores the true cost of remaining anonymous. They argue that

anonymity may lead to irrelevance in the digital realm, where even the most fascinating content tied to an anonymous profile may not gain visibility due to its excessively low ranking. This perspective, often viewed as coming from a techno-evangelic standpoint, suggests that privacy, when taken to extremes, may render individuals irrelevant in the eyes of big digital companies. These companies thrive on traceable user data for profitability. Furthermore, Bauman highlights a psychological dimension of our relationship with surveillance when he states that "the condition of being watched and seen has thereby been reclassified from a menace into a temptation"[24]. In this observation, he captures the paradoxical desire for visibility and recognition in an age where surveillance is omnipresent—a profound aspect of the human psyche that the Information Society exploits. In the previous paradigm, characterized by the age of broadcasting and mass media, the dynamics of surveillance and public exposure were markedly different. During this era, individuals in the public eye, such as celebrities or public figures, were acutely aware that the many were observing them. They willingly entered the spotlight, cognizant of the public's gaze, and actively participated in the process, often consenting to a degree of exposure that accompanied their roles. This awareness of being watched was an integral aspect of the broadcasting age, where individuals in the public eye took center stage with a sense of agency and volition, fully understanding the dynamics of the gaze directed at them.

However, in the digital age, where surveillance has become pervasive, this paradigm has shifted dramatically. David Lyon's observation that "many who are under the panoptic gaze are not informed or have not consented to having their personal lives exposed to view"[25] stands as a stark contrast to the previous era. In today's information landscape, individuals may find themselves under the panoptic gaze without necessarily being fully

---

[24] "The promise of enhanced visibility, the prospect of 'being in the open' for everybody to see and everybody to notice, chimes well with the most avidly sought proof of social recognition, and therefore of valued – 'meaningful' – existence". Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance : A Conversation* (New York: Polity, 2016).

[25] David Lyon, "9/11, Synopticon, and Scopophilia: Watching and Being Watched," in *The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility* (University of Toronto Press, 2005), 35–54, doi:10.3138/9781442681880-002.

informed or having actively consented to the exposure of their personal lives. The omnipresence of surveillance technologies, often operating discreetly and without explicit consent, challenges the principles of agency and autonomy. This transformation raises profound ethical questions about the boundaries between public and private life and underscores the imperative need for individuals to regain control over their personal information in an age where exposure has become the norm rather than the exception.

The tension between privacy and security in the digital age remains a central concern. Garfinkel's question, "How can society reasonably protect itself from random acts of terrorism without putting everyone under surveillance?"[26] delves into the heart of a critical political and ethical dilemma. Balancing the need for safety with the preservation of privacy has become increasingly challenging, particularly following events like the 9/11 attacks, which prompted intensified efforts in the fight against terrorism. This complex issue prompts a reevaluation of the perceived benefits and costs of surveillance, pushing us to consider the need for informed consent and transparency in the digital age.

Zygmunt Bauman's perspective offers essential insight into the multifaceted nature of privacy in the digital age. He suggests that while the loss of privacy may be the most immediate concern,

> the issues of anonymity, confidentiality and privacy should not be ignored, but they are also bound up with those of fairness and justice, civil liberties and human rights. This is because, as we shall see, social sorting is primarily what today's surveillance achieves, for better or for worse [27]

Bauman's notion of 'social sorting' emphasizes how surveillance primarily achieves the categorization and classification of individuals in contemporary society.

---

[26] Garfinkel, *Database Nation : The Death of Privacy in the 21st Century*.
[27] Bauman and Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance : A Conversation*.

Discussing potential solutions, one perspective emerges from the techno-evangelic community, suggesting that commercial rights might offer a pathway to digital privacy that allows for moderation. In this humanistic economy, privacy would no longer be an all-or-nothing proposition. Instead, individuals could determine when and to what extent their information is accessible, and this could come at a monetary cost. For instance, some of an individual's photographs might be worth accessing in certain contexts, while others may not. While this approach represents progress in terms of digital privacy, it remains intertwined with capitalist principles, leaving room for questions about its broader implications.

Floridi's ideas about privacy as a right to an appropriate flow of information within specific contexts, such as the marketplace, education, and political life, resonate with this perspective. He emphasizes the need to construct an infrastructure that allows for a plurality of publics and a choice of exposure and places to hide. In this vision, individuals should not have to disconnect entirely to protect themselves, highlighting the importance of balancing privacy with participation in the digital society.

Another approach, often associated with entities in control of vast amounts of data, involves the fusion of machine learning with game theory. This strategy revolves around anticipating potential actions and weighing the costs and benefits of various strategies, with the aim of striking a delicate balance between privacy and security in the digital age[28]. It aligns closely with the evolving landscape of surveillance and underscores the significance of technological solutions in addressing modern privacy challenges.

However, it's vital to acknowledge that in the realm of privacy, especially concerning Big Data companies, there is a prevalent tendency towards dominance. These major players hold substantial quantities of data, extensive resources, and formidable technological capabilities, which inherently position them at an advantage. This dominance can raise

---

[28] "The solution is to marry machine learning with game theory [...]: don't just learn to defeat what your opponent does now; learn to parry what he might do against your learner. Factoring in the costs and benefits of different actions, as game theory does, can also help strike the right balance between privacy and security". Pedro Domingos, *The Master Algorithm : How the Quest for the Ultimate Learning Machine Will Remake Our World* (New York: Basic books, 2018).

concerns about their potential to exert control and influence over individuals' personal information, ultimately impacting the preservation of privacy.

When discussing this approach, particularly within the context of game theory, it becomes apparent that Big Data companies represent the agents with a significant upper hand. They possess more chances to prevail in the game of privacy versus security. Their strategies and solutions often stem from a vantage point where they can shape and influence the rules of this digital game, potentially altering the landscape of privacy to favor their interests.

In essence, the pursuit of equilibrium between privacy and security unfolds within a broader context where Big Data companies may inherently possess a dominant position. This dynamic underscores the complexities of the digital age, where the quest for balance must grapple with the influential presence of these entities within the information ecosystem.

Finally, privacy manifests itself in two distinct facets, each bearing profound implications within the digital age. Firstly, it encapsulates the individual's authority to determine what information about themselves they wish to disclose to the world. This facet has assumed heightened complexity in the Information Age, where personal data continuously flows through digital networks, often traversing borders and domains beyond our immediate control. The ability to curate one's digital footprint and decide the extent to which personal information is made accessible has become an convoluted dance, requiring vigilance and awareness.

Conversely, the second facet of privacy involves the authority to erase or remove information that either pertains to or concerns the individual. While the former facet may pose formidable challenges, the latter, erasure of digital traces, encounters even more substantial obstacles. Legal and technological constraints converge to create a landscape where the deletion of one's digital past is virtually impossible.

This predicament is further exacerbated by the evolving nature of the digital landscape. Contemporary generations, often referred to as digital natives, grow up in an environment where their digital presence precedes their

capacity to provide informed consent or make choices about data sharing. From the moment they interact with digital devices and online platforms, a trail of data begins to accumulate, forming a digital record that may span a lifetime. This record, born before individuals can fully comprehend the implications or exercise control over it, poses unique challenges.

The notion of digital natives and the generations that follow highlights an unprecedented scenario where personal data is generated before individuals can even fathom the concept of digital privacy. It underscores the urgent need for comprehensive considerations surrounding data ethics, consent, and the rights of individuals in an era where their digital identities are shaped well before they can grasp the implications. The intertwining of personal histories with digital footprints presents a complex landscape where the right to control and erase information becomes a paramount concern, requiring innovative solutions and robust ethical frameworks to navigate.

In conclusion: the Information Society has ushered in an era where the concept of privacy is multifaceted, evolving, and often laden with paradoxes. From the challenges of articulating the erosion of individual liberty in an increasingly digital world to the complex interplay between privacy and security, this subject continues to shape the social, political, and technological landscapes. As we navigate this terrain, it becomes imperative to acknowledge the historical context and the enduring human inclination to prioritize security over freedom. Drawing a parallel between totalitarian governments and the new main informational agents in the infosphere, we can observe a striking similarity in their influence over individuals' lives. Francis Fukuyama description of the Soviet State eerily resonates with the concepts above mentioned: "This then was the ultimate goal of totalitarianism: not simply to deprive [...] man of his freedom, but to make him fear freedom in favor of security, and to affirm the goodness of his chains even in the absence of coercion"[29]. In the previous paradigm, totalitarian governments wielded power in specific physical territories and

---

[29] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

were subject to political accountability, making their actions more transparent and their control more tangible. People were aware of their presence and could, to some extent, resist or challenge their authority within the confines of a defined jurisdiction.

However, in the contemporary digital age, where major informational agents dominate the infosphere, the landscape has become more nebulous. These entities operate on a global scale, often transcending physical borders and eluding traditional forms of political accountability. Their influence extends across boundaries and into the daily lives of countless individuals who may not fully grasp the extent of their reach or the implications of their actions. This lack of physical presence and the diffuse nature of their control can make it challenging for individuals to resist or even recognize the influence exerted upon them.

Moreover, the digital age introduces a new dimension of control through data collection and surveillance. Individuals willingly share vast amounts of personal information online, often without a full understanding of how it is being used or who has access to it. This voluntary surrender of privacy, driven by the promise of convenience and security, can lead to a situation akin to Fukuyama's description of individuals embracing their chains in the absence of coercion. The new informational agents may not employ overt force, but they have the potential to shape individuals' choices, behaviors, and perceptions in subtle yet significant ways.

In summary, there is indeed a parallel between totalitarian governments of the past and the influence of main informational agents in the digital age. While the previous paradigm offered a clearer understanding of power structures due to physical presence and political accountability, the contemporary landscape presents challenges in recognizing and resisting the influence of entities that operate in the intangible realm of the infosphere. This highlights the need for increased awareness, transparency, and ethical considerations in the digital age to ensure that individuals do not unknowingly embrace their own constraints in the pursuit of security and convenience.

This juxtaposition of historical parallels underscores the gravity of our contemporary situation, urging us to carefully consider the consequences of trading freedom for security and to seek a balance that safeguards both individual liberties and collective welfare in the Information Age.

We can conclude with the following quote: "It is possible that on a simple calculus citizens accept that loss of privacy is the price to be paid for security - as the mass media have reiterated ad nauseam since 9/11 - but one wonders how these attitudes might change if the same citizens knew what exactly happened to their personal data as they circulate between distant databases"[30].

In this chapter, we explored the evolving concept of privacy in the Information Society. We discussed how technology challenges privacy boundaries and the struggle to articulate its erosion. Privacy has shifted from physical and mental boundaries to informational privacy, where sharing information can construct identities.

We addressed the tension between privacy and self-disclosure and how privacy can sometimes hinder self-realization. The invasion of privacy has democratized self-exposure, raising concerns about data governance.

Balancing privacy and security remains a challenge, with major informational agents wielding significant influence. We drew parallels between these agents and totalitarian governments, emphasizing the need for awareness and ethical considerations in the digital age.

In conclusion, our exploration sheds light on the complexities of privacy in today's digital landscape, prompting us to carefully consider the trade-offs between freedom and security.

This chapter, while not the central focus of our essay, serves as a fundamental cornerstone. It sheds light on the intricacies of privacy in the current digital landscape, delivering the essential context required to define personal identity in our modern era. Devoid of a firm grasp on these foundational concepts, our thorough understanding would inevitably fall

---

[30] Lyon, "9/11, Synopticon, and Scopophilia: Watching and Being Watched."

short, leaving us with an indistinct understanding of the complex interplay between freedom and security within the ever-evolving Information Society.

1.3 – ATTENTION!

"Our electrically-configured world has forced us to move from the habit of data classification to the mode of pattern recognition. We can no longer build serially, block-by-block, step-by-step, because instant communication insures that all factors of the environment and of experience coexist in a state of active interplay"

[31]

For millennia, our existence transpired within the confines of environments marked by a pronounced scarcity of information[32]. This enduring scarcity, which characterized human history until the advent of the digital age, signifies an epochal change not only in terms of technological advancement but also in the very fabric of human anthropology. It ushers in an era so unprecedented in the annals of human evolution that we are venturing into uncharted territory, reshaping not only how we access information but also how we fundamentally perceive and interact with the world.

In this monumental shift, our species is not merely embracing a new technological epoch but rewriting the narrative of our anthropological journey. The scarcity of information that has shaped our cognitive processes, decision-making, and societal structures for eons has yielded to a world of abundance where information flows ceaselessly. This transformation doesn't merely alter how we gather and process knowledge; it challenges the very core of human existence. We navigate a terrain unexplored in our evolutionary history, where the rules that once governed our interaction with the world have been rewritten by the relentless march of information technology. It is a transformation that echoes across the ages, creating a profound demarcation between 'then' and 'now', as we move deeper into the uncharted territories of the digital age, with implications yet to be fully comprehended.

---

[31] Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage* (Toronto: Random House, 1967).

[32] "For most of human history, we've lived in environments of information scarcity. In those contexts, the implicit goal of information technologies has been to break down the barriers between us and information. Because information was scarce, any new piece of it represented a novel addition to your life". James Williams, *Stand out of Our Light : Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

In these epochs, the overarching aim of emerging technologies was to break down the barriers that separated individuals from knowledge. Each new piece of information was akin to the discovery of a precious gem—an extraordinary addition to one's understanding of the world.

> From management structures to encyclopedias, to the courses of study we put our children through, to the way we decide what's worth believing, we have organized our ideas with principles designed for use in a world limited by the laws of physics [33]

However, the advent of the digital age has ushered in a seismic transformation.

> When information becomes abundant, attention becomes the scarce resource: in an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes. What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it [34]

This engenders a peculiar paradox wherein the burgeoning wealth of information begets a paucity of attention. In such an era, the central challenge lies in the judicious allocation of our limited attention amidst an overwhelming abundance of information sources, all vying for our cognitive engagement. The fundamental principles that once served as our guides in a world of scarcity must now adapt to navigate the landscape of abundance. This paradigm shift from a world marked by information scarcity to one characterized by its abundance carries profound implications, particularly in its impact on our memory and information selection—a concept that echoes Marshall McLuhan's insights. Our memory mechanisms and the

---

[33] David Weinberger, *Everything Is Miscellaneous : The Power of the New Digital Disorder* (New York: Times Books / Henry Holt, 2008).
[34] Williams, *Stand out of Our Light : Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy*.

systems we employ to make sense of the world, including news, education, law, and advertising, all originated and still operate under the assumption of an information-scarce environment. However, as we transition into an information-rich era, these systems undergo fundamental shifts that go beyond surface-level changes. They transform the very essence of how we memorize and select information in the digital age.

In this brave new world, our attention spans are tested as the digital realm inundates us with an ever-expanding array of choices and stimuli. The constant influx of information, often tailored to our preexisting interests and biases by sophisticated algorithms, encourages a shallow, skimming approach to consumption. The phenomena of clickbait, scrolling endlessly through social media feeds, and swiftly switching between tasks exemplify the new norm—shorter attention spans and diminished concentration.

This revised paragraph emphasizes the influence of information scarcity on our foundational systems and aligns with the McLuhan perspective regarding the profound consequences of these shifts on memory and information selection.

In the digital age, our bodies are grappling with a significant mismatch in terms of the evolution of our physiological preferences. Over centuries, our biology has been wired to respond to certain primal cues. We have an innate inclination toward consuming fats and sugars, once scarce in nature but vital for our survival. Similarly, our biological programming draws our attention to content that stimulates intense reactions - the sensational, the violent, the sexual, and the provocative gossip that carries elements of humiliation or offense. "If we're not careful, we're going to develop the psychological equivalent of obesity. We'll find ourselves consuming content that is least beneficial for ourselves or society"[35].

However, the digital realm inundates us with a deluge of information that far exceeds the capacity of the human organism to process. This vastness stretches our cognitive and perceptual limits, creating a profound stress on our faculties. The relentless expansion of cyberspace and the ceaseless

---

[35] Pariser, *The Filter Bubble : What the Internet Is Hiding from You.*

exposure to signals that we perceive as essential for our survival create a perceptual, cognitive, and psychological stress that can lead to a dangerous acceleration of our vital functions.

This dissonance between our innate proclivities and the information-rich environment poses a unique challenge.

It raises a question that aligns with the concept of convivial tools articulated by Ivan Illich. "What matters to us is whether the amount of information is above or below the threshold of what can be well processed given existing limitations"[36]. Illich's notion of convivial tools emphasizes the importance of tools that empower individuals to shape and control their own environments. These tools are designed with human scale and purpose in mind, enabling users to enhance their capabilities and live in harmony with the world around them. Convivial tools encourage active, participatory engagement, fostering a sense of agency and self-determination.

In our context, this concept reflects the need to scrutinize whether the sheer abundance of information has outstripped our cognitive capacities. It prompts us to consider whether the digital environment we've constructed adheres to the principles of conviviality. Is the digital landscape designed to facilitate our engagement, empower us, and enhance our understanding, or does it overwhelm, disempower, and strain our cognitive limitations? The questions arising from the abundance of information dovetail with Illich's principles of conviviality, suggesting that our tools - in this case, our digital information ecosystem – should be examined for their role in shaping our cognitive landscape.

Notably, this concept of convivial tools and their relevance to our interaction with information will be further explored and quoted later in the thesis, underscoring its significance in shaping our evolving relationship with the digital realm.

In navigating this interplay between our biological predispositions and the information-rich world we now inhabit; we face the daunting task of adapting to the changing parameters of the digital age.

---

[36] Williams, *Stand out of Our Light : Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy*.

Throughout history, the landscape of information transmission has witnessed a series of transformative shifts. We evolved from the era where the written word on paper, embodied by books, reigned supreme. Subsequently, the advent of mass media, such as newspapers, radio, and television, marked a dramatic transition in how we accessed and consumed information. These mass media sources brought news, entertainment, and knowledge into our lives on a grand scale. However, it is the internet, the contemporary digital frontier, that has ushered in an unprecedented transformation in the way we engage with information.

The printed book, as a medium for information consumption, held a unique and enduring status due to its specific technical specifications and limitations. Its role as a definitive medium stemmed from its intrinsic qualities rather than any attempt to glorify it.

"The printed book has a perfect cognitive format. It fulfils its task excellently because it contains only itself"[37]. It offered a straightforward, uncluttered, and focused experience, primarily because of the tangible connection it provided to the wisdom within its pages.

The limitations imposed by the physical constraints of the book itself played a central role in defining its scope. The printed book offered a self-contained world of ideas, inviting readers to engage in an immersive experience. These limitations, rather than detracting from its value, rendered the printed book a timeless and enduring medium for conveying information. It guided readers on journeys of exploration and understanding with a unique combination of clarity and depth, making it a definitive medium due to its distinctive technical specifications and inherent limitations.

> There are other marginal but interesting cognitive advantages of the book related to its linear organization. I receive tactile information from a book; my body, my hands can tell how much is left to read from the weight of the book and the way it's balanced; the pages yet to be read balance those already read. Knowing how much I have left

---

[37] Roberto Casati, *Contro Il Colonialismo Digitale : Istruzioni per Continuare a Leggere* (Bari: Laterza, 2014). [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

to read provides a concrete measure of the work done and allows me
to modulate the effort needed for the work to be done [38]

This distinct characteristic further underscores the book's status as a definitive medium, grounded in its unparalleled ability to engage the reader in a tactile and cognitive manner.

The transition from the traditional book or written page as the primary medium for information consumption marks a significant evolutionary leap in how we engage with the world of knowledge. In the digital age, we find ourselves immersed in an era where information travels at the speed of light, a notion eloquently articulated by media theorist Marshall McLuhan. It's a realm of everything, everywhere, all at once. As discussed earlier, this digital landscape is characterized by an overabundance of information, overwhelming in its sheer volume and diversity. In response to this informational deluge, the need arises for effective mechanisms to filter, curate, and make sense of this new informational world. This need gives rise to the concept of filter bubbles.

Filter bubbles represent a dynamic and evolving facet of our information ecosystem, a product of the digital age. They encapsulate the idea that as individuals navigate the vast ocean of online content, algorithms and personalization mechanisms construct personalized informational spaces. In these bubbles, individuals are exposed to information and viewpoints that align with their existing beliefs, preferences, and online behavior. The result is a personalized and often narrow information landscape that caters to each user's preconceptions and expectations. While filter bubbles offer the convenience of tailored content and a sense of familiarity, they also present the challenge of potentially limiting exposure to diverse perspectives and alternative viewpoints. In the following paragraph, we will delve deeper into the concept of filter bubbles and their implications in the context of our evolving information consumption landscape.

The celebration of 'personalization' in the current paradigm presents a surreal paradox. This phenomenon arises because the concept of

---

[38] Casati.

personalization, which implies a tailored and unique experience, stands at odds with its implications in reality. Instead of being serendipitous and genuinely reflective of individual preferences, personalization is often managed by others and chosen for profit-driven motives, undermining its authenticity. As we immerse ourselves in this age of information, we're encouraged to believe that personalization caters to our individuality and uniqueness. However, the stark reality is that this seemingly individualized experience is molded by unseen hands, with motives driven not by our best interests but by commercial profiling, as keenly observed by Shoshana Zuboff in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism.*

In this paradoxical scenario, we find ourselves viewing the world through lenses crafted by private companies, designed to serve their interests, not ours. What is presented as a tailored experience, shaped to align with our preferences and desires, often defiles the sanctity of our individuality. It ignores the full spectrum of our uniqueness, as the algorithms employed to achieve personalization are ultimately focused on profit rather than personal enrichment. Instead of celebrating our diversity and individuality, personalization mechanisms often override our eclectic tastes and obscure the opportunity for serendipitous discovery. In doing so, they displace the broader scope of human experience and understanding, limiting our exposure to different perspectives and diverse information.

The heart of the paradox lies in the fact that personalization, ostensibly designed to enhance our online experience, can inadvertently undermine our individuality and uniqueness, reducing us to mere data points within commercial algorithms. We navigate a world where the very idea of personalization is shaped by external forces, making it crucial to scrutinize the implications of this seemingly tailored approach to information consumption in the digital age.

Ultimately, personalization emerges as a double-edged sword, offering convenience and customization while simultaneously raising questions about its cost to our autonomy and our access to a wide spectrum of information. The paradoxical nature of personalization underscores the need to reevaluate our relationship with the digital ecosystem, one in which

the parameters of individuality and uniqueness are redefined by commercial interests, shaping our view of the world and the information it holds. This modern phenomenon constitutes a distinctive universe of information for each of us, fundamentally reshaping how we encounter ideas and information. While individuals have historically gravitated toward media that align with their interests, the filter bubble introduces three novel dynamics that set it apart. First, it leaves you in solitude, isolated within your own cocoon of information. This solitude, as elucidated by Eli Pariser in *The Filter Bubble*, stands as a departure from traditional media consumption. Second, and somewhat paradoxically, the filter bubble remains invisible. While it shapes your informational landscape, you are often unaware of its presence, as it operates behind the scenes. The third dynamic is that you don"t actively choose to enter the filter bubble; rather, it envelopes you as a consequence of your online behavior. In an era where attention is a prized commodity, the prevailing strategy to capture it is by providing content meticulously tailored to accommodate each individual's unique interests, desires, and needs. This approach is underscored by a new watchword that reverberates through the corridors and data centers of Silicon Valley: 'relevance'. As elucidated by Pariser in his seminal work, *The Filter Bubble*, the digital landscape has borne witness to a profound transformation, one that places personalization at the heart of information consumption in the digital age.

The pursuit of relevance in the digital realm has become the lodestar guiding content curation and dissemination. The algorithmic engines that power the internet's informational infrastructure are finely attuned to decipher the patterns of a user's online behavior, preferences, and interactions. They diligently craft a digital landscape tailored to meet each individual's expectations, thereby enhancing the perceived relevance of the information presented. This orchestration extends to the minute nuances of a user's interests, encompassing everything from hobbies and passions to the intricacies of their daily lives.

The implications of this relentless quest for relevance are far-reaching, reshaping the way we navigate the expansive information terrain. While

personalization undoubtedly delivers the convenience of content that aligns with our proclivities, it also raises pertinent questions. The digital age's pivot toward personalization can inadvertently lead to the creation of insular informational spaces, where users are cocooned within their comfort zones. It becomes a delicate balancing act, with personalization enhancing the user experience but simultaneously necessitating vigilance to safeguard against the potential confinement to echo chambers.

As we traverse this dynamic terrain, the significance of balance between personalization and exposure to diverse perspectives takes center stage, shaping the evolution of information consumption and digital engagement. Within the landscape of human cognition, we transcend the realm of pure logic. Instead, we engage in a remarkable cognitive process known as heuristics. Heuristics are mental shortcuts or rules of thumb that enable us to swiftly make decisions and solve problems. These cognitive shortcuts, often intertwined with miscalculations, contradictions, and irrationalities, are the very scaffolding of our intelligence. They underpin our remarkable capacity to not only adapt but to thrive in a world that constantly metamorphoses. It's akin to a cognitive high-wire act, where our minds balance on the tightrope of heuristics, guiding us to both assimilate wisdom from our past experiences and embrace the ceaseless influx of new information from the present.

> Human beings may be a walking bundle of miscalculations, contradictions, and irrationalities, but we're built that way for a reason: The same cognitive processes that lead us down the road to error and tragedy are the root of our intelligence and our ability to cope with and survive in a changing world. We pay attention to our mental processes when they fail, but that distracts us from the fact that most of the time, our brains do amazingly well. The mechanism for this is a cognitive balancing act. Without our ever thinking about it, our brains tread a tightrope between learning too much from the past and incorporating too much new information from the present [39]

---

[39] Pariser, *The Filter Bubble : What the Internet Is Hiding from You.*

In the contemporary digital landscape, heuristics come into play not only in our quest for survival but in our endeavor to navigate and discern the level of truthiness of the vast sea of information. We employ these mental shortcuts not just to select the information that deserves our attention but also to evaluate its reliability and authenticity. This process is further accentuated by the diminishing role of traditional authorities and mediators in our information ecosystem, a topic that we will delve into more deeply in subsequent chapters of this thesis. The shift from an era of trusted gatekeepers to an era of individual discernment marks a profound transformation in our information consumption landscape, making it a central theme of our exploration and analysis.

Filter bubbles are not arbitrary constructs; they exploit our cognitive vulnerabilities. To secure a foothold in the fiercely competitive battle for our attention, digital designers deftly appeal to the deepest recesses of human psychology. This subtle yet highly effective manipulation of our instincts and behaviors pulls us further into the personalized information spaces that filter bubbles craft.

Within this landscape, a pivotal force emerges – a concept known as the tyranny of the default. It highlights the remarkable influence wielded by designers when setting default options in our choices. The choices designers make significantly shape our online experiences, propelling us deeper into realms of personalization and reinforcing the pervasive nature of filter bubbles.

The question of consent looms large in this context. In practice, the noble concept of consent requires a reevaluation of the legal framework that governs it. The practice of perpetual, blanket consent warrants reform. Yet, this issue transcends mere legalities, delving into the realms of trust and practicality. In the post-capitalist age, where every moment is a precious commodity and our schedules are packed to the brim, the notion of dedicating extensive time to unravel the web of terms and conditions becomes increasingly impractical. It's in this landscape that trust takes on a new dimension. No longer merely a product of authority, trust now often

arises from practicality. We find ourselves leaning on a different kind of trust – practical trust – grounded in the recognition that navigating the fine print of digital agreements is a daunting task in our time-starved lives. This shift in the dynamics of trust and consent underscores the pivotal role played by mediators in the digital age. These mediators emerge as crucial navigators in guiding us through the complex and often bewildering landscape of information. They act as interpreters of the digital deluge, helping us make sense of the vast sea of content, and offering us signposts in an otherwise labyrinthine information ecosystem.

As we move further into this digital age, a notable transition emerges – a shift toward the era of the second degree of epistemological responsibility. In the past, our heuristics were primarily directed at understanding the world itself, as we sought to navigate the complexities of reality. However, as we evolve, our focus shifts from the world itself to those very mediators that provide authority and truthiness to the world. In this new age, we grapple not only with the information but also with the structures and systems that shape our understanding of truth and knowledge, recognizing that the sources of information often hold the power to shape our perception of reality. This transition marks a profound change in the way we approach and evaluate information, signaling the emergence of a new era of epistemological responsibility.

This shift in the dynamics of trust and consent underscores the vital importance of mediators in the digital age. These mediators play a central role in guiding us through the complex landscape of information, helping us make sense of the digital deluge.

To navigate this complexlandscape, advancing accountability, transparency, and measurement in design becomes paramount. Transparency in persuasive design goals is crucial, ensuring that our trust in technology creators is well-placed. However, this transparency often revolves around information management and falls short in addressing the mechanisms that shape our attention. This reflects the ongoing evolution of digital design, where ethical considerations around attention manipulation take center stage.

In conclusion, "we must reflect that, when we reach the end of our days, our life experience will equal what we have paid attention to, whether by choice or default"[40]. The design of digital environments, the consent we grant, and the trust we bestow upon technology creators all converge to shape the path of our attention in the digital age, underscoring the interplay between design, cognition, and the human experience.

In examining the decline of civic life in the digital age, a critical issue has come to the forefront – the transformation of our social connections. Traditional notions of social capital – the bonds of trust and cooperation that encourage people to help one another and work together on common issues – have evolved in intriguing ways. Two essential facets of social capital come into focus: bonding capital and bridging capital. Bonding capital primarily thrives within in-groups, often exemplified by events like college alumni reunions. On the other hand, bridging capital finds its foundation in diverse gatherings, such as town meetings or online forums, where individuals from various backgrounds come together to create new connections. The value of bridging capital is manifold. It possesses the ability to grant access to an extensive network of individuals with diverse skills, resources, and knowledge. This expansive reach not only facilitates the quest for employment opportunities but also underpins the process of securing investment for entrepreneurial ventures. Bridging capital, with its dynamic and versatile nature, serves as a catalyst for tapping into multifaceted networks, making it a valuable resource in navigating the complexities of the modern world. In the unfolding of the digital age, there was a prevailing expectation that the internet would emerge as a potent source of bridging capital, a platform for cultivating connections that transcended the boundaries of our immediate social circles and niches. The vision was that this virtual realm would facilitate encounters with diverse individuals and foster a sense of unity that reached beyond our offline lives. However, the reality, as highlighted by Eli Pariser, has not entirely aligned with this utopian notion. Instead, our online interactions have progressively

---

[40] Tim Wu, *The Attention Merchants : The Epic Scramble to Get inside Our Heads*, Fourth pri (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017).

mirrored our offline relationships, becoming increasingly insular and homogenous. This shift has led to an accumulation of bonding capital at the expense of bridging capital, marking a significant transformation in the dynamics of our social fabric. In recognizing the importance of diversity, it becomes evident that bridging capital is not just a matter of connection; it forms the cornerstone of our public sphere, where collective discussions unfold, and issues that transcend individual interests and affiliations are addressed. A robust public space is characterized by the inclusion of various perspectives and voices, creating a social texture that is both adaptable and resilient. In embracing diversity, we fortify the foundations of our society, fostering a more inclusive, dynamic, and collaborative environment where the complexities of our interconnected world can be effectively navigated and understood. The transformation of our social fabric, as filter bubbles reconfigure the dynamics of bonding and bridging capital, unfolds as a complex and largely acephalous process. Rather than being the result of specific individuals' or groups' intentional ideologies, it emerges as an outcome of broader systemic forces. This characteristic is a defining element of the post-capitalist era, a testament to the overarching ideology that characterizes this epoch.

What's particularly intriguing is that it eludes conventional attribution of blame to any singular entity or group. This aligns with the intricacies of post-capitalism, where power structures are diffuse and often obscured. The mechanisms propelling these changes function without a distinct ideological center, rendering it challenging to assign responsibility to any single party for the outcomes.

In the chapters to come, we will thoroughly investigate the complex relationship between ideology and human agency in both its psychological and ontological dimensions. The forthcoming discussions will unveil the mechanisms driving the perpetuation of ideology and emphasize the pivotal role played by the lack of agency as one of its central driving forces. These explorations will provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play in our digital society, guiding us through the interplay of these factors as they continue to shape our evolving landscape.

The digital age, with its relentless barrage of information and the ceaseless demand for our attention, has underscored the preciousness of our cognitive resource. In the contemporary landscape of information abundance, the idea of attention as a resource, akin to capital, maintains its underpinning within the structures of capitalism. It is essential to underscore that any endeavor aimed at liberation, while operating within the confines of these capitalist notions, inherently carries the weight of being a partial and unfinished venture. The urgency of the matter necessitates immediate action, especially given the prevailing state of affairs. Consequently, we must conscientiously engage in the pursuit of an effective approach to address attention within the existing capitalist framework, all while concurrently seeking innovative and revolutionary pathways towards liberation, as will be thoroughly explored in the conclusive and constructive section of this thesis. Indeed, attention is not just a personal asset. What if we considered it a fundamental right?

> To the same extent that organs should not be exchanged on the market place, our attentional capabilities deserve protective treatment. Respect for attention should be linked to fundamental rights such as privacy and bodily integrity, as attentional capability is an inherent element of the relational self for the role it plays in the development of language, empathy, and collaboration [41]

The ability to direct our focus, to choose what we pay attention to, is a cornerstone of autonomy, responsibility, reflexivity, and the development of a pluralistic society. In this context, safeguarding attention becomes imperative, akin to how we protect other intrinsic aspects of our humanity. Respect for attention must be intertwined with fundamental rights, much like the way privacy and bodily integrity are esteemed. The default settings and designed aspects of our technologies should be crafted to respect and preserve our attentional capabilities, offering users the informed choices they need to safeguard their attention. In the ongoing dialogue about the

---

[41] Luciano Floridi, *The Onlife Manifesto. Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era* (Cham: Springer Open, 2015).

ethics and governance of the digital sphere, we must elevate the status of attention to that of a fundamental human right.

As we venture into the uncharted territories of the digital age, these considerations become increasingly crucial. The shift from a world marked by information scarcity to one inundated with abundance has engendered a complex interplay between design, cognition, and human experience. The concept of filter bubbles reshaping the dynamics of social capital, the implications of design choices on our attention, and the subtleties of ideology and agency all pose multifaceted challenges that call for careful examination. The central themes we've explored in this chapter, from the scarcity of attention as a post-capitalist resource to the recognition of attention as a human right, will continue to thread through the tapestry of our exploration in the subsequent chapters.

In the digital age, attention is not just a currency; it's a fundamental cornerstone of our existence, and we are only beginning to understand the full implications of this transformation. The journey ahead is one of unwrapping the layers of this complex and interconnected reality and crafting a vision for a digital world where attention is treasured, protected, and recognized as an inalienable human right.

In this chapter, we embarked on an exploration of the profound transformation brought about by the digital age, shifting from a world of information scarcity to one characterized by abundance. The scarcity of information that once guided our cognitive processes and societal structures has given way to an era where attention emerges as the ultimate scarce resource. We observed the paradox where an abundance of information consumes our limited attention, necessitating judicious allocation. This chapter delved into the impact of this shift on our memory, information selection, and filter bubbles' role in personalizing our information landscapes. The discussion extended to the human biological predispositions and the concept of convivial tools, prompting us to question whether the digital environment aligns with principles of empowerment and self-determination. The dynamics of trust, consent, and practicality in the digital age were examined, highlighting the pivotal role of mediators. As

we ventured further, the chapter emphasized the transition to the second degree of epistemological responsibility, where we shift our focus from understanding the world itself to scrutinizing the sources that shape our perception of reality. The interplay between design, cognition, and human experience underscored the web of factors influencing our attention in the digital age. In conclusion, attention was identified as a finite and essential resource, deserving protective treatment as a fundamental human right. The themes explored, from attention scarcity within a post-capitalist context to recognizing attention as a human right, will remain central as we continue to navigate the uncharted territories of the digital age. Our journey involves unwrapping the layers of this complex and interconnected reality, envisioning a digital world where attention is treasured, protected, and revered as an inalienable human right.

1.4 – THE AGE OF SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM

> "Smart power reads and appraises our conscious and unconscious thoughts [...] It simply *happens*" [42]

In the contemporary era of information technologies, the ascent of surveillance capitalism, as elucidated by Shoshana Zuboff, has wrought a profound shift in the landscape of societal control and governance. This transformation stands in stark opposition to the conventional methods of discipline and punishment that held sway in earlier epochs. Zuboff's meticulous analysis, as detailed in her work, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, underscores the formidable nature of surveillance capitalism, a system designed to seize and harness human experiences. "Surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data"[43]. This data, once extracted, becomes the building block for the construction of predictive models that hold sway over a multitude of aspects of our lives. This data is not confined to its traditional role of merely serving product or service enhancement. Instead, it is primarily declared as a proprietary behavioral surplus, serving as the foundational fuel for the expansive domain of machine intelligence and the creation of predictive products that possess the capacity to anticipate individual actions and choices. This transformative innovation ushers in a new, regressive epoch marked by autonomous capital and heteronomous individuals[44]. In this era, the promise of democratic flourishing and human fulfillment teeters on a precipice, uncertain and subject to the prevailing forces of control and influence. Furthermore, the ascendancy of surveillance capitalism marks a pivotal transformation, signifying a momentous shift from the traditional role of the nation-state to private entities as the paramount informational agents. In previous eras, the state held sway as

---

[42] Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics* (London: VERSO Books, 2017).

[43] Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism : The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019).

[44] "The new global means of behavioral modification [...] represent a new regressive age of autonomous capital and heteronomous individuals, when the very possibilities of democratic flourishing and human fulfilment depend upon the reverse" Zuboff.

the primary arbiter of surveillance and influence, a central figure in the control and dissemination of information. However, contemporary dynamics have wrought a dramatic transition, and the reins of power have been ceded to private platforms, aptly described as the *New Governors* in this digital age, as aptly pointed out by Klonick[45]. This transition holds profound implications across various fields, from geopolitics to fiscal matters. Geopolitically, the locus of power and influence has significantly shifted. Nation-states have historically been the primary actors in international relations, wielding control over information and diplomacy. However, the rise of private tech giants as the New Governors has disrupted this traditional order. These entities, with their global reach and influence, now exert significant sway over geopolitics, often transcending national borders. They become key players in shaping international narratives and diplomacy, altering the geopolitical landscape.

In essence, the transition from state-controlled surveillance to private governance has far-reaching consequences. It transforms the traditional structures of power, challenging established norms in geopolitics, for example. While this essay may briefly touch on potential solutions towards the end, it's crucial to emphasize that the overarching objective of this thesis is to delve deep into the exploration of alternative approaches that can challenge and ultimately offer alternatives to the dominant ideology that currently defines the contemporary devices of biopolitical production. These digital platforms have harnessed the underlying digital infrastructure to establish an unprecedented level of control. It's akin to a significant power shift driven by market forces. Importantly, it's essential to recognize that this isn't a conventional or overt overthrow like a military coup. Instead, it's a more discreet transformation, concealed within the workings of the technology we engage with daily. This concealed influence can be compared to a Trojan horse that carries within it the interests of powerful

---

[45] "The private platforms that created and control that infrastructure are the New Governors in the digital era" Kate Klonick, "The New Governors: The People, Rules, and Processes Governing Online Speech," *Harvard Law Review* 131, no. 6 (April 2018): 1599–1670, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324645451_The_new_governors_The_people_rules_and_processes_governing_online_speech.

entities, operating beneath the surface of our digital interactions[46]. Surveillance capitalism, under the guise of personalization, achieves exclusive concentrations of knowledge and power, defying the principles of democratic social order and manifesting as a form of tyranny that operates for capitalist reasons.

The concept expressed in the saying *technology is neither good, nor bad; nor is it neutral* highlights that each technology, in line with McLuhan's insights, essentially functions as an extension of our society. This extension reflects not only its inherent capabilities but also the underlying ideology that guides it. In other words, technology itself doesn't possess a predefined moral stance; rather, its impact is moulded by the intentions and values of those who design, deploy, and use it. However, it's crucial to emphasize that within the context of surveillance capitalism, this principle becomes even more glaringly evident. The early digital dream was underpinned by a lofty belief that the act of being connected in the digital realm would inherently lead to a more inclusive and pro-social society, as well as the democratization of knowledge. This idealism suggested that the mere act of connecting individuals through technology would naturally give rise to these desirable outcomes. However, as time has progressed and our understanding of the digital landscape has matured, it has become increasingly evident that these ideals are not mere by-products of a specific form of connection and communication. Rather, they are deeply rooted in the values and principles that not only precede these technologies but also actively shape them. In other words, it's not enough for individuals to be interconnected digitally; it is the values and principles that underlie the design and use of technology that determine whether these connections lead to pro-social inclusivity and the democratization of knowledge. The digital landscape itself doesn't inherently create these outcomes; it is the choices

---

[46] "On the strength of its annexation of human experience, this coup achieves exclusive concentrations of knowledge and power that sustain privileged influence over the division of learning in society: the privatization of the central principle of social ordering in the twenty-first century [...] It is a form of tyranny that feeds on people but is not of the people. In a surreal paradox, this coup is celebrated as "personalization," although it defiles, ignores, overrides, and displaces everything about you and me that is personal". Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism : The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*.

and intentions of those who build and use these technologies that ultimately mold the direction they take. This realization highlights the fundamental importance of societal values and principles in shaping the digital world. It underscores that technology is a tool, and its impact on society depends on the ethical and moral compass of the individuals and institutions behind it. To truly achieve the ideals of pro-social inclusivity and knowledge democratization in the digital age, it is crucial to prioritize and embed these values into the very fabric of technology and its applications. Throughout the course of human history, the fundamental observation that democracy and inclusivity are not automatic outcomes of technological progress has been consistently demonstrated. This principle transcends specific historical periods and serves as a reminder that these values have never been solely determined by the mere existence of new tools and platforms designed to facilitate connectivity. In every era, the introduction of technological innovations did not inherently ensure the presence of democratic ideals or inclusivity. Instead, the realization of these principles has always been contingent on a multitude of factors, including the intentions and values of those who control and utilize the technology, the content produced and shared within these mediums, as well as the broader socio-political context in which these technologies operate. In essence, this observation underscores that the role of technology as a tool is constant, and its impact on society depends on the interplay of a wide array of elements. Regardless of the historical context, the intrinsic nature of technology does not guarantee democratic values or inclusivity. It is a continuous interplay of societal values, ethical considerations, governance structures, and individual agency that ultimately molds these principles in the context of technology's evolution. Instead, they are the products of societal values, governance structures, and individual agency. The design of technology and the digital landscape can either enhance or hinder these democratic values, but the ultimate accountability lies with society at large.

> Surveillance capitalism runs contrary to the early digital dream [...]
> Instead, it strips away the illusion that the networked form has some

kind of indigenous moral content, that being "connected" is somehow intrinsically pro-social, innately inclusive, or naturally tending toward the democratization of knowledge [47]

Indeed: if something, "cyberspace has proved most friendly for the monitorial model of democracy"[48]. Surveillance capitalism indeed goes beyond mere profit motives. It is a byproduct of an underlying ideology that shapes the reproduction of capital through self-expression and control. In this system, control has been internalized to a profound degree.

This knowledge is knowledge for the sake of domination and control (Herrschaftswissen): it facilitates intervention in the psyche and enables influence to take place on a pre-reflexive level [49]

The rise of surveillance capitalism underscores this point, shedding light on how technology, underpinned by an ideology of capital reproduction through self-expression and control, can erode democratic principles and individual autonomy. In this paradigm, control has been deeply internalized within the digital architecture and the mindset of both corporations and individuals. It has become a fundamental mechanism through which behavioral data is harvested and transformed into products that predict and influence human actions. Surveillance capitalism's underlying ideology has redefined the relationship between technology and society, emphasizing the extraction of behavioral data as a means of enhancing capital accumulation. This prevailing ideology extends its influence beyond the motivations of profit-seekers; it deeply permeates the very structures and functions of digital platforms themselves. The mechanisms of control within the digital realm have been effectively internalized, resulting in individuals becoming active participants, often both willingly and unwittingly, in the commodification of their own experiences. The transformation is most

[47] Zuboff.

[48] Henry Jenkins, Brad Seawell, and David Thorburn, *Democracy and New Media* (London: The MIT Press, 2004), https://www.worldcat.org/title/democracy-and-new-media/oclc/1026108286&referer=brief_results.

[49] Han, *Psychopolitics*.

apparent in how individuals engage with digital spaces. Previously, one's self-expression was considered a cornerstone of personal freedom and a means to assert one's identity. It was a way for people to share their thoughts, emotions, and experiences with a sense of autonomy and self-determination. However, in this new age defined by surveillance capitalism, the landscape has shifted. Individual self-expression has transitioned from a symbol of personal freedom to an instrument harnessed for surveillance and profit. In fact, one could argue that it's now more potent than ever. Individuals have unparalleled opportunities to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences across the global digital landscape. However, what has transformed significantly is how this personal expression is leveraged. While the internet remains a platform for personal expression, it's simultaneously become a rich source of raw material for the engines of surveillance capitalism. Every interaction contributes to an ever-expanding reservoir of behavioral data. This data isn't solely about stifling personal expression. It's harnessed to create prediction products that anticipate and influence individual actions and choices. These predictions can be used for a range of purposes, from targeted advertising to content recommendations. So, while personal expression thrives in the digital realm, it has also evolved into a powerful fuel for the algorithmic mechanisms that shape our digital experiences and influence our decisions. This profound shift not only affects individuals' agency but also reshapes the digital space itself. The platforms have evolved to prioritize data collection, analysis, and monetization. The very architecture of the digital landscape reflects the dominance of this surveillance-driven ideology. In essence, the transformation is not limited to external forces seeking profit; it has fundamentally altered the individual's relationship with technology and self-expression. The individual's autonomy in the digital realm, while it may seem formally enhanced, has been subtly undermined, creating an optical illusion of freedom. This illusion is particularly intriguing when viewed within the context of a specific field and perspective on human agency that has served as the backdrop for the operations of surveillance capitalism. In essence, the digital landscape presents a paradox: on the surface, it appears to empower

individuals with unprecedented autonomy and freedom to express themselves, connect with others, and access a wealth of information. However, this apparent autonomy is a facade, carefully constructed by the mechanisms of surveillance capitalism. This perspective on autonomy derives from a particular field and viewpoint on human agency. It underpins the prevailing ideology that shapes the digital landscape, emphasizing the individual's perceived control over their actions and choices within the digital realm. This perspective is deeply embedded in the narrative of technology as a tool for personal empowerment and self-expression. Yet, this viewpoint becomes a double-edged sword. While it amplifies the illusion of autonomy, it simultaneously obscures the obscurecontrol mechanisms operating behind the scenes. In this paradigm, individuals may believe they are making independent choices, while in reality, their decisions are often influenced by predictive algorithms and personalized content recommendations. Therefore, the need for a critical reevaluation of the prevailing ideology that underpins this evolving digital landscape becomes increasingly apparent. This ideology, grounded in a specific perspective on autonomy, warrants scrutiny as it has redefined the relationship between technology, individuals, and the concept of personal agency in the digital age. This perspective will be delved into further in the upcoming sections of this investigation. As a result, the surveillance capitalism paradigm not only poses a threat to democratic principles but also illustrates how control has been internalized in the digital age, shaping the very nature of human agency and self-expression. This transformation calls for a critical examination of the ideology that underpins the digital landscape and its implications for the future of society and individual autonomy. It's not the mere act of being connected that guarantees democratic flourishing; rather, it's the values and decisions underpinning these connections that play a pivotal role.

Therefore, in today's digital age, the juxtaposition of the early digital dream with the reality of surveillance capitalism serves as a stark reminder that technology, in itself, is not a guarantor of democracy or inclusion. Rather, these principles are determined by the choices, policies, and values that

shape the use of technology and the digital space. Recognizing this distinction is essential for a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between technology and society.

Under the direction of surveillance capitalism, the global reach of computer mediation has been repurposed as an extraction architecture, where individuals' personal experiences become the fuel for an information-driven market agenda. This transformation underscores the invisible ideological power exercised by information technologies in the capitalist pursuit of knowledge and control.

The concept of surveillance capitalism emphasizes a fundamental shift in the motives behind surveillance. It's no longer driven primarily by the desire for discipline and punishment as in previous paradigms. Instead, it is rooted in market-driven (on the surface) and ideological (deeply rooted) incentives. Surveillance capitalism operates under the banner of efficiency and profit, as it extracts valuable behavioral data to optimize and predict consumer behavior, often without their consent or awareness. The essence of the digital age has become a vast landscape where human experiences are commodified, and the internet serves as a powerful tool for this commodification. This process is not solely attributable to the web or digital technology itself. Instead, it's a reflection of the broader neoliberal paradigm that has come to define human capitalism in this new age. The digital landscape provides an environment where commodification is significantly expedited, primarily because it enables the rapid movement of information. Information has become the new currency, and the digital realm serves as the conduit through which this valuable commodity is exchanged and capitalized upon. In this context, the digital age acts as a facilitator, accelerating the transformation of human experiences into commodities within the framework of the contemporary capitalist ideology. Moreover, it is imperative to recognize that surveillance capitalism is not simply a reflection of technological advancement but a powerful ideological force that shapes and reshapes societies. The shift from the nation-state as the primary agent of information control to private platforms signifies a shift of monumental proportions. These digital behemoths, the New

Governors, wield immense power over information flows and narratives, often with little accountability or transparency.

In the era of surveillance capitalism, personalization and connectivity have lost their utopian luster. The illusion that being "connected" inherently fosters pro-social inclusivity and knowledge democratization has been stripped away. Instead, it's replaced by a reality where technology is harnessed to extract and monetize behavioral data. In this process, the autonomy of individuals is increasingly compromised, and the concentration of knowledge and influence intensifies. This shift has profound implications for the traditional structures of governance and societal order.

The transformation of the digital landscape from an initially utopian vision of open, democratized information to a reality dominated by a select few was not a mere coincidence. It was, in fact, a profound reflection of the inherent capitalist nature of the technology industry and the deep-seated contradictions within the seemingly utopian message of the *Whole Earth Catalogue*.

The technology industry, at its core, has always been driven by market forces and profit motives. While many of its pioneers and innovators, such as the highly praised Steve Jobs, may have started with idealistic aspirations of creating tools that connect people and empower individuals, the very structure and dynamics of capitalism inevitably played a central role. The imperative to generate revenue, compete, and grow market share pushed these companies to seek new ways to monetize their innovations. This, in turn, led to the consolidation of power and the concentration of wealth within a small number of tech giants.

However, the contradictions within the utopian message of something like the *Whole Earth Catalogue* are equally significant. The catalogue advocated for self-sufficiency, communal living, and a holistic, interconnected approach to life. It carried a countercultural spirit that inspired many in the early tech community. Nevertheless, when these ideas were adopted within the emerging technology industry, they became part of a broader narrative that conflated individual empowerment with consumerism.

The emphasis on community and interconnectedness served as a foundation for the creation of digital platforms and ecosystems. These platforms revolutionized the way people connect, enabling unprecedented levels of communication and interaction. However, within this digital landscape, a transformation occurred, wherein the ideals initially celebrated in contexts like the *Whole Earth Catalogue* were repurposed and manipulated to further commercial interests. The vision underlying perspectives like the Whole Earth catalogue was rooted in a deep sense of community, interconnectedness, and an optimistic view of the future. These perspectives often emphasized self-sufficiency and ecological awareness, championing the idea of a harmonious coexistence with technology and nature. However, what was often missing in this vision was a critical evaluation of how these ideals would scale up and adapt to a broader societal context. In the transition to the digital age, the very principles that were meant to foster community and cooperation were repurposed to serve the interests of commercial entities. Digital platforms, while connecting people and facilitating global communication, also became engines for data extraction and control consolidation. The principles of interconnectedness and community were harnessed to capture and monetize personal data, often without individuals fully comprehending the extent of this transformation. The result is a complex narrative where the well-intentioned ideals of earlier paradigms clash with the commercial realities of the digital era. As diverse lifestyles, values, and worldviews intersect in this digital landscape, the need for a critical reassessment of the intersection between technology, society, and ideology becomes increasingly evident. It raises questions about the sustainability and adaptability of such ideals in the face of rapid technological change and the commodification of human experiences in the pursuit of profit. The capitalist nature of the technology industry and the contradictions within the *Whole Earth Catalogue*'s message combined to shape the trajectory of the digital age. The result was a landscape where the promise of democratized knowledge and individual empowerment was overshadowed by the dominance of a few corporate entities, the rise of surveillance capitalism, and the erosion of privacy. This

transformation serves as a powerful illustration of the complex interplay between ideology and capitalism, and it underscores the need for a critical examination of the motivations and consequences of these developments in the digital era.

Surveillance capitalism represents a seismic shift in the traditional dynamics of commerce and personal privacy. It has not merely altered but profoundly disrupted the established relationship between producers and consumers. Rather than fostering value exchanges characterized by constructive reciprocity, surveillance capitalism employs a novel approach. It dangles its products and services as alluring baits, enticing users into extractive operations that lie concealed beneath the surface. In this new model, personal experiences, once deemed private, are transmuted into raw materials, meticulously scraped, and skillfully packaged to serve the interests of remote entities.

Within the landscape of surveillance capitalism, users adopt an unfamiliar and evolving role. This transformation challenges the traditional understanding of their status as customers. The adage, "if you're not paying for the product, then you're the product being sold," which was previously a perceptive observation, takes on new dimensions in this context. What was once taken for granted, that users essentially serve as the product, has rapidly evolved over recent years. Users are no longer mere consumers in the traditional sense, where they exchange money for products or services. Instead, they are integral to the product itself. Their data, behaviors, and experiences become the commodities in a complex market of surveillance capitalism.

This shift means that the traditional concept of users as customers, benefiting from the products and services they engage with, is no longer the central paradigm. Users have unwittingly transitioned into the role of being the raw material, as their personal data and the traces of their online activities have become the valuable resources that underpin the entire surveillance capitalism ecosystem. In essence, users are not only participants; they are the fuel that powers this new economic model.

> We are not surveillance capitalism's 'customers'. Although the saying tells us 'If it's free, then you are the product', that is also incorrect. We are the sources of surveillance capitalism's crucial surplus: the objects of a technologically advanced and increasingly inescapable raw-material-extraction operation. Surveillance capitalism's actual customers are the enterprises that trade in its markets for future behaviour [50]

This transformation has profound implications. It fundamentally redefines the user's position within the digital landscape. Traditionally, when we engaged with online services, we were seen as customers – individuals who benefited from the products, content, and services we consumed. However, the rise of surveillance capitalism has turned this relationship on its head. Now, our data, the digital footprints we leave behind, and the behavioral patterns we exhibit have become the primary focus. These personal data points and online activities serve as the lifeblood of the digital economy. They are harvested, aggregated, and processed to build extensive user profiles. These profiles are not only instrumental in shaping a tailored, data-driven environment designed to extract more data – both behavioral and economic – in a continuous, self-reinforcing cycle, but they also serve a larger purpose. The data generated by users is fed into advanced artificial intelligence (AI) systems. These AI systems are designed to do more than just create personalized experiences for individual customers. They are employed to sift through vast amounts of data, seeking patterns and trends that extend beyond the individual level. By analyzing this data, AI can identify patterns in social groups and communities. It can recognize how people with similar interests or behaviors cluster together, and it can predict future behaviors based on past activities. This insight is invaluable to those who operate within the surveillance capitalism ecosystem, as it allows for more precise targeting, manipulation, and influence over not just individuals, but entire demographics. This is where the power of surveillance capitalism truly manifests itself. It isn't just about targeting

---

[50] Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism : The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*.

individual users with relevant content or advertisements; it's about the ability to shape and influence the behavior and preferences of entire social groups. The data-driven insights derived from the amalgamation of personal data contribute to the creation of a digital environment that is not only optimized for data extraction from individual users but also for the strategic manipulation of collective behaviors and opinions. This expansion of surveillance capitalism's reach into the realm of social group analysis underscores the profound and complex implications of this new economic model. This transformation challenges established norms and raises important questions about agency, consent, and the ethical considerations surrounding the use of personal data. The rapid acceleration of this shift is a critical aspect of the broader discussion on the impact of surveillance capitalism on modern society.

The operations of surveillance capitalism manifest a set of recurring themes. Technology companies, driven by relentless innovation and rapid evolution, often outpace the state's ability to comprehend and regulate their operations. This asymmetry between technological progress and regulatory understanding creates an environment where interventions by governing bodies are frequently perceived as ill-conceived obstacles that hinder innovation. Consequently, a narrative emerges, suggesting that lawlessness is a necessary condition for technological advancement. In this new digital landscape, the role of the surveillance intermediary is anything but neutral. Its primary objective is to attract a continuous stream of user-generated content. However, its function extends beyond mere hosting; it actively engages in the covert, unilateral extraction of value from the content provided by users. What distinguishes surveillance capitalism from its predecessors is an unprecedented convergence of freedom and knowledge. This convergence is intrinsically tied to the scope of instrumentarian power. Instrumentarian power, within the context of surveillance capitalism, goes beyond mere observation. It encompasses the ability to shape and direct human behavior based on insights derived from the vast reservoir of surveillance data. This isn't just about collecting information; it's about actively influencing actions and decisions. It's the power to predict and mold

our behaviors, often without our conscious awareness. This shift in power dynamics has far-reaching consequences. The relentless accumulation of such power has the capacity to reshape the traditional division of learning in society. In the past, learning and knowledge were often decentralized, spread across various educational institutions and sources. However, surveillance capitalism centralizes the acquisition and application of knowledge, concentrating it in the hands of a few powerful entities. This centralization of knowledge results in a profound transformation of societal dynamics. It establishes a hierarchy where those who possess the instrumentarian power dictate the rules and influence the behavior of the masses. Access to knowledge, in this context, is no longer equitable; it's controlled and selectively distributed. This leads to dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, where individuals and groups are either beneficiaries or victims of this asymmetrical power structure. The outcomes of this power dynamic extend beyond economic considerations. They touch on fundamental issues of privacy, autonomy, and individual agency. The ability to shape and direct behavior raises ethical questions about consent and the fine line between persuasion and manipulation. It also has significant implications for democracy and social cohesion. When a few entities hold the power to influence and control behavior on a massive scale, the very fabric of society can be altered. The revenues generated by surveillance capitalism are not just a byproduct; they are intimately linked to this reconfiguration of power and knowledge. By concentrating and monetizing the data that underlies instrumentarian power, these entities accumulate vast wealth and resources. In the absence of effective checks and balances, this concentration of power becomes self-perpetuating, reinforcing the centralization of knowledge and influence. In essence, surveillance capitalism introduces a new era where knowledge is not just power but a means of control. Instrumentarian power encompasses the ability to shape and direct human behavior based on insights derived from the vast reservoir of surveillance data. It's the power to predict and mold our behaviors, often without our conscious awareness.

> The 'more soft and subtle' the panoptic surveillance, the more it
> produces the normalization of behavior, as opposed to surveillance
> that is 'more stringent, and rigorous,' which results in resistance[51]

This insight sheds light on the subtle and pervasive nature of surveillance capitalism. When surveillance is unobtrusive and omnipresent, it becomes a part of the fabric of our lives, shaping our actions in ways we may not even perceive. This shift in power dynamics has far-reaching consequences. The relentless accumulation of such power has the capacity to reshape the traditional division of learning in society. In the past, learning and knowledge were often decentralized, spread across various educational institutions and sources. However, surveillance capitalism centralizes the acquisition and application of knowledge, concentrating it in the hands of a few powerful entities. This centralization of knowledge results in a profound transformation of societal dynamics. The digital panopticon is in continuity with the disciplinary panopticon but replaces obedience with performance[52]. There is no longer any duty, but rather an unlimited potential for action. In the context of surveillance capitalism, this means that individuals are not merely observed; they are prodded and guided in ways that maximize the economic interests of the surveillance capitalists. These outcomes of the power dynamic extend beyond economic considerations. They touch on fundamental issues of privacy, autonomy, and individual agency. The ability to shape and direct behavior raises ethical questions about consent and the fine line between persuasion and manipulation. It also has significant implications for democracy and social cohesion. When a few entities hold the power to influence and control behavior on a massive scale, the very fabric of society can be altered. The revenues generated by surveillance capitalism are not just a byproduct; they are intimately linked to this reconfiguration of power and knowledge. By

---

[51] Ben Marder et al., "The Extended 'chilling' Effect of Facebook: The Cold Reality of Ubiquitous Social Networking," *Computers in Human Behavior* 60 (July 2016): 582–592, doi:10.1016/j.chb.2016.02.097.

[52] "There is no longer any duty, but unlimited power to do". Ippolita, *Tecnologie del dominio : lessico minimo di autodifesa digitale* (London: Meltemi, 2017). [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

concentrating and monetizing the data that underlies instrumentarian power, these entities accumulate vast wealth and resources. In the absence of effective checks and balances, this concentration of power becomes self-perpetuating, reinforcing the centralization of knowledge and influence. In the contemporary digital landscape, the emergence of surveillance capitalism has heralded transformations in the very fabric of human behavior, drawing striking parallels to B.F. Skinner's foundational insights into the realm of operant conditioning and the obscure workings of control mechanisms.

To understand how Skinner's work directly influenced the methods of control deployed by surveillance capitalism, it is crucial to delve into the historical context of Skinner's contributions and his seminal work, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. B.F. Skinner, a renowned psychologist of the 20th century, is most celebrated for his pioneering research in the field of behaviorism. Skinner's work sought to unravel the underlying principles that govern human behavior by exploring how individuals respond to various stimuli and consequences. His experiments with pigeons and rats, along with the invention of the Skinner Box, became iconic landmarks in the exploration of operant conditioning. Through these experiments, Skinner demonstrated that behavior could be systematically shaped through the manipulation of rewards and punishments, leading to the development of a framework that highlighted the significance of environmental influences on human actions. Skinner's magnum opus, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, published in 1971, represented a paradigm-shifting contribution to the field of psychology and laid the foundation for the discourse on human behavior and control. In this seminal work, Skinner argued against the prevailing notions of personal freedom and autonomy. He posited that the concepts of freedom and dignity were not absolute but rather contingent on the environment and the influence of external factors. This notion challenged the deeply ingrained belief in the intrinsic autonomy of human beings. *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* boldly contended that human behavior could be understood through the lens of operant conditioning, and it was subject

to modification through careful control of environmental contingencies. Skinner asserted that:

> The problem is to induce people not to be good but to behave well. The issue is again the visibility of control. As environmental contingencies become harder to see, the goodness of autonomous man becomes more apparent, and there are several reasons why punitive control becomes inconspicuous [53]

In this light, his work posed a radical departure from traditional ethical and moral paradigms and advocated for a more deterministic approach to human behavior. The influence of Skinner's theories on operant conditioning and environmental control was profound and paved the way for the advent of surveillance capitalism. Surveillance capitalism employs data-driven mechanisms that operate on principles akin to operant conditioning, guiding user behaviors in ways that align with the interests of corporations and data-driven entities. In this digital realm, platforms and algorithms subtly incentivize or discourage specific actions, much like Skinner's experiments with rewards and punishments. Skinner's assertion that control could become less visible when environmental contingencies were obscured resonates strongly with the covert data collection and manipulation strategies employed by surveillance capitalism. In summary, B.F. Skinner's work in the field of behaviorism, particularly as elucidated in *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, directly informs the methods of control deployed by surveillance capitalism. His exploration of operant conditioning, the malleability of behavior, and the shift from personal freedom to external control all serve as touchstones for understanding how surveillance capitalism operates, where digital platforms and algorithms quietly guide and shape user behaviors in alignment with commercial interests, often unbeknownst to the individuals themselves. Skinner's intellectual legacy, though rooted in the 20th century, continues to exert a

---

[53] B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

profound influence on the landscape of surveillance capitalism in the 21st century:

> under surveillance capitalism, the 'means of production' serves the 'means of behavioral modification.' Machine processes replace human relationships so that certainty can replace trust [54]

This quote encapsulates the core premise of our discussion, emphasizing that in the age of surveillance capitalism, the production of goods and services is inextricably linked to the manipulation of human behaviors through data-driven algorithms and systems. B.F. Skinner's reflections on behaviorism offer invaluable parallels to this digital paradigm. His assertion that the ultimate aim is to "induce people not to be good but to behave well"[55] aligns perfectly with the mechanisms of surveillance capitalism. In this context, the primary goal extends beyond the mere cultivation of moral virtue or goodness; it is centered on systematically molding and guiding individual and collective behaviors to serve not only the economic interests but primarily the overarching objective of control by data-driven entities. Online platforms, driven by sophisticated data analysis, are meticulously designed to subtly incentivize, reward, or even discourage specific actions, ultimately shaping the way users engage with digital technologies. While economic interests are undeniably a pivotal facet, the paramount objective of surveillance capitalism lies in exerting control over individuals and their online behaviors, perpetuating a pervasive influence that extends beyond monetary gains. Skinner also touched upon the notion that "punitive control becomes inconspicuous"[56] when environmental contingencies become less apparent. This phenomenon closely mirrors the insidious nature of surveillance capitalism, where the vast collection of personal data occurs inconspicuously in the background. The sheer volume of information gathered from users, often without their explicit knowledge or consent,

---

[54] Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism : The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power.*
[55] Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity.*
[56] Skinner.

facilitates the invisible manipulation of choices. Users, immersed in the digital environment, unwittingly conform to the desires of surveillance capitalism, their behaviors subtly directed by the algorithms and systems at play.

Moreover, Skinner's concept of internalized control, where external mechanisms gradually shift to the realm of individual consciousness, corresponds to the transition from visible to invisible control mechanisms in surveillance capitalism. In the digital landscape, individuals adapt to the ever-present influence of data-driven platforms. They internalize the cues and prompts provided by algorithms and respond in ways that are consistent with the objectives of surveillance capitalism. This internalization occurs largely unconsciously [57]. As the digital environment shapes the behaviors of individuals, it raises significant questions regarding the concepts of responsibility and freedom in a world governed by algorithms and data. Skinner's observation that "any move towards an environment in which men are automatically good threatens responsibility" [58] underscores the challenge of maintaining individual accountability. The seamless integration of digital platforms into daily life blurs the lines between personal freedom and external guidance. Individuals may find themselves making choices that align with the subtle influence of surveillance capitalism, prompting a reevaluation of the traditional notions of personal autonomy and responsibility in the digital era. Surveillance capitalism, with its inconspicuous control mechanisms, weaves a complex web in which individuals navigate between the illusion of autonomy and the invisible supervisor quietly directing their choices. Under these conditions, the idea that "only when other forms of control are available is that government best which governs least" [59] seems to be fulfilling.

Building on the foundation laid by Skinner's behaviorism, which he advocated, and its relevance to surveillance capitalism, Byung-Chul Han's

---

[57] "People behave well although there is no visible supervision. But the absence of a supervisor is easily misunderstood. It is commonly said that the control becomes internalized, which is simply another way of saying that it passes from the environment to autonomous man, but what happens is that it becomes less visible" Skinner.

[58] Skinner.

[59] Skinner.

broader criticism of behaviorism as a whole provides a seamless transition to a contemporary examination of the ever-evolving nature of control in our digital age. It's important to note that while Skinner, a proponent of behaviorism, favored behavior modification for societal benefits, Han stands as a major critic of behaviorism in general, particularly its application in the digital age and the emergence of surveillance capitalism. As we navigate the digital landscape of the 21st century, Han's critical analysis becomes increasingly relevant, as it addresses the dynamic and often subtle ways in which contemporary power structures operate, drawing from his overarching critique of behaviorism as a whole. Han's perspectives serve as a bridge from Skinner's fundamental work to the present day, highlighting the continuity and transformation of control mechanisms. His criticism of behaviorism underscores that the principles of shaping behavior, while rooted in Skinner's theories, have been adapted and extended in the digital age, often in ways that raise concerns about individual autonomy, privacy, and freedom. Han's critical perspective serves as a lens through which we can understand the sophisticated, yet often subtle, control mechanisms at play in surveillance capitalism, offering a more comprehensive critique of behaviorism's applications in the digital age and their potential implications for society and individuals. Han's observations shed light on the discreet, yet potent workings of contemporary power structures. As he notes that "wherever power does not come into view at all, it exists without question. The greater power is, the more quietly it works. It just happens: it has no need to draw attention to itself" [60]. In this regard, Han highlights how modern forms of power often function beneath the surface, exerting influence without overt coercion. This observation foreshadows an important theme that will be expounded upon in subsequent sections of this thesis, where we will delve into the shifting landscapes of power in the digital age. Indeed, the major emphasis in the upcoming discussions will be on unveiling the new places where power is wielded and where it finds its residence. We will explore how the

---

[60] Han, *Psychopolitics*.

traditional power centers, such as palaces and parliaments, have been complemented, and in some cases supplanted, by digital realms and networks. This paradigm shift in the exercise of power is central to understanding the contemporary dynamics of surveillance capitalism and the control mechanisms it employs. The discreet workings of power, often hidden in plain sight within the digital infrastructure, bring to light the need for a deeper exploration of the evolving nature of authority in our interconnected world. Crucially, Han delves into the concept of a technology of power that seeks to induce individuals to voluntarily subordinate themselves to power relations. As Han meticulously underscores, the dynamics of power in the digital age are characterized by an orientation toward activation, motivation, and optimization, in stark contrast to traditional methods of repression. This shift represents a pivotal evolution in the exercise of authority, wherein power is harnessed by delighting and fulfilling rather than suppressing[61]. The effectiveness of this approach lies in its subtlety, relying on mechanisms that encourage individuals to participate willingly and align with the overarching objectives of those in control. This sophisticated model of power bears a profound resonance with the mechanics of surveillance capitalism, which adeptly assimilates into our digital lives.

These themes, encapsulating the nuanced interplay of power, control, and freedom, will find their dedicated space within the same theoretical chapter. Here, we will embark on an in-depth exploration of the contemporary paradigm shift, where power no longer primarily exerts itself through rigid control but rather seeks to foster a sense of freedom and engagement as a form of governance [62].

In the digital age, the proliferation of information and communication technologies has engendered a shift. Han aptly points out: "today's society of information is not characterized by destroying words, but by multiplying them without end" [63]. This multiplicity of words and information creates an

---

[61] "Instead of making people compliant, it seeks to make them dependent". Han.
[62] *Governmentality*, as Foucault would define it.
[63] Han, *Psychopolitics*.

environment where surveillance capitalism thrives. It operates not by limiting communication but by harnessing the superabundance of positivity, encouraging individuals to communicate and consume. The control mechanisms of surveillance capitalism are far more nuanced than Orwell's state, where needs were repressed. Instead, it offers an illusion of freedom and choice, making individuals willingly disclose information[64]. Han's critique of the digital panopticon, where everyone feels free while being observed, underscores the profound shift in power dynamics. He notes that "everyone feels free. However, precisely this feeling of freedom – which is nowhere to be found in Orwell's state – is now the problem"[65]. In the world of surveillance capitalism, the manipulation of individual behavior operates so subtly that the perception of freedom is maintained, even as individuals are led to serve the interests of data-driven entities. This seamless integration of control into the digital realm reflects both the continuity of Skinner's behaviorism and Han's critical perspective on contemporary power dynamics, where control functions quietly and effectively in the age of information. In the contemporary digital landscape, the traditional notion of social, political, and economic contract is undergoing a profound transformation due to the pervasive asymmetry of information between users and information companies. Shoshana Zuboff eloquently encapsulates this transformation as the annihilation of contract, which can be better understood as the *uncontract*. This concept is not just incidental but an essential modality within the larger framework of surveillance capitalism. The uncontract operates as a central pillar in the architecture of behavioral modification, contributing to the economies of action by harnessing proprietary behavioral surplus. Its primary purpose is to preempt and foreclose alternative courses of action, effectively replacing the inherent indeterminacy of social processes with the determinism of programmed machine processes. What distinguishes the uncontract from

---

[64] "Needs are not repressed, but stimulated. Confession obtained by force has been replaced by voluntary disclosure. Smartphones have been substituted for torture chambers. Big Brother now wears a friendly face. His friendliness is what makes surveillance so efficient". Han.
[65] Han.

traditional contracts is its decisive shift away from social interaction and its replacement with automated procedures.

> The uncontract desocializes the contract, manufacturing certainty through the substitution of automated procedures for promises, dialogue, shared meaning, problem solving, dispute resolution, and trust: the expressions of solidarity and human agency that have been gradually institutionalized in the notion of "contract" over the course of millennia [66]

It effectively de-socializes the contract, obviating the need for promises, dialogue, shared meaning, problem solving, dispute resolution, and trust—key elements that have been ingrained in the concept of "contract" over centuries. Instead, the uncontract sidesteps these social mechanisms in favor of compulsion, driven by the pursuit of more lucrative prediction products that closely mimic the process of observation and, by extension, guarantee specific outcomes. This transformation signifies a substantial departure from the social intricacies that traditionally characterized contracts, marking a profound shift from interpersonal dynamics to automated, data-driven mechanisms. In this evolving landscape, contracts are no longer merely agreements founded on mutual trust and understanding but have been, to a significant extent, replaced by mechanisms driven by data and algorithms. Crucially, these data-driven mechanisms exhibit a fundamental asymmetry, as they inherently favor one party over the other. This asymmetry arises from the informational advantage wielded by one party, often the data-driven entity or corporation, which has access to an abundance of information about the user. This extensive informational asymmetry echoes the principles of game theory. In a traditional, fair game, both parties have access to the same information, allowing them to make informed decisions. However, the advent of surveillance capitalism disrupts this equilibrium by granting corporations an overwhelming informational advantage. In the context of data-driven

---

[66] Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism : The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*.

mechanisms in contracts, the informational asymmetry skews the game significantly in favor of the data-driven entity. This party can strategically craft agreements that maximize their utility, often to the detriment of the user, who lacks access to comparable data and insights. Consequently, users may unknowingly enter into agreements that do not fully align with their best interests, given the imbalance of information. The fundamental principle of game theory is that rational actors aim to optimize their outcomes. In the context of surveillance capitalism and data-driven contracts, the data-rich party leverages its informational advantage to create agreements that favor its interests. The power dynamics in this new paradigm highlight the complex ethical and legal considerations surrounding data-driven agreements, necessitating ongoing discussions and regulations to protect the interests of individuals in the digital age. Simultaneously, the evolution of the Internet's governance mirrors these changes in the realm of digital control. The shift away from intergovernmental organizations signals a move towards more decentralized, private, nonprofit entities. This transformation underscores the broader transition from a more intergovernmental model of Internet governance to a landscape where various private entities hold greater sway. This transformation reflects the ever-evolving nature of digital governance, adjusting to the dynamics and paradigms of the digital age. The reshaping of contracts and digital governance in the contemporary era represents a pivotal transformation driven by the ongoing digital revolution. It serves as a poignant illustration of the profound changes and challenges that this revolution has ushered in, touching upon various facets of our society, including the fundamental dynamics of power, governance, and human interaction. This evolution underscores the shift from traditional power structures and social interactions, which were deeply rooted in human communication, trust, and face-to-face negotiations, to a new paradigm characterized by data-driven and algorithmic control.

In this new era, the levers of power have shifted from human hands to the sophisticated algorithms and vast datasets that define our digital world. This shift challenges the established norms and institutions that have

historically governed our social and economic interactions. Increasingly, we find ourselves making political choices not only as traditional citizens but also as private consumers within the sprawling infosphere that transcends geographical boundaries [67]. This shift in our roles is emblematic of the digital age, where the influence of nation-states and traditional governance structures faces unprecedented challenges. While we navigate the vast and borderless terrain of the digital world, it's imperative to recognize that our political participation remains deeply intertwined with the confines and political mechanisms of the nation-states to which we owe our citizenship. This duality in our roles signifies a complex interplay between our digital existence and our status as citizens of specific countries, each with its unique set of political norms, legal frameworks, and societal expectations. In this context, our digital persona and activities often transcend the borders of our nation-state, allowing us to connect with individuals, communities, and entities across the globe. The digital realm enables us to make choices, express opinions, and influence various aspects of our lives as consumers within a global context. However, as we engage with the digital sphere, we must also navigate the intricacies of the traditional political structures within our respective nations. Our role as citizens entails adherence to local laws, participation in local elections, and the recognition of national governance as the ultimate authority over issues like taxation, legal rights, and public policies. This dynamic dualism is at the core of modern political engagement. We are simultaneously denizens of the infosphere, operating in a space without physical borders, and citizens of specific nations, subject to the governance and regulations of our respective states. The profound challenge of our time lies in harmonizing these two facets, ensuring that our political choices as private consumers in the digital realm coexist with, and potentially reshape, the political landscape of our nation-states. Moreover, it's crucial to note that in this new informational era, we find ourselves deeply invested in both the ultra-local and the ultra-global, often at the same

---

[67] "Consumers make private choices about their private needs and wants. Citizens make choices about the public needs and the public goods of the nation". Jenkins, Seawell, and Thorburn, *Democracy and New Media.*

time. We engage with global issues and communities on a daily basis, while also attending to the minutiae of our local lives and immediate surroundings.

What often seems missing in this web of connections is a sense of what's in between—the role of the state or any organization representing a broad section of individuals living in the same place. This intermediate layer, traditionally responsible for addressing issues that affect communities and regions, appears to be at a crossroads in this digital age, and it is this aspect of the discussion that we will delve into further. As we navigate the complexities of this evolving landscape, it becomes increasingly clear that the dynamics of political participation have been fundamentally transformed, presenting us with new opportunities, responsibilities, and challenges in the ever-evolving digital era. The emergence of surveillance capitalism, as described by Shoshana Zuboff, exemplifies this shift by pushing boundaries and blurring the lines between the market and society, market and world, and market and individual. As consumers, our choices are often relegated to our private needs and desires. We select products and services that cater to our individual preferences and immediate gratification. However, the shift to consumer-driven decision-making fundamentally alters our roles in shaping public needs and public goods. As an example: a consumer might delight in driving a fast car, but as a citizen, he would understand the importance of laws that regulate the size and speed of vehicles to ensure public safety [68]. This fundamental dichotomy between consumer choices and civic choices is pivotal in understanding the shift towards political decisions being made in the digital realm, which is devoid of the same mechanisms of governance and public accountability. Furthermore, private choice and consumer choice inherently lack true power. The liberty to make consumer choices, while valuable, is distinct from the collective power that citizens wield when making tough decisions about the kind of world they wish to live in, public utilities they require, and the societal instrumentalities they want to shape. Private choices tend to

---

[68] This example has been used by Jenkins, Seawell, and Thorburn.

lack the collective strength and influence necessary for addressing complex, public concerns.

> Private choice, consumer choice is choice without power [...] There's not more freedom when we privatize. There is less freedom, because our political liberty, our real civic liberty, consists in our capacity together to make tough choices about the kind of world we want to live in, the kinds of public utilities we want, and the ways in which we use all of the in strumentalities of our society. The liberty we have in private to make consumer choices is always choice without power [69]

This shift to consumer-driven political choices within an international digital space dominated by major private information companies underscores the evolving landscape of governance. It challenges established norms and institutions while questioning the concept of citizenship in a space where individuals are primarily consumers. The digital world is now marked by an imbalance of power, where major private entities dictate the rules, privacy is compromised, and the consequences extend into realms such as access to finance, housing, healthcare, education, and social services. In this evolving paradigm, the essence of public decision-making is undergoing a profound reconfiguration, prompting critical reflections on how to safeguard individual rights, equity, and collective decision-making in an increasingly digital and data-driven society. In the informational age, where the predominant mode of interaction revolves around storage and retrieval rather than communication, this erosion of our collective narrative becomes increasingly evident. As we transition from narrative-based interactions to data-driven processes, the challenge of maintaining a cohesive shared identity becomes more pronounced. Consequently, we find it increasingly difficult to keep in view the commonalities we share with others in our own society, as the narrative thread that once connected us becomes frayed and fragmented.

---

[69] Jenkins, Seawell, and Thorburn.

> When we start to lose the story of our shared identity, it has major implications for politics. We find it harder to keep in view the commonalities we have with others in our own society. We struggle to imagine them inhabiting the same space or demos as us, especially when we're increasingly physically isolated from them [70]

The physical and emotional distance that often accompanies our digital lives can create a palpable divide, making it increasingly difficult to imagine our fellow citizens inhabiting the same physical and emotional space or belonging to the same demos. We face a far more profound and irrational disunity – a disunity of identity among the body politic. This disunity of identity can lead to a collective weakness of will, where our political choices, driven by consumerist interests, prioritize individual desires over the collective good. The dangers of prioritizing customer choices over our roles as citizens become increasingly apparent when we consider the erosion of our collective identity. This erosion, which is often mischaracterized as mere polarization, poses a profound risk to our ability to act collectively as a society. When our shared narrative is fractured and the ties that bind us are weakened, our political will and cohesion may suffer, potentially compromising the fundamental principles that underpin our democratic societies. As we continue to navigate this digital era, addressing these challenges becomes imperative to ensure that our political choices remain grounded in the common good, rather than driven solely by individual interests and consumerist tendencies.

As we draw this chapter to a close, it is essential to reflect on the significant insights that have surfaced during our exploration. One of the pivotal concerns we have delved into is the potential trajectory of twentieth century's behaviorist theories [71]. These theories, while not intrinsically flawed, introduce the disconcerting prospect of becoming the dominant framework for understanding and influencing human behavior in our

---

[70] Williams, *Stand out of Our Light : Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy*.
[71] "The trouble with modern theories of behaviorism is not that they are wrong but that they could become true, that they actually are the best possible conceptualization of certain obvious trends in modern society" Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism : The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*.

contemporary society. Furthermore, we have examined the evolving nature of power in the digital age, where control over the means of behavioral modification takes center stage. This shift in power dynamics, epitomized by the concept of Big Other, urges us to reassess the nature of power in our digital era. The call for new legislation that questions the fundamental legitimacy of surveillance capitalism's operations underscores the urgent need for profound transformations in our approach to data and behavioral manipulation. It emphasizes critical issues such as the exploitation of human experience as behavioral data, the concentration of data-driven means in the hands of a few, and the accumulation of private knowledge. These challenges to the established paradigm of data ownership and control offer an opportunity to reaffirm the principles of individual autonomy, privacy, and the common good within our digital society. Our exploration of *dataism* [72] has illuminated a concerning trend that Byung-Chul Han perceptively likens to digital Dadaism. In the digital age, *dataism* leads us to depart from meaningful contexts, much like Dadaism did with language itself. Data, in its raw and abundant form, is inherently mute and devoid of inherent significance. It is through the power of storytelling and narrative that we extract meaning from this vast sea of data.

> Dataism is nihilism. It gives up on any and all meaning. Data and numbers are not narrative; they are additive. Meaning, on the other hand, is based on narration. Data simply fills up the senseless void [73]

Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that evaluating the trajectory of our information civilization requires us to acknowledge the interplay of technology, economics, and society. This understanding challenges the notion of technological inevitability. Technology is not an isolated entity but is entwined with the broader socio-cultural context. As we transition to the next phase of our exploration, we must bear in mind that the path of

---

[72] The cult of Big Data.
[73] Han, *Psychopolitics*.

technology is not predetermined; it is a product of human choices, values, and cultural influences. This understanding underscores the pivotal role of culture in shaping technology, emphasizing that, in the digital age, technology is not an inevitability but a reflection of our cultural values and decisions. It serves as a vital reminder that our cultural context significantly shapes the development and influence of technology in our society.

1.5 – INFORMATION SOCIETY AND DEMOCRACY

> "Di fronte all'evidenza che le tecnologie non sono neutre, ma incarnano e configurano mondi, svanisce l'inevitabilità della delega tecnocratica, che si rivela per quello che è: delega politica a gerarchie egemoniche e autoritarie" [74]

In the tapestry of contemporary societies, the fusion of digitization and democratic ideals has woven a complex narrative, reshaping the very essence of governance, participation, and societal structures. This chapter embarks on an immersive journey, a meticulous exploration into the myriad ways in which digitization influences the foundational principles of democracy in the context of advanced Western societies.

The evolving landscape of democracy in the digital age is marked by a series of seismic shifts across multifaceted domains. These transformations manifest within distinct realms that encapsulate the redefined dynamics:

- **Redefining Space and Sovereignty:** The digital realm transcends traditional borders, challenging established notions of territoriality and authority, fundamentally altering the landscape of governance and geopolitical dynamics.

- **Redefining Participation:** The advent of digital platforms has expanded the contours of civic engagement, fostering new avenues for participation while also presenting barriers that reshape the dynamics of democratic involvement.

- **Distinguishing Community from Network:** Within the digital ecosystem, the traditional concept of communities intersects with the interconnectivity of networks, influencing social cohesion, information dissemination, and collective action in unique ways.

- **Redefining Citizenship:** The notion of citizenship transcends physical boundaries in the digital era, necessitating an examination of

---

[74] Ippolita, *Tecnologie del dominio : lessico minimo di autodifesa digitale.*

digital citizenship, its rights, responsibilities, and identities that traverse traditional borders.

- **Dynamics of Force and Power:** The wielding of force and power takes on new dimensions within digital ecosystems, prompting a scrutiny of influence dynamics and control mechanisms in an interconnected digital landscape.
- **Epistemic Responsibility and Public Opinion:** The digital sphere serves as a battleground where opinions are shaped and disseminated, necessitating a critical examination of epistemic responsibility and its impact on democratic discourse and public opinion formation.

This exploration isn't merely an academic endeavor; it's also an intriguing bibliographical experiment. It involves a dialogue between some of the most influential scholars and advocates of liberal democracy of the 20th century, including Bobbio, Sartori, and Habermas, and the emerging wave of scholars investigating democracy in an interconnected world. This engagement spans the ideologies, theories, and perspectives that have shaped our understanding of democracy, creating a dynamic exchange between the stalwarts of democratic thought and the new wave of scholars navigating the complexities of an interconnected world.

In the historical context of media's influence on societal movements, the contrast between the past and present becomes vivid. Back in the 1960s, Gil Scott Heron's poignant question, 'Will the Revolution Be Televised?' reflected a time when mainstream media channels, predominantly controlled by corporate entities, were ill-equipped to broadcast dissenting ideas or images. During that era, alternative communication mediums, such as underground newspapers, folk songs, posters, and grassroots radio, became the resonating voice of the counterculture, fostering narratives that thrived beyond the confines of mainstream media limitations.

Fast forward to 2003, a transformative moment emerged with a new query: 'Will the revolution be digitized?' The resounding affirmation indicated a

shift—the advent of digital platforms becoming the heralds of change [75]. However, the optimism surrounding the internet's potential for participative democracy masks a stark reality.

Contrary to the envisioned democratic surge facilitated by the internet, its actual influence unfolds in a complex, decentralized, and often contradictory manner. The anticipated impact, typically associated with democratic potential, doesn't manifest in a singular defining moment. Instead, it emerges as a nuanced force, unevenly distributed and riddled with inherent contradictions. "The effects some have ascribed to networked computing's democratic impulses are likely to appear first not in electoral politics, but in cultural forms: in a changed sense of community, for example, or in a citizenry less dependent on official voices of expertise and authority" [76].

The prevailing belief that the internet would transport enthusiasts into an unfiltered cyber utopia diverges from reality. Instead of ushering individuals into an unmediated digital space, the internet disrupts and challenges existing institutional frameworks on Earth. The internet, "far from transporting its believers into the unmediated perfection of cyber space, is unfreezing a multitude of thoroughly secular institutional arrangements right here on earth and is posing the challenge of how these arrangements might be remade, both efficiently and equitably, in a more digital world" [77]. This juxtaposition between the envisioned idealism of cyberspace and the actual challenges faced in the tangible world underscores the between technological advancements and their real-world implications for participative democracy.

Each of these thematic domains encapsulates a distinct facet of the relationship between digitization and democracy. Through critical inquiry

---

[75] "Two slogans of the 1960s may help us to understand this distinction between old and new media. The first is Gil Scott Heron's song "Will the Revolution Be Televised?" The answer, in 1968, was clearly "No". A narrow pipeline controlled by corporate media was unlikely to transmit dissenting ideas or images. The counterculture communicated primarily through alternative media: underground newspapers, folk songs, posters, people's radio, comics. But in 2003, if we ask whether the revolution will be digitized, the answer is "Yes"". Jenkins, Seawell, and Thorburn, *Democracy and New Media.*
[76] Jenkins, Seawell, and Thorburn.
[77] Jenkins, Seawell, and Thorburn.

and meticulous analysis, this chapter aims to unravel the tapestry of digital influences on the foundational pillars of democratic governance – and on the way it functions – within the advanced Western context.

By delving into these realms, this exploration seeks to not only elucidate the challenges and opportunities emerging at this intersection but also to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the evolving dynamics within contemporary democratic frameworks.

The realm where these transformations transpire, often referred to as the infosphere, marks a departure from the conventional bounds of the biosphere owing to a substantial departure: its definition surpasses the conventional understanding of spatial parameters. This foundational premise serves as a gateway to delve into the profound alterations engendered by the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) within the well-established Newtonian physical space. The infosphere stands as an evolution, surpassing the limitations imposed by traditional spatial definitions. Unlike the biosphere, which is tethered to the physicality of our planet, the infosphere transcends the confines of tangible locations, encompassing the interconnected digital domain that permeates our modern existence. This departure from conventional spatial confines sets the stage for an exploration of the profound alterations and reconfigurations spurred by the digital revolution within the familiar physical realm governed by Newtonian principles. These transformative shifts, powered by the exponential growth of ICT, propel our perception and interaction with the world into a realm characterized by unprecedented connectivity and convergence. By unraveling these pivotal changes, we illuminate the metamorphosis that blurs the boundaries between the tangible and intangible, the physical and digital, fundamentally altering the fabric of our societal structures and perceptions of existence. Here are some of its major features:

1. **Contraction**: Our world appears to shrink, offering the capability to accomplish tasks at a pace that suggests leading multiple concurrent lives. We could regain the sense of space and time characteristic of the

nineteenth century only if one day we were to travel to Mars. The contemplation of such an interplanetary expedition elicits a profound reflection on the enormity of the transition from a time when spaces were traversed without instantaneous communication, where distances carried a weight and time moved at a rhythm distinct from our present interconnected reality. It is within this hypothetical narrative of interplanetary migration that we entertain the notion of comprehending the once-significant temporal and spatial gaps, appreciating the profound shifts that have reshaped our perception of distance in both time and space in the ever-evolving landscape of the digital era.

2. **Expansion**: In the current landscape, there's an inexorable shift towards an uncharted territory—the digital sphere—that heralds a beckoning call for societal transformation and redefinition. This digital milieu isn't a mere extension of our physical world; rather, it stands as an alternate reality, a sprawling expanse ripe for exploration, innovation, and societal evolution. This digital realm is a parallel universe, brimming with possibilities yet to be fully realized. As individuals, institutions, and entire societies navigate this uncharted terrain, the demarcation between the familiar and the unexplored blurs, creating an intermingling of realms previously considered distinct. This blurring of boundaries between the known and the undiscovered opens up gateways to both unprecedented opportunities and formidable challenges. In this uncharted digital landscape, the very fabric of our existence undergoes a profound metamorphosis. It's not just about adapting to new technologies; it's about embracing an entirely new dimension that coexists alongside our physical reality. It's an epoch where human interactions, information dissemination, and societal structures transcend the limitations of physical boundaries, shaping a world where innovation, connectivity, and adaptability are the guiding forces. The allure of this digital universe lies not only in its unexplored potential but also in the imperative for societies to redefine their values, ethics, and governance frameworks within this ever-expanding realm.

As societies grapple with this transformative shift, the journey ahead is characterized by a fusion of the known and the novel, a confluence of tradition and innovation, offering both uncharted opportunities for progress and unanticipated hurdles demanding resolution.

3. **Porosity**: In the contemporary landscape, there exists an inherent and seamless adaptability to traverse effortlessly between the palpable, concrete realm of offline reality and the ethereal, yet all-encompassing online domain. This fluidity in transitioning between these two distinct spheres engenders a transformative paradigm shift, introducing novel modalities of existence and interaction that redefine the essence of human experience. This innate capability to seamlessly navigate between the physical and digital realms extends beyond mere coexistence; it symbolizes a convergence—a harmonious intertwining that blurs the boundaries between these traditionally separate spaces. This fusion isn't just a juxtaposition but a dynamic interplay that molds and shapes our contemporary existence into a multifaceted tapestry of interconnected experiences. The duality of these spaces, once considered disparate, now converges in a symphony of interaction and engagement. It's no longer a matter of merely existing in one space or the other; it's about the integration, the synergy that arises from their mutual existence. This convergence redefines not only how we interact with technology but also how we perceive and engage with the world around us. In this amalgamation, traditional notions of physical and virtual spaces dissolve, giving rise to an web of interconnectedness. It's within this interconnected tapestry that our contemporary lives unfold—a tapestry woven from the threads of real-world experiences intertwined with the digital footprint we leave behind. This symbiotic relationship between the tangible and the intangible, the physical and the digital, shapes the very fabric of our contemporary human experience, offering a glimpse into a future where the dichotomy between these realms fades into an integrated whole.

4. **Hybridization**: The amalgamation of physical and cyber spaces signifies not just a juxtaposition but a seamless integration—an

interweaving that goes beyond coexistence. It marks a transformative convergence where the tangible reality of the physical world isn't supplanted by the digital realm but interlinked with it. This fusion isn't a replacement but a symbiotic relationship, one where the lines between what is traditionally considered tangible and what is virtual blur into an amalgamated whole. As these two realms converge, the landscape of our experience undergoes a profound reshaping. The conventional constraints of physical space are transcended, giving rise to an interconnected domain that challenges our traditional understanding of reality. What was once perceived as separate and distinct—the physical and the virtual—now intertwine, creating a complex and layered reality where boundaries become fluid, and distinctions between the tangible and the digital fade into a unified fabric of existence. This convergence transcends the limitations of individual spaces and redefines our interaction with the world. It's not solely about engaging with one aspect or the other; it's the integration of both realms that shapes our contemporary experiences. It's the augmented reality overlaying our physical environment, the digital platforms seamlessly intertwined with our daily routines, and the interconnectedness that dissolves the barriers between physical and virtual realms. In this amalgamated landscape, the dichotomy between what is real and what is virtual becomes increasingly nuanced. What was once delineated as purely physical or purely digital now coalesces into a hybrid reality—a reality where our perceptions, interactions, and engagements transcend the traditional definitions of the physical and the digital. This convergence challenges our preconceived notions, prompting us to reconsider our understanding of reality in a world where the boundaries between the physical and the virtual continue to blur and intertwine.

5. **Synchronization**: The inherent interconnectedness within our digital world serves as a conduit, effortlessly transcending geographical boundaries and allowing trends and information to traverse across borders seamlessly. This dynamic interconnectivity, inherent to our digital ecosystem, acts as a catalyst for a rapid synchronization,

enabling trends to swiftly transcend the constraints of local origins and swiftly morph into global phenomena within moments. The digital landscape, characterized by its expansive reach and instantaneous connectivity, functions as an expansive platform fostering the dissemination of ideas, behaviors, and information across a global spectrum. What begins as a local phenomenon, within the blink of an eye, can proliferate across continents, resonating with diverse audiences, and gathering momentum to transform into a global sensation. This digital ecosystem dismantles the conventional barriers that once impeded the widespread transmission of trends and knowledge. It propels the propagation of ideas, cultural nuances, and innovations, virtually erasing the confines of physical distance and cultural demarcations. A video shared from one corner of the world can swiftly captivate audiences on the opposite end, birthing viral phenomena that traverse linguistic, cultural, and geographic boundaries. The rapid dissemination of trends and information, facilitated by this interconnected digital framework, isn't just about their spread; it's about their transformation into global cultural touchpoints. It's a testament to the power of connectivity, where a single post, tweet, or video can spark a global conversation, transcending local contexts and swiftly weaving into the fabric of global discourse. In this digital landscape, the speed and scope of global synchronization redefine how trends emerge and disseminate. The once-distant corners of the world now stand connected, offering a platform for ideas and movements to swiftly resonate with audiences worldwide, uniting individuals across diverse cultures and geographies under the umbrella of a shared global experience.

The insights reveal a profound truth: global trends can emerge from the interplay of information waves, amplifying each other through fortuitous interactions. This natural emergence of global significance within social group behavior lacks intentional orchestration but is propelled by the cumulative impact of incidental interactions.

This transformation ushers in an era defined by the pervasive presence of computational capabilities—a world where the distinction between the analog and the digital realms gradually fades into obscurity. This pervasive integration of computational technology, seeping into every facet of our lives, blurs the boundaries between the physical and the digital, rendering them increasingly indistinguishable. In this evolving landscape, future generations, nurtured in this interconnected milieu, may cease to discern clear demarcations between experiences rooted in the online and offline realms. The fusion of these once-discrete spaces results in a seamless integration, where the line separating our physical reality from the digital domain becomes progressively blurred, if not entirely erased. The omnipresence of computational elements in our daily routines becomes akin to the air we breathe—ubiquitous, ever-present, and indispensable. It's the augmented reality overlaying our physical environments, the constant connectivity afforded by wearable technology, and the seamless integration of digital interfaces into our surroundings that culminate in a cohesive and immersive experiential landscape. For these future generations, the digital realm ceases to be an alternate reality; rather, it becomes an integral component woven into the fabric of their everyday lives. The digital footprint seamlessly integrates with their physical experiences, forming a tapestry where the transition between the two realms becomes fluid and natural. As computational ubiquity becomes an inherent aspect of existence, the dichotomy between online and offline dissipates, giving rise to a unified continuum of experiences. It's within this integrated landscape that future generations navigate – a realm where interactions, communication, and the very essence of existence are shaped by this convergence, blurring the boundaries between what is traditionally perceived as the physical and the digital domains.. However, this seamless integration raises concerns about a looming generational divide – the disparity between those raised before the pervasive internet age and those born into a digitally immersed existence.

Envisioning a scenario where digital natives replace digital immigrants, this transition hints at the culmination of e-migration. As this evolution unfolds,

the disconnection from the infosphere may progressively leave future generations feeling excluded, disadvantaged, or dispossessed – a consequence yet to receive widespread attention in the discourse surrounding digital evolution and its societal impacts.

> Democracy has become a media led democracy, in which multiagent systems (understood as distributed groups temporary and timely aggregated around shared interests) have multiplied and become sources of influence external to the Nation State [78]

The trajectory of the State's evolution, driven by the advent of the Information Society, presents a paradoxical narrative: "the State developed by becoming more and more an Information Society, but in so doing it increasingly made itself less and less the main information agent, because what made the State possible and then predominant, as a historical driving force in human politics, namely ICTs, is also what is now making it less central" [79]. Historically, the State wielded unparalleled influence by leveraging ICTs to consolidate power, shape narratives, and control the dissemination of information. These technologies acted as catalysts, propelling the State to the forefront of governance, enabling effective communication, and fostering a centralized approach to information distribution.

However, the digital evolution has unfolded a nuanced narrative. The ubiquitous nature of information in the Information Society has led to a diffusion of power and access. The very technologies that once bolstered the State's dominance now serve as conduits for information proliferation, granting access and agency to a multitude of actors beyond the State's purview.

This diffusion of information and power, facilitated by ICTs, transforms the global landscape into a web of interconnected nodes, blurring the delineation of authority and redefining the nature of influence. Non-state

---

[78] Floridi, *The Onlife Manifesto. Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era.*
[79] Floridi.

entities, ranging from multinational corporations to grassroots movements, now command significant informational power, challenging the State's monopoly over the dissemination and control of information.

Consequently, the State finds itself navigating a realm where its once-unrivaled position as the primary information agent undergoes a subtle but significant shift. While retaining elements of authority, its centrality in controlling and disseminating information has diluted amidst the expansive and interconnected digital sphere. This transformation, rooted in technological advancements, reshapes the dynamics of global affairs, necessitating the reevaluation of the State's role within an increasingly decentralized information landscape. Three interrelated factors underline this shift.

1) Democratization of Information by ICTs: the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has ushered in a transformative era characterized by the democratization of data access and control. This monumental shift dismantles the traditional hierarchy of information control held by the State, distributing these powers across a myriad of repositories and sources. This decentralization marks a paradigmatic shift, empowering a wide spectrum of non-state entities. "The State is no longer the only, and sometimes not even the main, agent in the political arena that can exercise informational power over other informational agents, in particular over (groups of) human informational organism"[80]. This proliferation of power among non-state agents signifies a departure from the State's exclusive dominance in shaping and directing human informational interactions. The State's erstwhile authority over informational ecosystems now faces formidable challenges as ICTs democratize data access. This redistribution of control challenges traditional power structures, fostering a landscape where informational influence is no longer monopolized by the State but shared among a diverse array of influential actors across the socio-political spectrum. This

---

[80] Floridi.

96

transformative shift not only alters the dynamics of power and influence but also signifies a broader societal recalibration in the wake of technological advancement.

2) Transformation of Spatial Dynamics by ICTs: the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) instigates a reshaping of the spatial landscape within which human experiences unfold. These technological advancements dissolve the rigidity of regional borders, ushering in a paradigm where geographical boundaries become increasingly permeable, and novel, borderless spaces emerge within the expansive infosphere. This transformative process redefines the nature of spatial experiences, challenging the conventional understanding of territorial demarcations. The emergence of stateless realms within the digital domain blurs the distinction between physical territories, creating a complex interplay between the global, non-territorial dynamics of geopolitics and the foundational identity of the Nation State deeply entrenched in territorial sovereignty. The tension that arises from this transformation is palpable – a tension between the traditional territorial governance framework upheld by Nation States and the borderless, interconnected nature of the digital sphere. The historical identity of the Nation State, bound by its territorial sovereignty, grapples with the challenge posed by an increasingly globalized and non-territorial geopolitical landscape shaped by ICTs. This shift doesn't merely blur the physical borders; it challenges the essence of the Nation State's identity. The tension between the global, interconnected nature of the digital realm and the State's insistence on territorial sovereignty raises fundamental questions about governance, jurisdiction, and the very definition of a State in an era where the geographical boundaries that once delineated power and authority are no longer as defining within the digital sphere. However, within this dynamic reconfiguration of spatial frameworks brought about by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), a significant concern emerges – a palpable disconnect between these evolving spatial organizations and the authentic formation of communities. The

proliferation of networks facilitated by ICTs lacks the essential fabric that embodies a physical community. This disparity is unmistakable when contrasting the depth and interdependence of these networks against the cohesive, nurturing nature inherent in geographically situated communities. The pivotal distinction lies in the essence of belonging. Communities create an environment that fosters a sense of security and dependability, albeit within a framework that imposes stricter constraints and obligations. They offer a sense of belonging that involves close monitoring, leaving little room for individual autonomy but providing a steadfast network of support and communal ties. In contrast, networks operate with a certain level of detachment. They often function without stringent adherence to shared norms, if such norms even exist within these networks. The freedom offered by networks, though liberating, lacks the depth of commitment and reciprocal engagement characteristic of physical communities. Essentially, communities embody the principle of reciprocal support – *a friend in need is a friend indeed* ethos – where individuals find steadfast support within a framework of obligations and responsibilities. Networks, however, offer a different paradigm. While they grant individuals greater autonomy and flexibility, this freedom comes at the cost of diluted connections and obligations. This dichotomy highlights the inherent risks embedded within these evolving spatial structures. The allure of networked associations, while offering autonomy and flexibility, often dilutes the core essence of communal bonds. The risk emerges from the potential loss of the intrinsic value ingrained in authentic community affiliations, jeopardizing the depth of human connections and the nurturing environment that communities inherently offer.

3) Redefinition of Political Organizational Structures by ICTs: the introduction of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) revolutionizes the very essence of political organizational structures, introducing a dynamic and fluid landscape within the realm of politics. These technologies serve as catalysts, instigating a fundamental shift

that redefines the traditional and rigid boundaries previously defining political dynamics. At the heart of this transformation lies the facilitation of agile and temporary groups by ICTs, groups that transcend the conventional confines of social classes, political affiliations, and linguistic barriers. These technologies empower the swift formation and dissolution of these transient coalitions, allowing for the agile aggregation and disaggregation of distributed groups based on shared interests, regardless of geographical or socio-cultural limitations. This unprecedented fluidity challenges the established rigidity of political frameworks, fundamentally altering the dynamics of how political entities operate and interact. ICTs engender a space where individuals and groups, united by common interests rather than predefined affiliations, can swiftly coalesce and disperse. These technologies democratize political participation, allowing diverse voices to converge and disperse dynamically, shaping discourses and initiatives in real-time. Moreover, the agility facilitated by ICTs enables the emergence of grassroots movements, advocacy groups, and collaborative efforts that operate beyond the confines of traditional hierarchical structures. This decentralization of political power encourages a bottom-up approach, where individuals, irrespective of their societal position or geographical location, can effectively mobilize and influence political discourse. The transformative influence of ICTs extends beyond the mere facilitation of communication; it redefines the very fabric of political engagement. By fostering an environment where boundaries are porous and affiliations are malleable, these technologies challenge the entrenched status quo, paving the way for a more fluid, inclusive, and responsive political landscape.

Thus, we encounter:

> a second problem, that of cohesion, for it answered not just the
> question of who or what the State is, but also the question of who or

what belongs to the State and hence may be subject to its norms and
actions [81]

At the heart of this expanded understanding of cohesion lies a myriad of profound questions. One of the central inquiries pertains to the inclusive nature of citizenship and belonging within a State redefined by the digital age. ICTs have catalyzed a global interconnectedness that transcends geographical boundaries, leading to a reevaluation of conventional citizenship paradigms. They challenge the traditional criteria for defining membership within a State, prompting a reassessment of inclusivity, representation, and the rights afforded to individuals within the digital realm. This redefined relationship between individuals and the State prompts a critical examination of the reciprocity inherent in governance. It raises pertinent queries about the reciprocal responsibilities and entitlements between individuals and the State in an era where the traditional boundaries of governance are no longer solely determined by physical proximity or nationality. Moreover, this shift demands a reconsideration of the State's role as the custodian of societal norms and values within an increasingly interconnected and diverse global community. It prompts discussions about how the State can uphold a cohesive social fabric that accommodates diverse perspectives, identities, and affiliations thriving within the digital ecosystem. The expanding concept of cohesion in this digital era challenges us to envision inclusive governance models that transcend traditional delineations. It beckons societies to grapple with questions of identity, belonging, and participation, seeking frameworks that accommodate the complexities arising from the digital interconnectedness while safeguarding the rights and interests of individuals within an evolving societal landscape. Floridi's exploration of consent and engagement dynamics signifies a shift in our understanding of governance, transcending the boundaries of traditional social contract theory and embracing a contemporary hyperhistorical framework.

---

[81] Floridi.

In the historical framework of social contract theory, the presumed default position is that of a legal opt-out: there is some kind (to be specified) of a priori, original consent, allegedly given by any individual subject to the political State, to be governed by the latter and its laws. The problem is to understand how such consent is given and what happens when the agent opts out of it (the out-law). In the hyperhistorical framework, the expected default position is that of a social opt-in [82]

This conceptualization sparks inquiries into the mechanisms behind granting consent, the complexities surrounding opting out of this implied agreement, and the profound implications arising when an individual becomes an out-law by choosing to disengage from this established order. Conversely, the evolving hyperhistorical paradigm presents a stark departure, advocating for a social opt-in approach—a nuanced and conditional submission to the political domain that occurs with specific intent and purpose. Within this framework, the ongoing process of soliciting consent on diverse political issues takes center stage, necessitating profound reflections on the motivating factors compelling various agents – expanding beyond the individual to encompass diverse entities and collective bodies – to engage actively or bestow their consent. Equally pivotal is discerning the circumstances that lead these agents, not inherently engaged yet not disengaged either, to abstain from active participation in political activities. This paradigmatic shift transcends the traditional binary of consent or refusal, sparking deeper reflections on the elaboratedynamics of political engagement and the interplay of motivations, circumstances, and contexts that govern an individual's or entity's decision-making process within the political realm. It necessitates a holistic understanding of the nuances inherent in the contemporary landscape, acknowledging the diverse array of influences and complexities that shape an individual or entity's stance towards political engagement within the hyperhistorical context. Failing to grasp this transition risks misinterpreting the stark contrast between individual disillusionment with conventional politics and

---

[82] Floridi.

the surge of impactful global movements and social forces. "What is moribund is not politics tout court, but historical politics, that based on Parties, Classes, fixed Social Roles, and the State, which asked political legitimacy only once and spent it until revoked" [83]. Moreover, Floridi cautions against the potential chaos that could emerge from universal voting facilitated by modern technology. While the theoretical possibility of continuous voting on diverse issues by anyone, anytime, appears liberating, it poses a significant challenge. This democratization of decision-making, while enticing, could inadvertently prioritize trivial matters over crucial, complex ones [84].

Floridi further emphasizes the urgency of constructing an inclusive infrastructure capable of accommodating the diverse array of publics thriving within the digital landscape. He advocates for an environment that not only encourages diverse participation but also respects individuals' choices for either open engagement or discrete involvement. Such an infrastructure aims to foster a truly inclusive digital society by providing varied avenues that acknowledge and accommodate the diverse needs and preferences of its inhabitants. All in all,

> we need to construct an infrastructure that allows for a plurality of publics, a choice of exposure and places to hide [85]

In the contemporary era defined by the information age, the merging of global and local political interests signifies a transformative shift, reshaping the dynamics of societal engagement and consciousness. This fusion of global and local spheres defies traditional boundaries, compelling individuals to navigate an intricate, interwoven tapestry of socio-political

---

[83] Floridi.
[84] "This is the philosophy of digital democracy that inspires the Movimento 5 stelle and was also attempted by Barack Obama at the beginning of his first term. What was hailed in 2009 as the first digital president in American history immediately changed course when, in the first survey among his supporters asking what they believed should be the government's top priorities, the top-ranked issues were the liberalization of marijuana and the disclosure of secrets related to certain UFO stories and the activities of military bases where, according to internet legends, some extraterrestrials were believed to have been imprisoned, studied, and then suppressed" Massimo Gaggi, *Homo Premium : Come La Tecnologia Ci Divide* (Bari: Laterza, 2018). [A/N: translated from the Italian original].
[85] Floridi, *The Onlife Manifesto. Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era.*

narratives that transcend geographical limitations. The interplay between global-scale issues and localized concerns blurs conventional distinctions, birthing a new paradigm where events from disparate corners of the world hold equal weight and resonance within the collective consciousness. At the forefront of this paradigm shift stands a prime example in movements like Black Lives Matter, initially grounded in addressing systemic racial injustices within the United States. Yet, these movements rapidly transcended national borders, becoming emblematic of larger global struggles against racial inequality and systemic injustices. Their impact reverberated globally, igniting conversations and mobilizing communities worldwide, epitomizing the convergence of local activism into a broader, universally resonating movement. Within this milieu, individuals grapple with the inundation of both local and global information, fostering a dual awareness that extends beyond traditional territorial confines. The pervasive nature of digital communication dismantles geographical barriers, fostering a shared consciousness and an acute sense of interconnectedness among individuals regarding events transpiring oceans apart. Issues like climate change, human rights violations, or socio-political movements are no longer confined to local landscapes; they traverse borders, weaving their narratives into the collective fabric of global discourse. However, this confluence of global and local narratives presents inherent political challenges. The digital revolution, which empowers citizens to engage and mobilize globally, prompts governments to grapple with reconciling their traditional roles with the increasing demands to address concerns transcending national boundaries. In the realm of digital platforms, the democratization of information fuels a vibrant space where individuals convene, voice opinions, and rally for causes resonating with their ethical compass. These platforms facilitate a surge in citizen participation, offering a forum for people to express solidarity and mobilize for global issues that align with their core values. This burgeoning participatory activism marks a seismic shift in societal engagement, challenging the established norms of governance that were traditionally confined by territorial borders. However, amid this surge in digital activism

lies a critical juncture. Despite these platforms serving as hubs for discussion and activism, their political accountability remains uncertain. While they empower individuals to voice opinions and rally for change, the ultimate decision-making authority often rests within the political apparatus of the state in which individuals reside. Despite the global reach of these digital platforms, their influence in effecting tangible change or policy outcomes is contingent upon the pathways and mechanisms embedded within the political systems of respective nations. Therefore, while digital spaces nurture discourse, galvanize movements, and generate awareness on global issues, the avenues for concrete political decision-making and policy implementation typically remain tethered to the established structures of national governance. The digital realm amplifies voices and ignites movements, but its direct influence on shaping policy and governance still largely hinges upon the political frameworks and processes entrenched within the states or regions where individuals reside. This distinction emphasizes the crucial role of the traditional political system in channeling and translating the energies and aspirations nurtured within these digital arenas into actionable change within the socio-political landscape. Yet, amid this interconnectedness, complexities emerge. The intersection of global and local interests necessitates nuanced approaches to ensure the authentic representation of local struggles within the broader global discourse. Balancing the urgency of global concerns with the specificity of local needs poses a challenge in governance and policymaking, compelling institutions to recalibrate their strategies to address the multifaceted demands of a globally connected citizenry. This g-local dynamic redefines the landscape of political engagement, signifying a pivotal moment in participatory democracy. The challenges posed by these evolving political interests demand adaptive governance models capable of responding to citizen aspirations molded by global events. It calls for collaborative, inclusive approaches that reconcile global solidarity with local sensitivity, charting a path toward addressing shared global challenges while honoring the intricacies of localized contexts and concerns.

In the era of digitization, the emergence of the *total citizen* marks a profound transformation in the landscape of civic engagement and responsibility. This modern figure embodies a paradigm shift—a citizen living in a world where information sources proliferate exponentially, blurring the lines of authority and credibility. No longer confined to mere political participation through voting, the *total citizen* assumes an additional epistemic role, tasked with the crucial responsibility of discerning trustworthy information amid the information deluge. As Luciano Floridi aptly illustrates,

> information is akin to natural resources of a third kind, besides the non-renewable and the renewable, we have the exponential. Instead of aiming at a global or encyclopaedic overview, we need to learn to navigate through information-saturated waters, and make sense of and value the abundance of information through datamining and other filtering activities [86]

Moreover, this transformation shapes a new breed of individuals, encapsulated in the succinct term used by Ventura (quoting Ballard): *half-educated.* This characterization by Ventura epitomizes the essence of the *total citizen* in the digital age — a fusion of traditional education with a necessary adaptation to the dynamic and vast realm of digital information. This citizen is neither fully equipped with traditional education nor entirely unversed in the digital sphere but stands at the intersection of these domains, navigating through the multifaceted landscapes of knowledge and information. The *total citizen* embodies a dual role — an active participant in the political arena and an informed navigator of the vast digital sea of information. The modern *total citizen* shoulders a multifaceted responsibility, extending beyond the conventional realms of political agency. Crucially, the *total citizen* must undertake the art of critically evaluating diverse sources, exercising discernment, and employing critical thinking to navigate the labyrinthine pathways of information. This

---

[86] Floridi.

evolution of citizenship aligns with the prescient insights of Bobbio, whose seminal work on democracy foresaw the nuanced responsibilities that contemporary citizens would face in the information age. Bobbio's astute observations on democracy anticipated the role of citizens, transcending the mere exercise of political rights. The essence of citizenship, as conceptualized by Bobbio, expands to encompass an epistemic dimension—an imperative demand placed upon individuals to engage actively with information, critically scrutinize sources, and synthesize knowledge to inform their decision-making process. The evolving landscape of citizenship, as envisaged by Bobbio, foreshadowed the imperative for citizens to navigate the plethora of information, wielding critical thinking as a tool to discern truth from misinformation and make informed choices in the complex web of digital information. This vision of citizenship, rooted in Bobbio's foreshadowing of democratic theories, underscores the evolution of civic engagement in the digital age. It acknowledges the indispensable role of individuals not only in shaping political discourse but also in engaging actively with information, fulfilling the epistemic responsibility inherent in the modern citizenship paradigm. The fusion of political agency with the conscientious evaluation of information represents a testament to Bobbio's foresight, portraying citizenship as an evolving construct that demands active participation, critical scrutiny, and informed decision-making within the expansive information ecosystem. I'll explore Bobbio's ideas further in the subsequent section, diving deeper into his visionary insights on the evolving nature of citizenship and democracy in the digital era. The emergence of the *total citizen* calls for a recalibration of the skills and competencies demanded in the digital era. It's a testament to the shifting responsibilities of individuals, not just in shaping political landscapes but also in curating and interpreting the wealth of information that defines the modern information age.

> Many of us have strong opinions, yet most of us are profoundly
> uninformed [87]

In the evolving digital sphere, the delineation between the knowledgeable and the uninformed, as defined in Jenkins' expert paradigm[88], faces disruption. This disruption pivots around the collective intelligence paradigm, which challenges the entrenched binary. Embracing a philosophy that celebrates the inherent value in each individual, it fundamentally challenges the perceived boundaries between knowledge and ignorance. Moreover, within this dynamic landscape of collective intelligence, entrenched hierarchies of established knowledge undergo dissolution. What emerges in its place are innovative feedback mechanisms and rating systems, reshaping the once-firm structures that dictated the dissemination and validation of information. This transformative shift significantly alters the traditional contours of knowledge transmission and authentication. This paradigmatic transformation extends beyond mere information dissemination; it becomes a catalyst for democratizing knowledge. By fostering a space that encourages broader participation and engagement, it empowers individuals to actively partake in both the creation and critical assessment of knowledge. This democratization establishes a new order where information doesn't reside solely within the realms of established authorities but emerges from the collective efforts of an engaged and participatory community. Amidst this seismic shift towards collective intelligence, a critical risk demands proactive resolution before embracing this evolving paradigm wholeheartedly. Traditionally, societies functioned within established frameworks where authoritative figures were visible and recognized. Such figures acted as cornerstones for accountability, providing clear entities to hold responsible for actions, decisions, or disseminated information. However, as this landscape undergoes transformation,

---

[87] Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur : How Blogs, Myspace, YouTube and the Rest of Today's User-Generated Media Are Destroying Our Economy, Our Culture, and Our Values (Book, 2011) [WorldCat.Org]* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2011), https://www.worldcat.org/title/cult-of-the-amateur-how-blogs-myspace-youtube-and-the-rest-of-todays-user-generated-media-are-destroying-our-economy-our-culture-and-our-values/oclc/844944525&referer=brief_results.
[88] "the expert paradigm creates an "exterior" and "interior"; there are some people who know things and others who don't" Jenkins, Seawell, and Thorburn, *Democracy and New Media.*

transitioning from traditional hierarchical models to decentralized structures driven by collective intelligence, a profound danger looms. In this emerging scenario, where traditional authorities fade in prominence, new channels of knowledge validation and dissemination take precedence. Herein lies a potential gap — a vacuum in accountability. In this scenario, the absence of clearly defined entities to assign responsibility threatens the core principles of credibility and integrity within the information ecosystem. The transition towards collective intelligence must coincide with the establishment of robust mechanisms ensuring transparency, ethical conduct, and accountability. Safeguarding against a scenario where culpability evades identification (and responsibility attribution becomes an insurmountable challenge) is imperative. Addressing this critical issue mandates proactive measures to preserve the integrity and reliability of information dissemination and decision-making within this rapidly evolving paradigm. In the vast digital expanse, Origgi's insight into the perpetual struggle for attention among myriad information sources is profound. "In an environment with a high density of information like the web, where various sources are in constant competition to capture users' attention, and where direct verification of information is simply impossible at reasonable costs, evaluations and rankings are epistemic tools and cognitive practices that inevitably introduce a shortcut in information" [89]. In essence, to thoroughly scrutinize each source and decipher its credibility would require dedicating nearly every waking moment—an impractical feat. This overwhelming information overload is like any other evolutionary challenge. Just as our ancestors developed heuristic methods to navigate their physical environments, our contemporary existence demands a new set of mental shortcuts. These modern heuristics are intrinsic to our cognitive toolkit, serving as indispensable tools for interpreting and managing the relentless deluge of digital data. They represent an evolutionary adaptation, an integral part of our cognitive evolution tailored to our immersion in the digital ecosystem. Consequently, evaluations and

---

[89] Gloria Origgi, *La reputazione : chi dice cosa di chi* (London: EGEA, 2016). [A/N, all quotes from *La reputazione* have been translated in English from the Italian original].

rankings emerge as epistemic tools, serving as cognitive shortcuts in assessing information reliability. In today's inundated information landscape, uncertainty often clouds the reliability of the content we encounter.

> The more uncertain the content of information, the more significant the weight of others' opinions becomes in determining the quality of this content. This doesn't make us more credulous. Our epistemic responsibility regarding these reputational systems lies in being aware of the distortions inherent in each system's form, both for technical, sociological, or institutional reasons [90]

Moreover, this evolving landscape of information assessment demands a more vigilant cognitive approach, one that goes beyond the mere acceptance of secondary data. It compels us to actively question sources, critically analyze the reasons behind our trust in them, and navigate a complex terrain where the lines between truth and falsehood often blur. This shift toward collective filtration and acquisition of information signifies a substantial cognitive leap. It emphasizes the importance of social cognition[91], far surpassing the limitations of individual inferential capacities, which seem comparatively rudimentary in this context. Living in a society heavily reliant on reputation and rankings, it becomes crucial to grow skills in navigating this convoluted informational realm. Blindly accepting rankings without delving into their creation process and origins proves insufficient in a society governed by reputational dynamics and selectively filtered information. It calls for a critical lens, urging individuals to delve deeper into the mechanisms shaping rankings, understand their makers, and critically evaluate their validity. This ability to scrutinize and discern is essential for making well-informed decisions and grasping the nuances of our information-rich environment.

---

[90] Origgi.
[91] "That is, understanding whom it's worth believing, who says what, who the reliable informants are". Origgi.

Ventura's contemplation comes in handy here: the author delves into the maze of the contemporary information landscape.

> The era of post-truth is not a time of ignorance but of stupidity, a stupidity generated by widespread suspicion and excessive trust in one's abilities. This stupidity embodies what we consider fundamental principles: critical thinking, the disintermediation of knowledge, and its circulation, accompanied by the dark counterparts of skepticism, information overload, and mechanisms of polarization [92]

In the fabric of everyday life, the sheer volume and constant influx of information become overwhelmingly dense. The notion of achieving real-time, comprehensive understanding within this deluge is an impractical pursuit. It's like attempting to seize every drop of water in a torrential downpour. In this context, the emergence of meticulous fact-checkers seems like a reasonable antidote to misinformation. However, their zealous pursuit of accuracy inadvertently poses a threat to the fluidity of democratic participation. Despite their noble intentions, these fact-checkers—vigilant and discerning as they may be—risk clogging the informational channels. Their quest for unwavering accuracy within the ever-evolving realm of information inadvertently erects barriers to the free flow of diverse perspectives, stifling the very essence of a participatory and vibrant democratic discourse.

In our exploration of democracy, the invaluable perspectives of eminent scholars — namely here: Bobbio, Habermas, and Dahl — offer multifaceted insights into this complex system of governance. Habermas is very useful here in clearly and concisely defining the modern state:

> the "state" on the modern conception is a legally defined term which refers, at the level of substance, to a state power that possesses both internal and external sovereignty, at the spatial level over a clearly

---

[92] Raffaele Alberto Ventura, *La guerra di tutti : populismo, terrore e crisi della società liberale* (Roma: Minimum fax, 2019). [A/N, all quotes from *La Guerra di tutti : populismo, terrore e crisi della società liberale* have been translated in English from the Italian original].

delimited terrain (the state territory) and at the social level over the
totality of members (the body of citizens or the people) [93]

Turning to Bobbio's astute observations on the future of democracy, he challenges the idealistic notion of *computerocracy* enabling direct citizen participation. While such technology might seem empowering, the sheer volume of potentially proposed laws implies frequent voting, potentially fostering what Dahrendorf termed the emergence of the *total citizen* (that we used above).[94] Excessive participation might paradoxically lead to political saturation and voter apathy, undermining the very essence of democracy.

> The price which has to be paid for the commitment of the few is often
> the indifference of the many. Nothing risks killing off democracy
> more effectively than an excess of democracy [95]

Bobbio's insights further delve into the democratic ideal versus reality, highlighting the divergence between the envisioned centripetal society and the actual polycentric or polycratic society. This discrepancy underscores the inherent plurality within democratic governance. Additionally, Bobbio articulates how civil liberties have emancipated civil society from strict political systems, resulting in an ever-increasing demand for government response.

> First the liberal state, and then by extension the democratic state,
> have contributed to the emancipation of civil society from the
> political system. This process of emancipation has created a
> situation where civil society has increasingly become an

---

[93] Jürgen Habermas, Ciaran Cronin, and Pablo De Greiff, *The Inclusion of the Other : Studies in Political Theory* (Oxford: Polity, 2005).

[94] "The hypothesis that the future 'computerocracy', as it has been called, might make direct democracy possible, by giving all citizens the possibility of transmitting their votes to an electronic brain, is puerile. To judge by the number of laws which are tabled every year in Italy, responsible citizens would have to be called upon to cast their vote at least once a day". Norberto Bobbio, *The Future of Democracy : A Defence of the Rules of the Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

[95] Bobbio.

inexhaustible source of demands on government, which in order to
carry out its functions properly must make adequate responses [96]

However, this overloading of government with swiftly evolving demands poses a formidable challenge. Citizens' prompt calls for action stand in stark contrast to the slow decision-making processes within democratic political systems. Amidst these discussions, Dahl's contributions underscore the complexities of democracy, emphasizing the critical role of the public sphere and the idea of *polyarchy*. His work delves into the intricacies of political power distribution and participation, unveiling the multifaceted nature of democratic governance.

In the evolving landscape of democracy, the insights from Bobbio, Habermas, and Dahl illuminate the layers of governance and the challenges faced by contemporary political systems. As these scholars unveil the complexities inherent in democracy, a remarkable shift becomes evident in the role of the democratic state. Increasingly, the democratic state is assuming a neutral stance, transforming into a mediating force regulating interactions between individuals and private entities. This paradigm shift resembles an extension of the *minimal state*, a concept championed by liberal theorists as the optimal form of government. The emerging role of the democratic state as a neutral third party signifies a departure from its traditional functions of centralized power and interventionism. Instead, it assumes the role of an impartial regulator, facilitating transactions and interactions between citizens and private entities. This metamorphosis aligns with the principles of liberal theory, emphasizing limited government intervention and the autonomy of private actors within a framework of neutral governance. The state serves as a facilitator, ensuring fair play and resolving disputes without imposing excessive control or influence on private affairs. The ethos of neutrality and minimal intervention allows private actors to operate autonomously, fostering innovation, competition, and individual agency. However, as the state navigates this delicate balance between regulation and non-intervention, complexities emerge. Balancing

---

[96] Bobbio.

the imperative of a neutral regulatory stance with safeguarding public interest and social justice becomes a difficult task. Moreover, the rise of global interconnectedness and the borderless nature of digital transactions further complicates the state's role, demanding novel regulatory frameworks that transcend geographical boundaries. This transition of the democratic state toward a regulatory mediator marks a pivotal juncture in governance philosophy. The necessary evolution seems that of a liberal theoretical underpinning of a minimal state, underscoring the importance of impartial governance and the autonomy of private actors. Yet, as this transformation unfolds, questions arise regarding the state's ability to adapt to the dynamic needs of a rapidly changing society. Striking a harmonious balance between regulatory neutrality and ensuring public welfare remains a continuous challenge. Moreover, in an era of rapid technological advancements and global interconnectedness, the state faces the daunting task of crafting adaptable regulatory frameworks that cater to diverse interests while upholding the fundamental tenets of democratic governance. In essence, the evolving role of the democratic state as a neutral third-party regulating interactions between individuals and private entities embodies the liberal ideal of a minimal state. This paradigm shift raises critical questions about the state's capacity to navigate the complexities of contemporary society, emphasizing the need for adaptive governance models that reconcile regulatory neutrality with societal welfare in an increasingly interconnected world. In exploring the evolving landscape of governance, Bobbio introduces the concept of *neocorporatism*, "characterized by a triangular arrangement in which the government, ideally the representative of national interests, intervenes only as a mediator between the two sides and at most can act as guarantor (generally an impotent one) to ensure that any agreement reached is honoured" [97]. This model signifies a departure from direct government intervention, emphasizing mediation and agreement enforcement. In alignment with the liberal conception of the state, a profound recognition emerges regarding

---

[97] Bobbio.

the delineation between the state and the *non-state.*[98] The emergence of the liberal state can be understood as a dual process: the separation of political power from religious authority (the secular state) and the detachment of economic power from political control (the laissez-faire state). This delineation lays the foundation for the governance of non-state entities, including digital companies, which have garnered substantial influence despite operating outside direct state control. The significance of this distinction is echoed in the historical context of economic strategy.

> It has often been said that the Keynesian economic strategy was an attempt to save capitalism without abandoning democracy, so rejecting the two opposite solutions of either destroying capitalism by sacrificing democracy (Leninism in practice) or destroying democracy so as to save capitalism (fascism). It might now be said that for the liberals of the new generation the problem is the other way round, that of saving (if it is still possible and as far as it is possible), democracy without abandoning capitalism [99]

The relationship between governance, capitalism, and democracy underscores the complexities of modern statecraft. The emergence of neocorporatism, the evolution of the liberal state, and the intertwined dynamics of economic and political powers encapsulate the ongoing quest to strike a delicate balance between preserving democratic ideals and sustaining capitalist structures. This challenge holds profound implications for contemporary governance, especially in light of the growing influence wielded by non-state entities like digital corporations, which navigate the blurred lines between the state and civil society, reshaping the terrain of influence and power in the digital age.

Jenkins astutely highlights that the burgeoning digital economy heralds a landscape where private entities take the lead, relegating governments to secondary roles. We can trace a parallel between contemporary digital magnates and the infamous robber barons of the late nineteenth century.

---

[98] "By non-state I mean religious society, the general intellectual and moral life of individuals and groups, and civil society (or the realm of productive relations in Marxist terms)". Bobbio.
[99] Bobbio.

These claims to lawless space are remarkably similar to those of the robber barons of an earlier century. Like the men at Google, the late-nineteenth-century titans claimed undefended territory for their own interests, declared the righteousness of their self-authorizing prerogatives, and defended their new capitalism from democracy at any cost. At least in the US case, we have been here before. Economic historians describe the dedication to lawlessness among the Gilded Age "robber barons" for whom Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism played the same role that Hayek, Jensen, and even Ayn Rand play for today's digital barons [100]

In this rapid and dynamic sphere, governmental processes often struggle to keep pace, lacking the requisite agility and flexibility demanded by the swift currents of the digital era. The private sector, though not devoid of its bureaucracies, tends to navigate this domain more effectively, capitalizing on the need for heightened productivity and adaptability that the internet era mandates.

It's very difficult to work at a high productivity level in government; it's very difficult to work flexibly; it's very difficult to move quickly; and the Internet requires all of those things [101]

Moreover, Jenkins elucidates an essential paradox underlying private choice within this framework: the façade of consumer choice often masks a lack of true power. Privatization doesn't inherently amplify freedom; instead, it tends to diminish civic liberty by reducing collective power in the realm of political decision-making. Democratic civic liberty resides in the collective capacity to navigate and influence the societal framework, shaping public utilities, and steering the instrumentalities of society. The liberty afforded in private, focusing on consumer choices, often falls short of empowering individuals within the broader social and civic context. The

---

[100] Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism : The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*.

[101] Jenkins, Seawell, and Thorburn, *Democracy and New Media*.

echoes of historical precedents underscore the enduring tension between capitalism and democracy, wherein the ascendant digital economy and its champions evoke concerns akin to those raised during prior epochs of capitalist expansion. This intersection highlights the perennial struggle between the unfettered pursuit of commercial interests and the imperative of democratic governance.

In the contemporary digital landscape, these ideologies advocate a fusion of liberalism and capitalism, glorifying the unbridled market as the epitome of personal freedom. This philosophy champions individual pursuits of accumulation and consumption as the ultimate expression of liberty. "The institutions are in a state of crisis because a forced deregulation is taking place, leading to traumatic changes in relationships between the involved individuals: an empty seat in a car becomes a missed income, an empty bed at home a potential gain, hosting a friend an economic loss" [102]. This radical reshaping of human interactions challenges existing norms and forces institutions to grapple with rapid adjustments in societal dynamics. While advocating for a limited role, the State's retention of authoritative power, particularly its perceived monopoly on violence within borders, solidifies its image as a coercive entity. This perception starkly contrasts with the perceived openness of the digital realm, deepening the portrayal of the State as a controlling force. These insights from Ippolita's work shed light on the complex relationship between the State and the emerging digital landscape, where the State's role and its perceived control are juxtaposed against the perceived openness of the digital sphere. Technocratic promises flirt with a disquieting outcome — the liberation from freedom itself. Genuine liberty thrives on choices, yet the allure of technocracy masks itself with an illusion of limitless options, enticing individuals to relinquish their autonomy. Within this maze of excessive choices, individual agency surrenders to a system dictating what is presumed to be the best, all under the guise of

---

[102] Ippolita, *Tecnologie del dominio : lessico minimo di autodifesa digitale.* [A/N, all quotes from *Tecnologie del dominio : lessico minimo di autodifesa digitale* have been translated in english from the Italian original].

benevolence. We can sum this up with an enlightening comment from Bifo Berardi:

> The power of politics and the power of techno-science have indeed shaped the artificial world over the last five centuries, but the effect of this triumph is now evident before our eyes: the generated reality has reached a level of complexity beyond practical and cognitive control. The power of technology becomes, at a certain point, an uncontrollable force because complex society and the techno-universe gain a speed that informed and rational decision-making can no longer sustain, and voluntary and coordinated action can no longer govern. Modern humanism indicates the assertion of autonomy of human will from fortune and fate. But the endpoint of that autonomous will is the construction of a techno-universe with transcendent power, appearing as a new figure of Fate. Modern humanism had sanctioned the separation between human will and divine plan, thereby asserting human sovereignty in the sphere of human action. Within this sphere of sovereignty, politics could be conceived: Machiavelli declares that the prince's task is to subdue fortune to law, to will. *However, the sovereignty of organized individuals over their associated destiny has waned since the economy and society have become the realm of action for interconnected technological automatism* [103]

In the midst of burgeoning discussions lauding the liberal account of democracy and its symbiotic relationship with economic frameworks, there exists an enduring reality: the web of geopolitical interdependencies and global equilibrium. While scholars and economists celebrate the virtues of liberal democracy as a hallmark of societal progress and stability, the landscape of international relations continues to be shaped by multifaceted geopolitical forces. Nation-states, despite embracing liberal ideologies domestically, are inevitably entwined within a complex global tapestry of political, economic, and strategic interests. The stability of this geopolitical web hinges on a delicate equilibrium, where nations navigate a labyrinth of

---

[103] Franco Bifo Berardi, *La Fabbrica Dell'infelicità : New Economy e Movimento Del Cognitariato* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2001). [A/N, all quotes from *La Fabbrica Dell'Infelicità : New Economy e Movimento Del Cognitariato* have been translated in english from the Italian original].

alliances, rivalries, and cooperative endeavors. Even in an era seemingly propelled by the ideals of liberal democracy, the international arena remains deeply rooted in power dynamics, strategic alliances, and global power struggles. The maintenance and preservation of geopolitical equilibrium pose perpetual challenges for nation-states, demanding a delicate balance between advancing their own interests and harmonizing with global expectations. As globalization continues to redefine the contours of international interactions, the role of nation-states undergoes a nuanced transformation. They become integral players in an elaborate chessboard, where every move is intertwined with geopolitical repercussions and global ramifications. Moreover, the advent of digital connectivity and the seamless flow of information across borders introduce new dimensions to this global equilibrium. The digital landscape, ostensibly borderless, complicates the traditional notions of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Cybersecurity threats, information warfare, and digital espionage blur the lines between national and international interests, compelling nation-states to safeguard not just physical borders but also virtual domains. In this dance of power and influence, nation-states grapple with the tensions between national sovereignty and global interconnectedness. While espousing the tenets of liberal democracy domestically, these entities must navigate the complexities of global geopolitics, balancing their individual interests with international obligations. Striking this balance is not just a diplomatic pursuit but a delicate art, a constant juggling act that defines the stability and equilibrium of the world stage. Amidst the fervor for liberal democratic ideals, the geopolitical equilibrium reminds us of the enduring relevance of nation-states as key actors in a world where interests, alliances, and power dynamics shape the course of international relations. The coexistence of liberal democratic values with the imperatives of global geopolitics forms the fabric upon which the stability and equilibrium of our world rest. In an ever-evolving digital landscape we will witness a relentless shift toward sustained, low-intensity cyber warfare.

Within this dynamic, states grapple with an increasingly informed and vocal public, leading to the strategic adoption of strategies for virtual

containment. Governments, seeking to manage dissent, permit controlled online expression but encounter the complex task of discerning genuine threats amid the cacophony of digital noise. This challenge complicates their response strategies in an era fostering open dialogue and extensive online interactions. The rapid proliferation of cutting-edge technologies, notably the widespread adoption of robots and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), introduces a paradoxical scenario in global geopolitics. On one front, the escalating use and experimentation with these advanced tools by nations significantly escalate international tensions. The competitive rush to harness and test the capabilities of these technologies creates an atmosphere fraught with uncertainty and strategic maneuvering, intensifying the rivalry among states seeking an edge in the technological arms race. Interestingly, amid this heightened tension, there emerges a contrasting narrative. The very presence and efficacy of these modern tools paradoxically serve as a deterrent to all-out warfare. The increased reliance on sophisticated technological systems modifies the traditional landscape of conflicts, creating a situation where full-scale confrontations become less feasible and pragmatic. Nations are compelled to engage in more cautious and calculated strategies, considering the potential risks and ramifications of engaging in direct, large-scale conflicts. This transformative shift in the geopolitical arena ushers in an era marked by a nuanced approach to conflicts. It prompts nations to recalibrate their military and strategic doctrines, fostering a trend toward restrained, controlled confrontations, and meticulous cyber maneuvers. The intricate balance between the deployment of these advanced tools and the cautious avoidance of escalations reshapes the dynamics of global power struggles, fostering a landscape where strategic maneuvers and calculated posturing take precedence over outright confrontations.

In the ever-evolving intersection of the information age and democratic principles, seismic shifts in power dynamics have altered the traditional constructs of authority. The dominance once held by the nation-state now stands precariously at the cusp of impotence as power dissipates into a vast, global 'space of flows' that transcends the confines of conventional

territorial politics. "There is something of a thread of recognition in Internet Studies that online communication venues foster what might be called "third spaces," i.e., ones shaped by a sense of group sharing and intimacy that is neither individually private in a strong sense nor public in some wholesale sense"[104]. This evolution of freedom, transcending political emancipation, extends its reach deep into the structural fabric of society, emphasizing societal liberation alongside political autonomy. In the contemporary landscape, the concept of freedom extends far beyond the conventional notions of emancipation solely from state authority. It now ventures into the realms of societal power within civil structures. Merely being free from the State loses its essence if one remains constrained within society. A liberal state loses its luster when societal foundations remain entrenched in despotism. The idea of political freedom becomes hollow if the broader social freedom is absent. Beyond the overt subjugation to princely authority lies a deeper submission to the apparatus of production. To authentically grapple with the question of liberty, a crucial step backward beckons – from the confines of statehood toward the expansive territory of civil society. As Bobbio suggests:

> the power of politics and the power of techno-science have indeed shaped the artificial world over the last five centuries, but the effect of this triumph is now evident before our eyes: the generated reality has reached a level of complexity beyond practical and cognitive control. The power of technology becomes, at a certain point, an uncontrollable force because complex society and the technocosm gain a speed that informed and rational decision-making can no longer sustain, and voluntary and coordinated action can no longer govern. Modern humanism indicates the assertion of autonomy of human will from fortune and fate. But the endpoint of that autonomous will is the construction of a technocosm with transcendent power, appearing as a new figure of Fate. Modern humanism had sanctioned the separation between human will and divine plan, thereby asserting human sovereignty in the sphere of human action. Within this sphere of sovereignty, politics could be

---

[104] Floridi, *The Onlife Manifesto. Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era.*

conceived: Machiavelli declares that the prince's task is to subdue fortune to law, to will. However, the sovereignty of organized individuals over their associated destiny has waned since the economy and society have become the realm of action for interconnected technological automatism [105]

The hallmark of a democratic society lies not just in its governance structures but in the vibrant engagement of its citizens across diverse platforms. However, this access to platforms stands as a dual phenomenon: it emerges both as an outcome of a self-regulating, open internet space and, simultaneously, as the catalyst propelling this environment. The interplay between equal access and self-regulation poses a conundrum, making the regulation of digital spaces a challenge within the evolving dynamics of governance and information dissemination.

In our exploration, we've encountered the profound impact of digitization on the very fabric of modern society. The emergence of virtual spaces, though intangible and devoid of traditional governance, has become robust arenas for political engagement, amplifying the voices and actions of citizens worldwide. This digital evolution has fundamentally altered the state's role. While it still wields authority over force and security, its grip on informational influence has slackened. Multiple actors, both state and non-state, now contribute significantly to shaping public opinion and discourse, reshaping the landscape of information dissemination and societal influence. The notion of 'g-local' stood out as a defining characteristic of this digital era, where the global interconnectedness coalesces with local nuances, creating a novel hybridity that reflects the complex interplay between the global and the local, fundamentally altering how societies interact and evolve. Our exploration delved deeply into the foundational pillars of democracy as delineated by prominent scholars, contextualizing their visions within the framework of a participatory democracy in the age of electronics. Moreover, the lens of liberalism shed light on the evolving nature of governance, contemplating the feasibility of a minimal state

---

[105] Norberto Bobbio, *Eguaglianza e Libertà* (Torino: Einaudi, 2009). [A/N, all quotes from *Eguaglianza e Libertà* have been translated in English from the Italian original].

amidst the digital revolution. Yet, throughout these profound changes, geopolitics retains its pivotal significance. Even in this digitized epoch, the geopolitical arena continues to hold sway, dictating global equilibrium and power dynamics, showcasing its unwavering importance in shaping the future trajectory of our interconnected world.

In concluding Part One, our journey through the landscape of digital evolution and its impact on societal structures has been illuminating. These insights provide a foundational understanding of the transformative forces at play in our contemporary world. However, they are just one piece of a multifaceted puzzle that characterizes our post-capitalist societies. As we transition to Part Two, we pivot our focus toward another disruptive force reshaping the fabric of our existence: the looming prospect of the so-called end of work. This critical facet further propels us into what is often coined as *post-capitalist society*. This imminent evolution in labor dynamics, automation, and the evolving nature of employment serves as a complementary canvas to our previous exploration. Together, these two intertwined themes, the digital revolution and the shifting landscape of labor and employment, will lay the groundwork for our forthcoming analysis of contemporary power paradigms. They provide a rich tapestry against which we will delve deeper into the nuanced complexities of modern power dynamics, unveiling their intricacies and implications on the broader spectrum of society. Our pursuit aims not only to understand but to dissect the mechanisms underpinning the socio-political dynamics of our time. Through this comprehensive lens, we seek to unravel the essence of power in its myriad forms, exploring its manifestations, influences, and implications within the contemporary socio-economic landscape. This journey is but a step toward grasping the web of forces shaping our societies and navigating the ever-evolving nature of power in the modern era.

CHAPTER 2 – THE END OF WORK: TIME, WORK AND LEISURE IN POST-CAPITALIST SOCIETIES

2.1 – THE END OF WORK AND NEW FORMS OF PRODUCTION/CONSUMPTION

"We live in the age of the overworked, and the under-educated; the age in which people are so industrious that they become absolutely stupid" [106]

Building upon the critical exploration of digitization and its implications for individual subjectivity and democratic principles in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 embarks on a journey to unravel the multifaceted tapestry of the end of work. At the heart of this chapter lies a comprehensive examination of the pivotal notion of the end of work and its ramifications. The approach taken within Chapter 2 moves beyond traditional Marxist ideology to embrace a post-Marxist perspective, which examines the notions of value and exploitation in a contemporary context vastly different from the industrial society that Marx analyzed. This post-Marxist approach navigates the terrain of value and exploitation within a societal framework that transcends the industrial paradigm. It elucidates the intricacies of surplus value and its implications within our current socioeconomic structures, departing from the conventional confines of classical Marxist thought. The examination is rooted in an understanding that contemporary society has undergone profound transformations, rendering the industrial lens insufficient to comprehend the complexities of present-day labor dynamics. By adopting this post-Marxist lens, the chapter endeavors to shed light on the redefined landscape of work, moving beyond the classical industrial conception. This nuanced exploration acknowledges the evolution of societal structures, where the nature of labor and its relationship to value and exploitation have undergone profound reconfigurations. This post-

---

[106] Wilde, "Complete Works of Oscar Wilde."

Marxist approach doesn't discard Marx's insights but rather builds upon them, acknowledging the necessity to adapt theoretical frameworks to the realities of a society that has transcended the industrial epoch. It navigates the contemporary complexities of labor, value, and exploitation in a world where technological advancements and shifting economic paradigms redefine the fundamental nature of work. Through this post-Marxist prism, Chapter 2 aims to unravel the web of labor dynamics and societal structures, offering a critical examination that transcends the industrial roots of classical Marxist ideology. The post-Marxist approach embraced in Chapter 2 stands as a continuum and adaptation of the core tenets laid out in Marx's work. It acknowledges that the exploration of value and exploitation is rooted in Marx's foundational theories but is further evolved to address the exigencies of our contemporary context. The chapter's journey into post-Marxism is deeply rooted in Marx's *Grundrisse* and its groundbreaking contemplations on the impact of machines. It's within this seminal work that Marx ventured into the realm of machines and their transformative potential in altering the fabric of labor and production. The insights gleaned from the *Grundrisse* lay the foundation for this post-Marxist discourse, serving as a springboard to delve deeper into the evolving nature of work, value, and exploitation. By harnessing the *Grundrisse's* ideas on machines as a starting point, the chapter navigates the complexities of contemporary society – a society where the trajectory of technological advancement and its implications for labor have surpassed the industrial framework within which Marx operated. This post-Marxist exploration acknowledges its roots in Marx's foundational work while transcending the confines of an industrial paradigm, recognizing that the contemporary context demands an adaptive and expansive lens through which to analyze value, exploitation, and the changing nature of work. Therefore, this post-Marxist endeavor isn't a departure from Marx's theories but a natural evolution – a progression that emerges from the foundational ideas within Marx's work, specifically springing from the profound insights within the *Grundrisse* regarding the transformative potential of machines and their impact on labor and production. It's an adaptation that honors the continuity of

analyzing value and exploitation while embracing the imperative to contextualize and evolve theories to aptly reflect the realities of our contemporary, technologically-driven society. I will report here the full section of *Grundrisse* that serves as the basis for this post-Marxist left (and, to an even more specific extent, for the *accelerationist* thought – in all its forms):

> The increase of the productive force of labour and the greatest possible negation of necessary labour is the necessary tendency of capital, as we have seen. The transformation of the means of labour into machinery is the realization of this tendency. In machinery, objectified labour materially confronts living labour as a ruling power and as an active subsumption of the latter under itself, not only by appropriating it, but in the real production process itself; the relation of capital as value which appropriates value-creating activity is, in fixed capital existing as machinery, posited at the same time as the relation of the use value of capital to the use value of labour capacity; further, the value objectified in machinery appears as a presupposition against which the value-creating power of the individual labour capacity is an infinitesimal, vanishing magnitude; the production in enormous mass quantities which is posited with machinery destroys every connection of the product with the direct need of the producer, and hence with direct use value; it is already posited in the form of the product's production and in the relations in which it is produced that it is produced only as a conveyor of value, and its use value only as condition to that end. In machinery, objectified labour itself appears not only in the form of product or of the product employed as means of labour, but in the form of the force of production itself. The development of the means of labour into machinery is not an accidental moment of capital, but is rather the historical reshaping of the traditional, inherited means of labour into a form adequate to capital. The accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain, is thus absorbed into capital, as opposed to labour, and hence appears as an attribute of capital, and more specifically of fixed capital, in so far as it enters into the production process as a means of production proper. Machinery appears, then, as the most adequate form of fixed

capital, and fixed capital, in so far as capital's relations with itself are concerned, appears as the most adequate form of capital as such [107]

And also

To the degree that labour time – the mere quantity of labour – is posited by capital as the sole determinant element, to that degree does direct labour and its quantity disappear as the determinant principle of production – of the creation of use values – and is reduced both quantitatively, to a smaller proportion, and qualitatively, as an, of course, indispensable but subordinate moment, compared to general scientific labour, technological application of natural sciences, on one side, and to the general productive force arising from social combination [*Gliederung*] in total production on the other side -- a combination which appears as a natural fruit of social labour (although it is a historic product). Capital thus works towards its own dissolution as the form dominating production [108]

Then again

Capital employs machinery, rather, only to the extent that it enables the worker to work a larger part of his time for capital, to relate to a larger part of his time as time which does not belong to him, to work longer for another. Through this process, the amount of labour necessary for the production of a given object is indeed reduced to a minimum, but only in order to realize a maximum of labour in the maximum number of such objects. The first aspect is important, because capital here – quite unintentionally – reduces human labour, expenditure of energy, to a minimum. This will redound to the benefit of emancipated labour, and is the condition of its emancipation [109]

Finally

[107] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1973).
[108] Marx.
[109] Marx.

Real wealth manifests itself, rather – and large industry reveals this – in the monstrous disproportion between the labour time applied, and its product, as well as in the qualitative imbalance between labour, reduced to a pure abstraction, and the power of the production process it superintends. Labour no longer appears so much to be included within the production process; rather, the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator to the production process itself [...] The theft of alien labour time, on which the present wealth is based, appears a miserable foundation in face of this new one, created by large-scale industry itself. As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. The surplus labour of the mass has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth, just as the non-labour of the few, for the development of the general powers of the human head. With that, production based on exchange value breaks down, and the direct, material production process is stripped of the form of penury and antithesis. The free development of individualities, and hence not the reduction of necessary labour time so as to posit surplus labour, but rather the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them. Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth. Hence it diminishes labour time in the necessary form so as to increase it in the superfluous form; hence posits the superfluous in growing measure as a condition – question of life or death – for the necessary. On the one side, then, it calls to life all the powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and of social intercourse, in order to make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labour time employed on it. On the other side, it wants to use labour time as the measuring rod for the giant social forces thereby created, and to confine them within the limits required to maintain the already created value as value. Forces of production and social relations – two different sides of the development of the social individual – appear to capital as mere

> means, and are merely means for it to produce on its limited foundation. [...] the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process [110]

Beyond theoretical realms, this chapter delves into the tangible realities of the *classe disagiata* (in opposition to Veblen's *leisure class*), as articulated by Raffaele Ventura. Embedded within this exploration is a personal dimension — an experiential perspective stemming from the author's affiliation with this class and the intimate witnessing of its unfolding decline. It is imperative to emphasize the biographical essence underpinning this narrative, intertwined with a pursuit of coherence — a recognition of the limitations inherent in narrating experiences from a privileged, European, male standpoint while acknowledging the distinct realities of less fortunate individuals worldwide. A critical facet of this chapter revolves around the redefinition of work and consumption, transcending conventional paradigms. This journey prompts a scrutinizing gaze upon the contemporary academic system in developed countries, inviting a discourse on its limitations and shortcomings within the evolving landscape of societal needs and aspirations. Moreover, the narrative trajectory of this chapter is enriched by the voices and perspectives of post-Marxist scholars and sociologists. These eclectic thinkers, stemming from the realm of leftist thought that evolved from the critique of Marx's *Grundrisse*, converge on a conjecture. Their discourse revolves around the notion that the ascendancy of machines in material production will not emancipate individuals from labor but instead engender a transformation wherein individuals are incessantly engaged in work even during moments of supposed leisure. This nuanced understanding posits work in post-capitalist societies as fundamentally reproductive rather than productive. Within this intellectual tapestry, the voices of Berardi, Baudrillard, Mark Fisher, Bourdieu, Boltanski, Han, Comité Invisible, Wu Ming, and the clandestine publications of Tiqqun resonate. Their diverse perspectives

---

[110] Marx.

coalesce into a discourse that transcends traditional boundaries, offering profound insights into the dynamics of power, time, and the reconfigured landscape of labor in contemporary society. The true essence of this interconnectedness between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 lies in their collective role as precursors to the forthcoming Chapter 3. The seeds sown in the initial chapters germinate into a comprehensive understanding of psychopolitical forms of power. The journey from digitization's impact on subjectivity to the reconfiguration of labor and power dynamics forms an integral continuum — a pathway crucial for comprehending the nuanced exploration of psychopolitical realms in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 stands as the culmination, synthesizing the insights gleaned from Chapters 1 and 2, and delving deeper into the web of psychopolitical forms of power. Without the foundational knowledge laid out in the preceding chapters, the reader would traverse an incomplete intellectual terrain, lacking the essential framework required to grasp the complexities inherent in the discourse on psychopolitical power dynamics. Therefore, the deliberate focus on specific topics within Chapters 1 and 2 isn't merely an isolated pursuit but a strategic endeavor – a roadmap meticulously designed to guide the reader toward a comprehensive understanding of the evolving psychopolitical milieu. It's through this interplay between chapters that the thesis's true essence manifests – an invitation for the reader to journey through a continuum of ideas, each chapter serving as a stepping stone towards a comprehension of psychopolitical forms of power in our contemporary society.

2.2 – VALUE AND WORK IN THE POST-CAPITALIST AGE

"The problem is not the end of work, but endless work" [111]

"The concept of work is closely allied to that of specialization, of special functions and non-involvement; before specialization there was no work. Man in the future will not work – automation will work for him – but he may be totally involved as a painter is, or as a thinker is, or as a poet is. Man works when he is partially involved. When he is totally involved, he is at play or at leisure. Man in the electronic age has no possible environment except the globe and no possible occupation except information-gathering" [112]

This section acts as a gateway, inviting readers into the landscape of the *classe disagiata*. It serves as a foundation, crafted to guide readers through a series of interconnected concepts, each laying the groundwork for a comprehension of this significant class within the evolving societal fabric. Initially, the narrative unfurls against the backdrop of historical work contexts, painting a vivid picture of work structures in the industrial era. It ventures into the essence of work during this period, a time when labor was not solely a means of economic sustenance but a defining element of societal identity. This historical excursion is pivotal, providing the essential bedrock upon which subsequent explorations rest. Amidst this historical canvas, the concept of the end of work emerges, challenging established notions and signaling a transformative shift. Beyond a mere cessation of labor, this concept embodies a profound redefinition of work, its essence, and its role within post-industrial societies. It's within this exploration that the interplay between technological advancements, societal dynamics, and the evolving nature of labor becomes indiscernible. This transition leads into an examination of post-industrial societies — a landscape marked by global

---

[111] Andrea Fumagalli, *Bioeconomia e Capitalismo Cognitivo : Verso Un Nuovo Paradigma Di Accumulazione*, 2. rist. (Roma: Carocci, 2007).
[112] McLuhan, "The Agenbite of Outwit."

significance and transformative potentials. Here, the contours of labor undergo a metamorphosis, transcending conventional paradigms and blurring the delineations between work and other facets of life. This societal evolution sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the *classe disagiata*. It's poised at the intersection of these shifting paradigms, representing a stratum deeply affected by the transforming landscape of labor, value, and societal dynamics.

The narrative unfolds in four main components:

Definition of Work and Industrial Society: this segment establishes a foundational understanding of work within the context of industrial society. It highlights the historical connotations and societal structures that characterized this era.

The Meaning of the End of Work: within this segment, the aim is not to dwell on the specifics of industrial society but rather to extract fundamental insights that remain unaltered in the shift to post-capitalism. The focus here isn't confined to a meticulous dissection of industrial society's intricacies. Instead, it navigates through the annals of capitalism, pinpointing the elemental ideologies that continue to resonate amidst societal transitions. In this pursuit, selected authors serve as beacons, illuminating the core tenets that underpin the capitalist framework. Through their insights, we discern not just the historical connotations of industrial societies but rather the foundational principles that remain ingrained within societal systems, echoing their influence even as the landscape transitions towards post-capitalism. By delving into these foundational elements, this segment aims to offer a deeper understanding of the enduring ideologies that transcend historical epochs.

Post-Industrial Societies and Their Global Significance: within the exploration of post-industrial societies, the focal point isn't solely on the expansion of capitalism's effects at the periphery but rather on the consequential shifts caused by the middle class-ification of the periphery.

This perspective underscores the transformative repercussions that reverberate back to the core, impacting the very fabric of the center. This unravels a narrative where the periphery's evolution into a middle-class ideology triggers a ripple effect. As the periphery undergoes a transformation mirroring middle-class structures, it engenders a unique scenario — the erasure of the traditional *outside* that capitalism exploits. This shift, where the boundaries between the periphery and the core blur ideologically initiates a crisis within the center. When everyone becomes middle class, the traditional dynamics of exploitation falter. This disruption challenges the established norms, causing social and civil breakthroughs within the core of the empire. Consequently, the western middle class, historically positioned at the center of societal structures, finds itself confronting an unprecedented crisis. This phenomenon interweaves the narratives of the periphery and the core, illustrating how the evolution of the former catalyzes profound upheavals within the latter. Moreover, this perspective transcends the conventional view of post-industrial societies merely as an extension of capitalist expansion. This narrative framework provides a lens through which to comprehend the transformative impact of the middle class-ification of the periphery on the core, depicting how societal shifts, propelled by this evolution, challenge the established order and redefine the contours of the center within the broader landscape of post-industrial societies.

Towards the *classe disagiata*: this segment serves as a preparatory canvas, delineating the significance of the *classe disagiata* within the evolving landscape of labor, value, and societal dynamics. It acts as a precursor, paving the way for a deeper exploration that focuses on the ideological device of the exploitation of the self, particularly emphasizing Han and Ventura's insights. The approach towards the *classe disagiata* isn't merely a classification within societal strata; it's a nuanced perspective that probes into the complexities of this class's existence within the contemporary socioeconomic fabric. By leveraging the insights of Han and Ventura, the exploration converges on the ideological device of the exploitation of the

self. Han's insights delve into the subtle intricacies where personal autonomy paradoxically becomes a form of exploitation, a theme that echoes Foucault's ideas on neoliberalism, signaling an evolution of thought. Ventura's perspectives further enrich this exploration, providing a prism through which to contemplate the biographical essence and coherence of the *classe disagiata.* His conceptual framework adds depth, shedding light on the intricacies of this class's existence, illuminating its significance within the evolving societal dynamics. Moreover, this preparatory groundwork positions the reader for an engagement with the subsequent section, which scrutinizes the evolution of Foucault's ideas on neoliberalism and their convergence with Han and Ventura's discourse on the exploitation of the self. This intersection offers a lens to examine how societal structures exploit individual autonomy under the guise of freedom, signaling a paradigm shift in the understanding of labor, value, and societal dynamics within the context of the *classe disagiata.*

As per Marx's analysis, the crux of generating surplus value within an industrial capitalist system hinges on the ability to purchase a unique commodity — the labor force — available on the market. Once integrated into a specific production system, it unveils an unanticipated surplus, not factored into its market value. This stems from labor power's distinction as living labor, embodying not just quantifiable and individualized attributes (referred to as abstract labor) but also an additional portion of pre-individual and social quality. This uncalculated surplus, concealed during exchange and retained by the buyer, serves as the catalyst for surplus value creation. The process isn't a mere exchange of material values but, through this transaction, entails the acquisition, albeit through alienation, of the seller's subjectivity – a powerful force capable of yielding surplus value. Essentially, it's the alienation of the worker's very essence. What's being traded isn't merely a commodity owned by the laborer; it's the laborer themselves, defined within the specific social context of labor power. With no property access and possessing nothing else, the laborers must sell their sole possession – their labor capacity, a fusion of their social and individual subjectivity. This transaction between capital and labor occurs within a

social structure where actors hold asymmetric social power positions. Here, the contractors lack equivalent discretionary powers; one seeks profit while the other operates out of sheer necessity for survival. The societal narrative surrounding capital, therefore, serves an ideological purpose, aiming to depict labor as a commodity akin to others, intending to mask its intrinsic subjective qualities.

Capitalism's essence lies initially in commodification and subsequently in the consumption of significance within a space that strives for maximum individualization. This space is devoid of any political project for collective action. In the present radical modernity, this endeavor becomes increasingly conspicuous. Economic power, disengaging from politics, organizes itself as a cybernetic network, exposing its nodes directly to the dynamics of the global economy. As Chicchi suggests, there are psychonalytical reasons behind the acceptance of consumption as a fulfilling practice for the individual:

> the process of commodifying labor (and consequently, the subject) as an inherent movement of capitalism was reiterated in a notable conference held in Milan in 1972, and similarly emphasized by Jacques Lacan through the concept of the "capitalist discourse." Essentially, the French psychoanalyst saw in it the assertion of the commodity's power over the subject. This power is established under the illusion that the subject can achieve fulfillment through the repetition of consumptive practice, "in the illusion that in this infinite consumption, the 'lack of being' constituting existence can be magically resolved." Therefore, capitalism roots itself first in the commodification of labor and subsequently in the consumption of meaning within a space striving to become as smooth and individualized as possible—deprived of the political project of action and the social density that lays the groundwork for its possible establishment [113]

---

[113] Federico Chicchi, *Soggettività smarrita : sulle retoriche del capitalismo contemporaneo* (London: B. Mondadori, 2012). [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

The diminishing significance of the political realm signals the fading presence of the individual within economic globalization, shifting focus from production (the project) to consumption (passivity). Hence, it seems deliberate that the economic and political philosophy of capital thrives on an anthropological viewpoint, interpreting human action solely through the lens of strategic maximization of private interests (homo oeconomicus). This portrayal envisions society as an interconnected array of isolated units without cohesive social integration. By portraying labor as a commodity and negating its complexity and inherent political dimension, an attempted division emerges between poiesis (work and production) and praxis (action, cooperation, and communication) intrinsic to labor. This division results in a fragmented, divided, and estranged subject. This comprehensive exploration delves into the dynamics of labor, capital, and subjective elements within the framework of capitalism, illuminating the complexities and tensions inherent in this socio-economic system. Within a monetary economy of production, particularly in the realm of capitalism, the focal point of economic endeavors revolves around private accumulation. This concept of accumulation denotes the pursuit of profit, which manifests in two distinct manners: either through monetary gain or through the acquisition of new means of production. Throughout the evolution of capitalist production over the last two centuries, the mechanisms of accumulation have undergone significant structural transformations. Yet, these changes haven't diminished the fundamental hierarchical and subordinate nature inherent in the relationship between capital and labor. To quote Fumagalli:

> The transformations within the accumulation process over time
> have not only impacted the organizational structures of production
> and labor deployment methods or the structure of capital but have
> also affected the very forms of ownership, authority, and control.
> These latter modifications have proven necessary to uphold, albeit
> in diverse iterations, the enduring prerogatives of capitalist
> dominion over both labor and individuals within the system. These
> alterations were deemed essential to sustain, albeit in modified

forms, the essential features of capitalist control over labor and the
human elements involved [114]

The conventional notion of ownership has historically centered on the control of land and physical possessions such as buildings, tools, raw materials, and consumer goods. This form of ownership is inherently individualistic, entailing the right to exclude others from utilizing or benefiting from a particular asset. In this context, societal divisions regarding wealth distribution and class structures are established based on one's initial ownership endowment, essentially the material resources they possess. As long as the resources forming the initial endowments that drive economic transactions are physically finite and quantifiable, economic exchange essentially involves the transfer of property rights.

However, with the advent of modernity and the ascension of capitalism, the primary engine propelling accumulation transitions from land to capital. This capital engages directly with labor activity, initially manifested through artisanal work, later standardized into wage labor, and increasingly evolving into cognitive labor. This pivotal shift positions labor exchanges at the heart of defining individual ownership and delineating the scope of its exercise. As long as labor activity remains quantifiable in terms of time units and its resulting output measurable in physical commodities, the definition of individual ownership retains some level of clarity, primarily attributed to the concept of exclusive possession. On this perspective: "Productive' manual workers, more than anybody else, thrive on the illusion of production just as they experience their leisure under the illusion of freedom" [115]. As Negri suggests: "Marx analyzes capital's constant need for expansion first by focusing on the process of realization and thus on the unequal quantitative relationship between the worker as producer and the worker as consumer of commodities" [116]. This inherent discrepancy acts as a driving force propelling capital beyond its customary confines, propelling

---

[114] Fumagalli, *Bioeconomia e Capitalismo Cognitivo: Verso Un Nuovo Paradigma Di Accumulazione*. [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.
[115] Jean Baudrillard and Iain Hamilton Grant, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (SAGE Publications, 2017).
[116] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

it relentlessly toward the extensive domain of the global market. To unravel the tapestry of economic complexities woven within this paradigm, it becomes imperative to embark upon an in-depth investigation of exploitation. Within Marx's seminal analysis, this foundational understanding elucidates how capital systematically compels laborers not only to engage in necessary labor but to surpass it, delving into the realm of surplus labor. This mechanism not only serves as the conduit through which capital asserts itself but also facilitates the generation of surplus value. At the crux of this relationship is the worker's wage, intrinsically linked to the concept of necessary labor. It remains a critical determinant, persistently held below the total value produced by the worker. However, the realization of this surplus value hinges significantly on its ability to locate a suitable market for its tangible manifestation. The full actualization of surplus value heavily relies on the subtleties and dynamics of the market, transforming latent potential into tangible economic worth. In the realm of unequal exchange, the rise of the middle class comes into focus, particularly through the emergence of the bourgeoisie. This societal segment finds its footing amidst historical conditions marked by the dominance of capital and political control stemming from the center towards the empire. Within this context, the bourgeoisie bestows a certain reverence upon labor. This reverence isn't merely a nod to the act of working but holds deeper significance as it serves as the linchpin for their societal positioning and personal advancement. For the bourgeoisie, labor assumes a sacred status because it fulfills a trifecta of essential roles. Firstly, it acts as the bedrock upon which their societal status is built and maintained. Secondly, labor becomes the avenue through which they accumulate and enhance their material wealth, laying the foundation for their economic standing. Lastly, labor is employed as a means to legitimize and justify their patterns of consumption and lifestyle. Hence, the bourgeoisie doesn't just represent a social stratum but rather embodies an ideology deeply entrenched in societal values. This ideology, revolving around the veneration of labor and its multifaceted importance, precedes and fundamentally shapes the structural positioning observed within the middle class. It's this ideology,

entrenched in the sanctity of labor, that forms the bedrock upon which the societal stratification and identity of the middle class are constructed and perpetuated. As Debord acutely observes:

> The bourgeoisie is associated with a labor time that has finally been freed from cyclical time. With the bourgeoisie, work becomes work that transforms historical conditions. The bourgeoisie is the first ruling class for which work is a value [117]

Living in a society which is fundamentally bourgeois means that:

> economic growth has liberated societies from the natural pressures that forced them into an immediate struggle for survival; but they have not yet been liberated from their liberator. The commodity's independence has spread to the entire economy it now dominates. This economy has transformed the world, but it has merely transformed it into a world dominated by the economy. The pseudonature within which human labor has become alienated demands that such labor remain forever in its service; and since this demand is formulated by and answerable only to itself, it in fact ends up channeling all socially permitted projects and endeavors into its own reinforcement. The abundance of commodities – that is, the abundance of commodity relations – amounts to nothing more than an augmented survival [118]

The transition from the traditional model of industrial capitalism to the emerging landscape of cognitive capitalism brings forth a nuanced understanding of individual ownership in relation to the utilization of labor's productive capabilities. This evolution isn't a straightforward process but rather a complex reconfiguration influenced by multifaceted elements. This shift signifies a departure from the conventional norms of ownership tied to the industrial era's tangible assets. Instead, it navigates towards a paradigm where the boundaries of ownership blur within the

---

[117] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014).
[118] Debord.

realm of intangible assets, notably knowledge and its pivotal role in economic production. As Fumagalli argues:

> Initially, knowledge embodies a communal resource rather than an individual asset. Its validity and worth are intricately tied to a socially shared circuit that both authenticates and disseminates its content. This network, essential for the validation, propagation, and revitalization of knowledge, cannot be exclusively appropriated by a solitary "owner […] Secondly, knowledge also constitutes a personal asset, intertwined with unalienable capacities residing within the mind and body of the worker. This intrinsic connection underscores the intimate fusion between personal capabilities and the essence of knowledge within the individual, forming an inseparable bond between the worker's faculties and the realm of knowledge [119]

As our theoretical and historical analysis continues, we are now at the verge of what we might call post-industrial society. In more advanced capitalist societies, the traditional role of the salaried worker is losing its significance in the larger system of wealth accumulation. Instead, newer forms of labor have emerged that don't conform to the typical exploitation dynamic between capital and labor. These emerging labor types find themselves integrated into various productive structures such as industrial districts or network-based production systems. Here, albeit with some difficulty, there's an organic development of cooperation between key productive elements, notably labor and capital. This organic collaboration is reshaping the conventional Marxist viewpoint that emphasizes conflict between these elements. Furthermore, once again with Fumagalli:

> in tertiary productions, what labor is increasingly demanded to provide isn't subordination to machinery, as in old industrial capitalism, but rather active involvement that makes it more and more akin to capital. This even reaches extreme cases where labor

---

[119] Fumagalli, *Bioeconomia e Capitalismo Cognitivo : Verso Un Nuovo Paradigma Di Accumulazione*. [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

> capacity itself turns into capital (human capital), effectively blurring
> the capitalist dichotomy between labor and capital [120]

The exploitation of labour for capitalist accumulation is thus reproduced under different form. As Negri argues: "primitive accumulation is not a process that happens once and then is done with; rather, capitalist relations of production and social classes have to be reproduced continually" [121]. There's been a notable shift in the paradigm of primitive accumulation, particularly in terms of the method and nature of accumulation. Firstly, the distinction between the internal and external elements, a hallmark of the two traditional models, has gradually diminished over time. However, the most significant change lies in the evolving nature of both accumulated labor and wealth. In the era of postmodernity, the accumulated social wealth is undergoing a transformation – shifting towards an increasingly immaterial form. This wealth now encompasses social ties, communication infrastructures, information, and emotional networks. The wealth isn't merely material anymore but is deeply intertwined with intangible and interconnected aspects of society. This is a radical change because it places information, rather than labor, at the basis of capitalist production. Negri again:

> as the new informational economy emerges, a certain accumulation
> of information is necessary before capitalist production can take
> place. Information carries through its networks both the wealth and
> the command of production, disrupting previous conceptions of
> inside and outside, but also reducing the temporal progression that
> had previously defined primitive accumulation. In other words,
> informational accumulation (like the primitive accumulation Marx
> analyzed) destroys or at least destructures the previously existing
> productive processes, but (differently than Marx's primitive
> accumulation) it immediately integrates those productive processes
> in its own networks and generates across the different realms of
> production the highest levels of productivity. The temporal sequence

---

[120] Fumagalli. [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.
[121] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*.

of development is thus reduced to immediacy as the entire society tends to be integrated in some way into the networks of informational production. Information networks tend toward something like a simultaneity of social production. The revolution of informational accumulation therefore requires an enormous leap forward in the greater socialization of production. This increased socialization, along with the reduction of social space and temporality, is a process that no doubt benefits capital with increased productivity, but is one also that points beyond the era of capital toward a new social mode of production [122]

Advancements in technology across industries promise an era of unprecedented abundance, allowing for the creation of greater wealth with reduced labor inputs. However, within the confines of our current economic structure, this progress is poised to exert significant influence on the distribution of income and wealth. Consider a scenario where a machine can perform the work of a person in one hour, but at a cost of just one dollar. In such a scenario, a profit-driven employer, aiming to maximize gains, may offer a wage close to that minimal cost. This situation presents a stark choice for the worker: either accept a substantially reduced wage or seek alternative avenues of livelihood. Conversely, the emergence of novel ways to leverage insights, talents, or skills using digital technologies can lead to exponential earning potential. For instance, connecting with a million new customers through digital platforms could yield earnings many magnitudes higher than traditional means. This juxtaposition between technological progress offering abundant possibilities and the consequential unequal distribution of opportunities isn't coincidental. Both empirical evidence and theoretical insights underscore this intersection of bounty and disparity. The evolution of technology, while ushering in unprecedented prosperity, simultaneously alters the landscape of income distribution and wealth creation. It reshapes the dynamics of labor valuation within a free-market system, presenting unique challenges and opportunities that profoundly influence how individuals earn a living and how wealth is distributed across

---

[122] Hardt and Negri.

society. "Advances in technology, especially digital technologies, are driving an unprecedented reallocation of wealth and income. Digital technologies can replicate valuable ideas, insights, and innovations at very low cost. This creates bounty for society and wealth for innovators but diminishes the demand for previously important types of labor, which can leave many people with reduced incomes" [123]. The juxtaposition of abundance alongside inequality poses a challenge to two prevalent yet conflicting perspectives. One viewpoint asserts that technological progress invariably elevates incomes, while the other suggests that automation, replacing human labor with machines, detrimentally affects workers' wages. While both hold elements of truth, the actual scenario is far more intricate. Swift advancements in digital tools undeniably generate unparalleled wealth. However, there exists no inherent economic mandate ensuring that every worker, or even a substantial majority, will reap the rewards of these advancements.

The rapid evolution of our digital arsenal promises tremendous prosperity, but it doesn't guarantee universal benefits. It's a nuanced reality where technological strides can significantly boost wealth creation while simultaneously reshaping labor dynamics, posing uncertainties regarding the equitable distribution of its benefits. These advancements reshape economic landscapes, yet their impact on individual workers' income remains varied, making it imperative to navigate this complex interplay between technological progression and its diverse socioeconomic implications. "For almost two hundred years, wages did increase alongside productivity. This created a sense of inevitability that technology helped (almost) everyone" [124]. We are slowly seeing before our very eyes how this inevitability was just a myth. For the scope of the thesis, we have a very important task: "Reading these diverse practices in the light of the social relations that characterize the world of labor, from a Marxist perspective, allowing for the discovery of labor where its existence is not suspected,

---

[123] Brynjolfsson and McAfee, *The Second Machine Age : Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*.
[124] Brynjolfsson and McAfee.

unveiling deceitful forms of exploitation, more or less evident" [125]. First of all, because as technological development continues to advance, it presents us with an array of opportunities that were once beyond imagination. However, despite these remarkable technological advancements, the anticipated simplification of our lives might not be as straightforward. There's an underlying expectation from society that, in the face of automation handling numerous tasks, we ought to expand our capabilities to manage an increased workload. This expanded workload includes not only our professional responsibilities but also extends to the maintenance and management of our digital presence – actively engaging on various social networks, managing emails, and tending to other digital aspects of our lives. Thus, while technology simplifies certain tasks, it concurrently places a demand on individuals to handle and manage an expanded range of digital engagements and responsibilities (at the same time) [126]. "In the postmodernization of the global economy, the creation of wealth tends ever more toward what we will call biopolitical production, the production of social life itself, in which the economic, the political, and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest one another"[127].

Following on Negri's insights, with the advent of new biopolitical control mechanisms over production, an intriguing paradox emerges: despite the significant automation witnessed across industries, there's a simultaneous increase and devaluation of work time. This phenomenon warrants a deeper exploration into the intricacies of contemporary labor dynamics. The modern landscape of biopolitical control within production systems introduces an array of techniques and systems designed to oversee and regulate human life in relation to economic activities. In this context, automation emerges as a double-edged sword. On one hand, the integration of advanced technologies streamlines various tasks, ostensibly reducing the need for human labor in certain processes. However, this doesn't equate to a proportional reduction in the time or effort demanded of the workforce.

---

[125] Ippolita, *Tecnologie del dominio : lessico minimo di autodifesa digitale.*
[126] Taking from Gaggi, *Homo Premium : Come La Tecnologia Ci Divide.*
[127] Hardt and Negri, *Empire.*

Interestingly, the proliferation of automation doesn't necessarily translate into a decrease in work time. Instead, it's accompanied by a curious devaluation of the time devoted to labor. The conventional understanding might suggest that automation should liberate individuals from excessive working hours, but in reality, it seems to have an inverse effect. The expectations from the workforce often escalate, demanding higher output or multitasking abilities, even in environments heavily reliant on automation. Furthermore, the very nature of automation, while alleviating some manual tasks, often introduces new complexities and demands, requiring continuous human intervention for maintenance, supervision, and adaptation to evolving technologies. This dynamic perpetuates an extended and devalued work time, despite the prevalent automation. Therefore, while automation promises efficiency and reduced human labor, its integration within biopolitically controlled production frameworks paradoxically results in an amplified and depreciated temporal investment from the workforce. To quote Negri:

> the regulation of the working day, which was the real keystone to socialist politics throughout the past two centuries, has been completely overturned [...] Empire has work for everyone! The more unregulated the regime of exploitation, the more work there is. This is the basis on which the new segmentations of work are created. They are determined (in the language of the economists) by the different levels of productivity, but we could summarize the change simply by saying that there is more work and lower wages. There are still places in the world where poverty allows for the reproduction of labor power at a lower cost, and there are still places in the metropolises where differences of consumption force a lower class to sell itself for less, or really to submit itself to a more brutal regime of capitalist exploitation [128]

The conditions described here play a pivotal role in birthing and perpetuating the so called *classe disagiata* that we will be exploring in depth in the next sections. The shift towards information-driven production and

---

[128] Hardt and Negri.

the rise of immaterial production have "tended to free capital from the constraints of territory and bargaining" [129]. Sometimes, the mere potential to relocate becomes a powerful leverage in negotiations. As a consequence, entire working populations, previously enjoying a degree of stability and bargaining power, now face increasingly precarious employment conditions. The evolving landscape of employment, notably the destabilization affecting the middle class in advanced economies due to shifting work dynamics, will be the focal point of my examination. I'll delve into the ramifications faced by this demographic, marked by declining stability and job security in the face of these transformations. With the erosion of labor's negotiating strength, the network-based production model accommodates various historical forms of non-guaranteed labor arrangements, encompassing freelance work, remote work, part-time roles, and piecework. This is exactly what constitutes the most common scenario for many within the *classe disagiata*. Once again, we are somehow back to McLuhan's – this time with his seminal article *The agenbite of outwit*, where he foresaw the culmination of work and production, envisioning their eventual disappearance into something completely new: "Simply by talking to one another, we create wealth. Any child watching a TV show should be paid because he or she is creating wealth for the community. But this wealth is not money" [130]. As Brynjolfsson clearly explains on his book, automation generates a huge *bounty*. Within this enormous *bounty*, "the problem of discovering occupations or employment may prove as difficult as wealth is easy" [131]. In the evolving landscape where work infiltrates and defines every moment and facet of existence, becoming omnipresent and accessible to all, it assumes a novel role – it becomes a commodified entity unto itself. This paradigm shift, the essence of Baudrillard's inquiry into the end of work, encapsulates a pivotal moment in societal evolution. This transition signifies a departure from the traditional understanding of work as a mere means to an end; instead, it morphs into a ubiquitous and perpetual

---

[129] Hardt and Negri.
[130] McLuhan, "The Agenbite of Outwit."
[131] McLuhan.

presence, blurring the boundaries between labor and leisure, productivity, and idleness. This transformation sparks an exploration into the very essence and purpose of work, as it transcends its conventional definitions to become an entity existing independently within the fabric of contemporary existence.

> The system, having reached this high point of 'objective' futility, produces and reproduces labour itself [...] Labour, like social security, has come to be just another consumer good to be distributed throughout society. The enormous paradox is that the less labour becomes a productive force, the more it becomes a product [132]

In this transformational era, labor undergoes a fundamental evolution, shedding its traditional material essence and assuming a new role as a product. This pivotal shift, reminiscent of Debord's musings on the bourgeois ethos, signifies a departure from established economic norms. The completion of political economy marks our entry into a new phase, where the creation of surplus value extends beyond the confines of conventional workplace productivity. Instead, this value is generated socially. In this altered landscape, the boundaries between productive and unproductive consumption, as well as between leisure and labor, blur into obscurity. What emerges is a convergence of activities into a unified realm of reproductive consumption and engagement. This collective involvement in societal processes underscores a fundamental truth: that all forms of engagement, irrespective of their prior classifications, contribute to the communal creation of surplus value. This indifference to traditional delineations characterizes an age where each individual's actions actively contribute to the collective productivity of society.

> Leisure is as productive as labour, factory labour as 'unproductive' as leisure or the service industries, it is irrelevant what formula we use. This indifference precisely marks the phase of the completion

---

[132] Baudrillard and Grant, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*.

of political economy. Everyone is reproductive [...] The system
currently reproduces capital according to its most rigorous
definition, as the form of social relations, rather than in its vulgar
sense as money, profits and the economic system [133]

Thus, as Ippolita argues "the main weak point concerns the definition of work" [134]. To effectively highlight and condemn various exploitative practices within the realm of the economy, it's crucial to simplify the definition of work to its most fundamental essence across these diverse activities. This essence is "the production of value" [135]. This new era isn't confined within the typical boundaries of economic productivity; instead, it extends across the vast landscape of social interactions and engagements. At its core, this transformation blurs the lines between conventional definitions of work and leisure. It's no longer a matter of distinct periods allocated to work or leisure; rather, work has permeated every aspect of our existence. The essence of this change lies in the omnipresence of work – it's not confined to a specific time or space but has become a continuous, integral component of our societal fabric. This shift fundamentally alters how we perceive value generation, underscoring the social essence of labor.

As labor moves outside the factory walls, it is increasingly difficult
to maintain the fiction of any measure of the working day and thus
separate the time of production from the time of reproduction or the
work time from leisure time [136]

The discussion on the pervasive nature of work in our lives, extending beyond conventional boundaries, serves as a gateway into a prominent undercurrent of this thesis: the exploration of time in the post-capitalist era. This facet, while extensively scrutinized in economic and philosophical spheres, stands as a relatively uncharted territory within sociological and psycho-pathological academic realms. It's a terrain marked by its novelty

[133] Baudrillard and Grant.
[134] Ippolita, *Tecnologie del dominio : lessico minimo di autodifesa digitale.* [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.
[135] Ippolita. [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.
[136] Hardt and Negri, *Empire.*

and significance, encapsulating an evolving understanding of time no longer limited to philosophical musings but tangibly linked to the physical realm. This investigation peers into the dynamics of how time, once a distinct and separate entity, has transformed into an integrated, inseparable part of our existence, chiefly through the uninterrupted flow of work and human capital that transcends temporal boundaries. This focal theme seeks to unravel the complexities behind the restructuring of time within the evolving socio-economic framework, offering a perspective that challenges conventional perceptions and embraces a social and individual understanding of temporality in the contemporary era – at the same time. In this unfolding narrative of societal change, the concept of time in the post-capitalist era becomes a focal point, resonating particularly with the experiences of those entrenched within this new societal fabric — the so-called *classe disagiata*. Their collective experience encapsulates the shifting temporal boundaries brought about by the ubiquitous presence of work. What becomes increasingly apparent in navigating this landscape is the intrinsic link between the emergence of this disadvantaged class and the broader global transition into a realm of capitalist dominion. The crux of the *classe disagiata* phenomenon relies on the canvas of a universal capitalist world, where temporal boundaries blur due to the omnipresence of work. This socio-economic shift blurs the traditional demarcations between labor and leisure, underscoring a world where work pervades every moment. The emergence and predicament of this class are inexorably tied to this broader global context shifting toward a universally capitalist structure. Their disenfranchisement and precarious existence find roots in the overarching transition where external realms for exploitation have been largely erased. "The countries of old industrialization have shifted from Fordist industrial capitalism to cognitive capitalism, while the countries of the global South, where capitalism was still in a pre-Taylorist state, have approached the Tayloristic paradigm of production" [137]. This marks a departure from traditional paradigms that previously categorized worlds into exploitative

---

[137] Fumagalli, *Bioeconomia e Capitalismo Cognitivo : Verso Un Nuovo Paradigma Di Accumulazione*. [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

dichotomies, rendering these classifications defunct in the face of a homogenized, universal capitalist sphere. This transition also serves as a crucial link between the discourse on third world-ism and the emergence of this new socio-economic paradigm. It underlines the far-reaching implications of this societal transformation, highlighting the dissolution of previously distinct spheres and the elimination of once-defined peripheries suitable for exploitation. Consequently, the notion of a middle class extends beyond conventional boundaries, reflecting a universal convergence and an erasure of previously delineated spaces ripe for exploitation.

The global landscape has undergone a process of "de-ruralization" [138], predominantly fueled by a strategy to curtail remuneration costs via the relocation of production processes. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, there was a stark decline in the percentage of the world's population residing in rural areas. "When there are no more regions for factories to escape to, there will be no way to significantly reduce the levels of remuneration for employed workers on a global scale" [139]. The essence of the *classe disagiata*'s adversity lies in a world where the conventional paradigms of development have been disrupted. The diminishing availability of external regions for factory relocation serves as a linchpin in this scenario. It's a pivotal reason why this disadvantaged class finds itself in a perpetual state of disadvantage — it's a direct consequence of the eradication of exploitable territories. The traditional dichotomy of a developed north and an underdeveloped south no longer neatly characterizes our global landscape. Tertiary work, once confined to specific geographies, has proliferated across the world, blurring the boundaries that once delineated global economic distinctions. This shift reflects a new reality where the global economy no longer adheres to conventional boundaries but is interconnected in a complex web of economic activities, impacting the socio-economic fabric universally. The emergence of advanced tertiary sectors presents a compelling paradox: the loss

[138] Immanuel M. Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis : An Introduction* (London: Duke University Press, 2007).
[139] Wallerstein. [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

experienced in salaries and unemployment are counterbalanced by gains as consumers[140]. As the nature of work shifts and traditional job roles evolve, there's a simultaneous reconfiguration of our roles as consumers. While workers might encounter a restructuring of labor dynamics – possibly experiencing reductions in job security or traditional employment models – the perspective shifts when viewed from the lens of consumers. The modern landscape emphasizes the dual nature of individuals functioning as both laborers and consumers. The essence of this paradox lies in the relationship between production and consumption in a society driven by tertiary services. As workers, individuals may grapple with precarious employment situations or blurred work-life boundaries. However, as consumers, they encounter an expanded array of products, services, and experiences. This shift challenges the conventional definitions of work and leisure, prompting a critical revaluation of their economic significance. Work no longer encapsulates the traditional confines of labour; it extends to encompass various activities contributing to the production and consumption cycle. The blurring of distinctions between work and leisure demands a rethinking of their inherent value. As individuals spend their time engaged in activities that could be classified as both work-related and leisure-oriented, assessing their economic worth becomes a complex endeavor. This paradoxical situation urges a comprehensive reassessment of the economic, social, and psychological implications associated with contemporary labor and consumption patterns. The burgeoning trend toward fragmented, part-time, and short-term employment, masquerading as "flexibility" [141], unveils a profound transformation in the labor landscape. Income inequality widens, creating disparities in access to essential resources such as education and healthcare. The disintegration of stable employment strains the fabric of social relationships, injecting stress into families and communities. The sense of collective prosperity, once nurtured by dependable jobs, weakens in the face of a more individualistic and

---

[140] "One of the paradoxes of globalization is that the very people who have been hit the hardest in terms of jobs have gained more as consumers." Enrico Moretti, *The New Geography of Jobs* (Boston Mass.: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).
[141] Whose ideology we will be focusing on in the next chapters.

competitive job market. At a psychological level, the toll of this evolving job landscape is palpable. Job insecurity, absence of benefits, and the perpetual need to adapt to ever-shifting work environments contribute to heightened stress and anxiety among workers. Furthermore, the porous boundary between work and leisure exacerbates the risk of burnout, as individuals struggle to disentangle themselves from work-related responsibilities. The mental health of the workforce emerges as a pressing concern, demanding a reconsideration of how we define and foster well-being within the context of modern work dynamics. This transformation is not solely a narrative of adaptation and flexibility but rather a veiled erosion of longstanding worker protections. The dismantling of assurances and guarantees secured through decades of labor negotiations threatens the very foundations upon which the welfare state was built. The employer-employee relationship, once defined by a balance of power achieved through hard-fought compromises, now tilts toward employers, leaving workers vulnerable to the whims of a capricious job market. As Gaggi claims:

> the American economy has been generating almost exclusively new temporary jobs: 94 percent of the employment growth recorded in the decade from 2005 to 2015 is attributed to so-called alternative works (temporary or unstable jobs). Specifically, 60 percent of the 10 million jobs created in these ten years were generated through freelance activities or independent contractors. Technology, in essence, has accelerated a phenomenon that had already emerged in the economy about fifteen years ago, that of the working poor: individuals who, despite having a fixed position, find themselves in conditions of poverty because their earnings are insufficient to cover food, housing, health insurance, and their children's education [142]

At the crux of my exploration Byung Chul Han and Raffaele Alberto Ventura serve as references, converging on a critical analysis of the deregulation of work and the profound ideological shift embedded in neoliberal discourse. Byung Chul Han elevates the discourse beyond traditional frameworks,

---

[142] Gaggi, *Homo Premium : Come La Tecnologia Ci Divide.* [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

delving into a post-Foucaldian perspective. Han directs attention towards the biopolitical mechanisms of power that underpin the contemporary employment landscape. His scrutiny of the post-Foucaldian paradigm unveils how power operates through subtle, often invisible, mechanisms that regulate not just the external aspects of work but penetrate the very fabric of individual existence. In this post-Foucaldian context, the emphasis on biopolitics underscores the ways in which power influences and governs life itself, intertwining the economic, social, and psychological dimensions of individuals within the framework of alternative and precarious work. From another side, Raffaele Alberto Ventura provides a focused lens on the repercussions of this deregulation through his concept of the *classe disagiata*. Ventura, in consonance with Jean Baudrillard's ideas, navigates the hyperreal landscape of contemporary capitalism. The term *classe disagiata* encapsulates the essence of the working poor, individuals who, despite being part of the workforce, grapple with precarious conditions leading to socio-economic vulnerability. Ventura's work draws attention to the hyperreality of consumption and capital in the contemporary world, where the boundaries between reality and simulation blur. In this hyperreal environment, the pursuit of consumption becomes not just an economic endeavor but a symbolic act, shaping the identity and aspirations of individuals within the web of neoliberal capitalism. These two perspectives, while distinct, harmonize in illuminating the multifaceted consequences of the neoliberal transformation in the job market. Together, they underscore the urgency of comprehending not only the economic dimensions of deregulated work but also its profound sociocultural and psychological implications. Through the lenses of Han and Ventura (and more, of course), the discourse extends beyond traditional analyses, offering a more nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in the contemporary dynamics of labor, consumption, and power. According to Han, in a world ruled by capitalist exchange, "the neoliberal subject has no capacity for relationships with others that might be free of purpose" [143].

---

[143] Han, *Psychopolitics*.

> For Marx, individual freedom represents a ruse – a trick of capital. 'Free competition', which is based on the idea of individual freedom, simply amounts to the 'relation of capital to itself as another capital, i.e., the real conduct of capital as capital'. Capital reproduces by entering into relations with itself as another form of Capital: through free competition. It copulates with the Other of itself by way of individual freedom. Capital grows inasmuch as people engage in free competition. Hereby, individual freedom amounts to servitude inasmuch as Capital lays hold of it and uses it for its own propagation. That is, Capital exploits individual freedom in order to breed: 'It is not the individuals who are set free by free competition; it is, rather, capital which is set free" [144]

In the contemporary era dominated by neoliberal ideals, the profound transformation of individuals into self-exploiting laborers within their personal enterprises unfolds as a multifaceted phenomenon. This paradigmatic shift underscores a nuanced duality wherein individuals seamlessly oscillate between the roles of master and slave within the tapestry of their own pursuits.

> Today, everyone is an auto-exploiting labourer in his or her own enterprise. People are now master and slave in one. Even class struggle has transformed into an inner struggle against oneself [145]

The concept of being an "entrepreneur of oneself" within the neoliberal framework signifies more than a mere economic role; it encapsulates a voluntary and passionate engagement in auto-exploitation. Individuals willingly immerse themselves in the pursuit of self-optimization, driven by a fervor to mold their lives into a form of personal achievement that aligns with neoliberal ideals. This self-as-a-work-of-art becomes a captivating, yet misleading illusion carefully maintained by the neoliberal regime. It acts as a mechanism to tap into the individual's resources exhaustively, as

---

[144] Han.
[145] Han.

achievement-subjects willingly contribute to their own exploitation within the overarching structure of neoliberalism.

> Under neoliberalism, the technology of power takes on a subtle form. It does not lay hold of individuals directly. Instead, it ensures that individuals act on themselves so that power relations are interiorized – and then interpreted as freedom. Self-optimization and submission, freedom and exploitation, fall into one [146]

This interplay of seemingly opposing forces represents a sophisticated engineering of freedom and exploitation, a concept that (according to Han) Michel Foucault did not entirely foresee in his analyses of power dynamics. In a parallel discourse, Raffaele Alberto Ventura emerges as a distinct voice, offering a complementary perspective that centers around the concept of the *classe disagiata*. This notion becomes a focal point for the subsequent chapter, signifying a unique actor in the broader narrative of contemporary socio-economic dynamics. Ventura's exploration of the *classe disagiata* serves as a crucial pivot, navigating through the complexities introduced in the preceding chapters. The term encapsulates a class of individuals grappling with socio-economic hardships, embodying a socioeconomic vulnerability that becomes increasingly relevant in the context of the multifaceted transformations discussed earlier. Crucially, understanding the nuances of the *classe disagiata* necessitates a comprehensive grasp of the dynamics elucidated in prior discussions. The crisis faced by the *classe disagiata* is not merely an isolated event but is linked to the geographical shifts discussed earlier in the chapter. The geographical shifts, encompassing changes in employment landscapes, the rise of alternative work arrangements, and the subtle but profound alterations in power dynamics, create an environment where the vulnerabilities of the *classe disagiata* are accentuated. The globalization of labor markets and the dispersion of economic activities across different regions contribute to the unique challenges faced by this class. The crisis faced by the *classe disagiata*

---

[146] Han.

becomes a manifestation of the larger transformations, both in the way individuals engage with work and in the global reconfiguration of economic power. In conclusion, the exploration of the *classe disagiata* in the upcoming chapter serves as a vital link to the broader discourse, emphasizing that a comprehensive understanding of this vulnerable class can only be achieved by contextualizing it within the interplay of forces delineated throughout the preceding discussions. The geographical shifts, alongside the complexities of self-exploitation and power dynamics, converge to shape the crisis faced by the *classe disagiata,* offering a holistic view of the contemporary socio-economic landscape. As Ventura puts it: "With culture, one certainly eats, especially when one dominates the global economy and can use culture as a title of domination over labor" [147].

---

[147] Raffaele Alberto Ventura, *Teoria Della Classe disagiata* (Roma: Minimum fax, 2017). [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

2.3 – DO WHAT YOU LOVE AND YOU'LL NEVER STOP WORKING [148]

"Capital is the subject in this world; all other actors are figures,
masks, faces, prosopopoeic personifications of the subject. This is
the primacy of Capital already emblazoned in the title Capital, the
place nineteenth-century novels most often reserve for the subject:
Capital is the subject of Capital, as David Copperfield or Jane Eyre
or Daniel Deronda are the subjects of David Copperfield, Jane
Eyre, and Daniel Deronda. The analytic importance of this subject
position, an idea advanced by the trope of personification more
than by exposition, is not only that Capital is the protagonist of
modernity, but that the workings of capitalism are described by
this subjectification and embodiment of an abstraction. Capital is
the story of Capital's becoming-subject, of the relentless self-
constitution, the "valorisation of value" that propels this mode of
production. The artifice of the trope of personification calls
attention to the artifice and instability of this subject, to the
fissures and crises in its course of becoming, in its adventure of
Bildung" [149]

In the landscape of modernity, where the threads of work, income, and
consumption weave together, a distinct class comes to the forefront — the
classe disagiata. This chapter embarks on a nuanced exploration into the
complexities of this vulnerable class, aiming to dissect its relationship with
work, income, and consumption while unraveling the ideological
underpinnings that shape its aspirations and struggles. The *classe disagiata*
stands as a unique entity within the contemporary socio-economic
panorama, shaped by a delicate interplay of forces that define the daily lives

---

[148] M.G. McIntyre, "Do What You Love and You Will Never Stop Working | The Outline," June 2019,
https://theoutline.com/post/6978/doing-what-you-love-is-hard-
work?utm_source=contributor_pages.
[149] Mark Fisher, Darren C Ambrose, and Simon Reynolds, *K-Punk : The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004-2016)*, 2018.

of its members. As we navigate through the intricacies of their existence, we delve into the heart of their economic experiences, questioning how work, the cornerstone of livelihood, is engaged with, and what significance income holds in their day-to-day realities. This exploration extends beyond economic dynamics, touching upon the dance of consumption within the *classe disagiata*. How do members of this class navigate the realm of wants and needs, and what influences shape their consumption patterns in the face of economic challenges? These inquiries offer a glimpse into the choices and constraints that color their economic decisions. Moreover, the ideological undercurrents that shape the aspirations and struggles of the *classe disagiata* come into focus. What narratives, values, and beliefs influence their perceptions of success and fulfillment? By examining these ideological forces, we aim to unravel the complex web within which this class negotiates their identity and aspirations. In essence, this chapter is a journey — a journey into the heart of a class defined by its vulnerabilities. Through a holistic exploration of work, income, consumption, and the ideological forces at play, we endeavor to construct a comprehensive narrative that captures the essence of the *classe disagiata* within the fabric of contemporary society. This chapter also unfolds as a personal journey, delving into the heart of my own experiences and challenges within the *classe disagiata*. The focal point of my analysis isn't solely on the economic aspects of the *classe disagiata*. As a matter of fact, the economics of the classe disagiata are not the main focus of my analysis. On a second degree of investigation (almost a meta-investigation), this is itself a key indicator of *classe disagiata,* per se. I am not talking about primary needs and yet this is an existential issue. As a PhD student, a digital worker, a member of the *aspirational class,* and a white, privileged man, I navigate the complex landscape of the classe disagiata with a myriad of identities. It's crucial to acknowledge the potential incoherence embedded within this exploration. This incoherence, however, serves as a vital lens through which the true essence of the classe disagiata is fully expressed. It underscores that the vulnerabilities extend beyond economic struggles and delve into the intricacies of identity, social positioning, and the pursuit of aspirations. In

essence, this chapter is an intimate journey — a journey into the heart of a class defined by its vulnerabilities, with economic challenges being a key but not exclusive indicator. As we navigate through this terrain, we will draw insights from diverse intellectual landscapes, converging on a post-Marxist lens influenced by Foucault's perspectives on human capital. Additionally, we will engage with the sociology of risk, echoing voices such as Hirsch and Beck. The chapter will be structured as follows:

1. Paradoxes of Modernity:

The journey commences by revisiting the paradoxes inherent in modernity, building upon the discussions in the previous chapter on the evolving nature of work. Drawing on the insights of alternative intellectuals such as Ivan Illich and John Kenneth Galbraith, this section seeks to unravel the layers of paradox that characterize the contemporary socio-economic landscape. By critically examining the intersections of modernity, work, and cultural narratives, we set the stage for a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the *classe disagiata*.

2. The classe disagiata

This section unfolds through several interconnected lenses:

(a) Work and Income:

Delving into the very essence of work and the significance of income for the classe disagiata, we explore the dynamics that define their labor experiences and economic sustenance.

(b) Consumption in Context:

Building on the foundations laid in the previous sections, we navigate the terrain of consumption within the context of the *classe disagiata*. Here, we investigate how their unique relationship with work and income shapes patterns of consumption.

(c) Aspiration as an Ideological Device:

Unveiling the great machine for both individual and social depression, we scrutinize the ideological construct of aspiration within the *classe disagiata*. By exploring how societal expectations and individual aspirations intersect, we unravel the psychological toll imposed on this class, further intertwining post-Marxist and sociological perspectives (on a clinical psychology level as well).

(d) The Fight for Status:

Status becomes a battleground within the *classe disagiata*. This section dissects the nuanced struggle for recognition and status, shedding light on how societal norms and economic precarity converge to shape identity and social positioning within this class.

(e) Representing a Class Struggling with Itself:

The chapter concludes by delving into the complexities of representing a class in perpetual struggle with itself. Drawing on a mosaic of perspectives from various scholars and intellectuals, we seek to capture the dynamics, contradictions, and resilience embedded within the *classe disagiata*.

The classe disagiata occupies a unique position atop what various authors (such as Marc Augé, Ivan Illich, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Bruno Latour) would articulate as the *paradox of modernity*. From their perspective, the paradox becomes conspicuously apparent: the zenith of modernity aligns itself with its point of no return, or even the inception of its impending demise. It is within the contours of this paradox that the classe disagiata finds its embodiment. In Ivan Illich's incisive critiques, he unveils the intricate and often paradoxical outcomes of modern institutions. Promising liberation and progress, these institutions frequently, and perhaps ironically, give rise to oppressive conditions, especially for individuals occupying vulnerable positions (both absolutely and relatively). One salient aspect Illich illuminates is the modernization of poverty. Rather than eradicating poverty in its traditional sense, the interventions and institutional frameworks implemented under the guise of progress and development often perpetuate and, in some cases, exacerbate existing

disparities. As Baudrillard cynically suggests: "the very fact that (economic) inequality is no longer a problem in itself constitutes a problem" [150]. Poverty, in the context of Illich's perspective, undergoes a transformation rather than an eradication. The modernization of poverty implies that it adapts to and coexists with the evolving structures of contemporary society. This nuanced understanding challenges conventional notions of progress, urging a reevaluation of the means by which societies address issues of poverty and vulnerability. New industrial products present themselves as essential goods yet remain inaccessible to many. In the third world, thanks to the 'green revolution,' the poor farmer is expelled from his land. As an agricultural laborer, he earns more, but his children no longer eat as they used to. John Kenneth Galbraith's examination captures the essence of the paradox, where opulence and deprivation exist side by side, and the classe disagiata finds itself navigating the fissures between these extremes. We cannot automatically presume that well-being improves with a comprehensive increase in production compared to a lower level. It might remain consistent. "The higher level of production has, merely, a higher level of want creation necessitating a higher level of want satisfaction" [151]. Modernity serves not to enhance the collective well-being of individuals, but rather to intensify the proliferation of individual desires. This transformative phenomenon expands the number of participants involved in what is a zero-sum game, where gains for one individual correspond to losses for the rest of the group. Moreover, the trajectory of modernity unfolds against a backdrop of heightened material affluence, generating a concomitant increase in waste production alongside the accumulation of wealth. This interplay between individual desires, the dynamics of a competitive zero-sum game, and the simultaneous generation of wealth and waste encapsulates the multifaceted impact of modernity on societal structures and environmental sustainability. In Galbraith's words:

---

[150] Jean Baudrillard, "The Consumer Society : Myths and Structures" (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2017).
[151] John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971).

to furnish a barren room is one thing. To continue to crowd in
furniture until the foundation buckles is quite another [152]

The theme of waste emerges as a pivotal focal point in this chapter, especially concerning the analysis of the *classe disagiata.* Within the framework of a zero-sum game, waste becomes a critical determinant that delineates the divide between winners and losers, a concept elucidated with economic precision by Robert H. Frank [153]. As we delve deeper into the dynamics, a crucial consideration is the nature of the capital lost and the form and quantity of capital received in return. Over the long term, survival becomes a privilege accorded to the few, often favoring those already endowed with higher material capital. This cyclical process underscores the unequal distribution of resources within the zero-sum game, accentuating the challenges faced by the classe disagiata in navigating a system where the accumulation and loss of capital perpetuate existing disparities, ultimately consolidating advantages for the privileged few. The prominence of waste within the dynamics of a zero-sum game, as articulated by Robert H. Frank, distinctly characterizes a societal segment that aligns with what Currid Halkett terms the *aspirational class* [154]. In the context of the zero-sum game, the *aspirational class* strategically navigates the landscape of waste and capital accumulation, perpetuating a cycle where those with existing advantages, particularly in terms of material capital, are more likely to emerge as long-term winners.

With their nonmaterial choices on what to spend on, these new elites
are deviating even more from the consumer patterns of the middle
class, never mind the lower income groups and the truly poor. These
deviations create the norms, symbolic boundaries, and cultural
capital that exclude everyone else, and make very obvious the
differences between these two disconnected societies. Further, and

---

[152] Galbraith.
[153] See Robert H. Frank and Philip J. Cook, *The Winner-Take-All Society : Why the Few at the Top Get so Much More than the Rest of Us, Journal of ...* (New York: Virgin Books, 2010).
[154] The "*aspirational class*" by Currid Halkett essentially represents the classe disagiata but viewed through a consumption-centric perspective. This underscores their interconnected nature, emphasizing the *aspirational class* as an alternative lens for understanding the experiences and dynamics of the classe disagiata in modern society.

more disconcerting, the things the wealthy *aspirational class* actually spend money on—education, health care, child care (not silver spoons, fancy cars, or fine china)—are the very things that build social capital and create class boundaries across generations that are almost impossible to overcome with material goods [155]

This heightened pursuit of social uprising, marked by intensified competition and underscored by the noticeable waste emblematic of the perils of fulfilled modernity, carries a discernible social cost. Society is compelled to grapple with the adverse social consequences stemming from this race to the top. This necessity prompts a strategic response: a redirection of an expanding portion of the gross domestic product towards critical social investments. These investments encompass crucial domains such as education, research, and healthcare, strategically designed not only to address immediate societal challenges but, equally importantly, to serve as instruments that validate and perpetuate the prevailing ideology of development and competition. This approach involves a deliberate commitment to invest in the human capital and well-being of the population, recognizing that such social investments play a dual role. They not only mitigate the negative externalities associated with the race to the top but also contribute to the cultivation of an environment conducive to ongoing economic advancement. As Baudrillard[156] observes:

> these compensatory expenditures, whether private or collective, which are intended to cope with dysfunctions rather than increase positive satisfaction, are added in, in all the accounts, as part of the rise in the standard of living. Not to mention the consumption of drugs, alcohol and all the other conspicuous or compensatory expenditures, or the military budgets, etc. All of this is growth and, hence, affluence [157]

Within the *classe disagiata,* a homogeneous ontological working condition prevails, transcending the diversity in the types of jobs its members may

---

[155] Elisabeth Currid-Halkett, *The sum of small things : a theory of the aspirational class* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton university press, 2012).
[156] A key author in the following pages.
[157] Baudrillard, "The Consumer Society : Myths and Structures."

undertake. Departing from conventional norms of well-defined salaries and rigid working conditions, such as fixed shifts and specific locations, the contemporary reality for this class is marked by a shift towards a more fluid and dynamic landscape. What unfolds is a mosaic of activities contributing to income generation. The once clearly delineated boundaries of work dissolve as individuals engage in a variety of tasks that span different periods of time, lack continuous patterns, and unfold in diverse spatial settings. This fragmented nature of work highlights the departure from traditional employment paradigms, signaling a shift away from the standardization of labor. Moreover, these activities often resist easy categorization within the confines of a conventional salary structure. The income generation becomes multifaceted and, at times, elusive, reflecting the evolving nature of employment for the *classe disagiata*. Following this trend, it becomes evident that a discernible pattern aligns with what Boltanski and Chiapello have conceptualized as the *spirit of capitalism*. Capital, in its perpetual evolution, exhibits a tendency to appropriate its critics and transform their ideas into a capitalist framework. In this specific context, we observe the capitalist assimilation of artistic critique [158], which initially fueled the '68 movement. The outcome is the emergence of a work landscape characterized by fragmentary, non-repetitive tasks, allowing workers the illusion of freedom in movement. The appropriation of artistic critique by capitalism is particularly pronounced in the reconfiguration of labor dynamics. The landscape now reflects a departure from traditional structures, reminiscent of the artistic sphere. Workers engage in tasks that are diverse, non-repetitive, and possess an illusionary sense of autonomy, reminiscent of the way artists historically determined the value of their

---

[158] "On the one hand the disenchantment and inauthenticity, and on the other the oppression, which characterize the bourgeois world associated with the rise of capitalism. This critique foregrounds the loss of meaning and, in particular, the loss of the sense of what is beautiful and valuable, which derives from standardization and generalized commodification, affecting not only everyday objects but also artworks (the cultural mercantilism of the bourgeoisie) and human beings. It stresses the objective impulse of capitalism and bourgeois society to regiment and dominate human beings, and subject them to work that it prescribes for the purpose of profit, while hypocritically invoking morality. To this it counterposes the freedom of artists, their rejection of any contamination of aesthetics by ethics, their refusal of any form of subjection in time and space and, in its extreme forms, of any kind of work". Luc Boltanski, Ève Chiapello, and Gregory Elliott, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (Roma: VERSO Books, 2018).

work. This strategic assimilation underscores the adaptability of capitalism, which ingeniously incorporates dissenting voices into its own mechanisms, shaping a contemporary work environment that mirrors, in certain aspects, the ideals of artistic autonomy and individual agency. This is also one of Ulrich Beck's concerns when describing the future of its *risk society*:

> one can say that a transition is occurring in industrial society from a uniform system of lifelong full-time work organized in a single industrial location, with the radical alternative of unemployment, to a risk-fraught system of flexible, pluralized, decentralized underemployment, which, however, will possibly no longer raise the problem of unemployment in the sense of being completely without a paid job. In this system, unemployment in the guise of various forms of underemployment is 'integrated ' into the employment system [159]

In the on-demand service world, the worker is not an employee but rather a temporary service provider. If new technologies allow maintaining the same degree of prescription and control in Taylorist wage labor even when production is scattered and fragmented across the territory, then, on the one hand, we witness a process of salarization of autonomous work and, on the other hand, the flexibilization and autonomization of wage labor. Work time and life time overlap, with a clear predominance of the former over the latter and an excessive extension of working hours. We no longer speak of remuneration for labor *per se*, independent of the product or service resulting from the work. Instead, the focus shifts to the payment for the object and/or service provided, regardless of the work performed. This does not imply that there is no longer a direct link between work and payment for the service; rather, it suggests that the content of the work is no longer the sole component but one of the elements (still the main one today) underlying the definition of the value of the service. The direct exploitation implicit in the subordinate condition of wage labor, compensated by the guarantee of subsistence, is replaced by formally independent employment.

---

[159] Ulrich Beck and Mark Ritter, *Risk society : towards a new modernity*, 2013.

However, it is effectively rendered subordinate through the relationships of precariousness and existential risk, closely connected to the experiences of those managing the production cycle. This is especially clear for Fumagalli, who also adds that

> in other words, the autonomous worker takes on the roles of both the wage earner and the entrepreneur: their remuneration is closely dependent on self-exploitation of their own capacity for work on one side and the bargaining power they hold within the hierarchical structure of the market on the other, within an increasingly complex and differentiated production chain [160]

This phenomenon is also an outgrowth of the increasing automation of work. The rapid progression of technology, particularly in the digital realm, is instigating an unparalleled redistribution of wealth and income. The advent of digital technologies allows for the efficient replication of valuable ideas, insights, and innovations at an exceptionally low cost. While this phenomenon results in societal abundance and prosperity for innovators, it concurrently diminishes the demand for labor types that were once pivotal. This shift in demand dynamics can lead to a scenario where many individuals experience a reduction in their incomes. The transformative impact of digital technologies not only generates economic bounty and prosperity for those at the forefront of innovation but also introduces challenges as traditional job roles are affected. The cost-effectiveness of digital replication processes alters the landscape of labor demand, with certain types of work facing a decline. This, in turn, has repercussions on the income levels of individuals whose skills and occupations are marginalized by these technological advancements. The interplay between technological progress and its socioeconomic ramifications underscores the complex and evolving nature of the contemporary workforce. The convergence of bounty and spread[161] confronts two prevailing yet conflicting

---

[160] Fumagalli, *Bioeconomia e Capitalismo Cognitivo : Verso Un Nuovo Paradigma Di Accumulazione.*
[161] As explained by Brynjolfsson and McAfee in Brynjolfsson and McAfee, *The Second Machine Age : Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies.*

perspectives on technological progress. On one hand, there is a widespread belief that technological advancements consistently elevate incomes. On the other hand, there's the notion that automation adversely impacts workers' wages, given the displacement of human roles by machines. While both of these viewpoints contain elements of truth, the actual dynamics are more nuanced. The swift evolution of digital tools is indeed generating unparalleled wealth, but there exists no inherent economic principle dictating that all or even a majority of workers will reap the benefits of these advancements. The unfolding reality of our digital era challenges simplistic narratives about the universal positive or negative impact of technology on incomes. The nuanced reality of the digital age prompts a more comprehensive understanding of how technological advancements intersect with the complexities of the modern workforce. "For almost two hundred years, wages did increase alongside productivity. This created a sense of inevitability that technology helped (almost) everyone" [162]. This sense of inevitability is now vanishing before our very eyes. What becomes apparent and is of particular significance for the focus of my thesis, is a profound shift from a societal perspective. It suggests that, from a social standpoint, the nature of the produced goods or services becomes secondary. The primary concern revolves around the ability to assign each individual to their anticipated source of income, a promise ingrained in them from the initiation of their educational journey. The incapacity to fulfill this promise lies at the heart of the emergence and crystallization of the *classe disagiata*. This underscores how, in contemporary society, the quest for economic stability and social mobility is tied to the ability to secure a reliable source of income. To quote Galbraith:

> the production reflects the low marginal utility of the goods to society. The income reflects the high total utility of a livelihood to a person. For this reason, although there is conventional effort to deny it, income and employment rather than goods have become our basic economic concern [163]

---

[162] Brynjolfsson and McAfee.
[163] Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*.

The overarching reality for members of the classe disagiata is one characterized by a paradoxical and schizophrenic work situation. Their daily professional landscape is marked not only by the unpredictability of their incomes but also by the erratic and uncertain nature of their work schedules. This dual unpredictability creates a challenging and often disorienting environment where stability and routine become elusive.

In this web of employment, the sources of income for individuals within the classe disagiata are subject to constant fluctuations, introducing an element of financial precariousness. This is what Foti defines *flexploitation*:

> one day overworked, the following day out of work; one week zero hours, the next thirty on late-night shifts [...] One might say the precarious are quantum workers, existing in a superposition of employment states, both temporarily employed and temporarily unemployed [164]

The classe disagiata finds itself in a poignant paradox marked by a stark disjunction between their shared aspirations and the harsh reality they encounter. This dissonance is emblematic of contemporary capitalism, where the widespread dissemination of aspirations sharply contrasts with the limited and unevenly distributed opportunities available. In the dynamics of contemporary capitalism, aspirations burgeon on a societal scale, fueled by the rhetoric of economic liberalism that promises prosperity and success for all. However, the reality unfolds as a stark reminder of the inherent constraints and disparities within the system. The tension between the amplified aspirations and the restricted, unequal distribution of opportunities becomes a defining characteristic of the *classe disagiata*. Contemporary capitalism, in its pursuit of universality, inadvertently fosters an environment where demands and pressures escalate beyond manageable bounds. The tension between the expansive promises of economic

---

[164] Alex Foti, *General Theory of the Precariat : Great Recession, Revolution, Reaction* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2017).

liberalism and the constrained reality results in a clash between the anticipated and the actual.

> Economic liberalism is in this sense a victim of its own propaganda: offered to all, it has evoked demands and pressures that cannot be contained. In a further sense, economic liberalism has been the victim of its own success [165]

The paradox within the classe disagiata is exacerbated by the global spread of capitalist ideology. As more individuals join the economic contest fueled by capitalist aspirations, the chances of realizing those aspirations diminish. Globalization expands the pool of contenders, creating a competitive landscape that challenges the pursuit of aspirations. The classe disagiata faces not only local economic challenges but also amplified global competition, magnifying the disparities between promised success and the constrained reality in an interconnected world [166]. Additionally:

> the increase in individuals' "needs" created by positional competition has a cost in time represented by the extra money that has to be earned to pay for the additional needs [167]

The significance of this dynamic lies in the recognition that time is the ultimate and scarce resource for human capitalists. In the pursuit of increased earnings to meet elevated aspirations stemming from competitive social positioning, individuals expend their most limited resource – time. Thus, "much of leisure, for the *aspirational class,* has become productive" [168]. The shift towards productive leisure among the *aspirational class* reflects the evolving landscape of conspicuous consumption [169]. The conventional means of displaying social position have become more

---

[165] Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth*, 2015.
[166] See Frank and Cook, *The Winner-Take-All Society : Why the Few at the Top Get so Much More than the Rest of Us*.
[167] Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth*.
[168] Currid-Halkett, *The sum of small things : a theory of the aspirational class*.
[169] As originally identified by Veblen (Thorstein Veblen and Martha Banta, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Oxford: Oxford Univ Press, 2009).)

intricate. Members of the *classe disagiata* navigate this complexity by identifying themselves through expenditures on behaviors and goods that diverge from the traditional notions of conspicuousness. Unlike the past, these elites are moving away from consuming overtly conspicuous items and are increasingly drawn to subtler status markers. This manifests through a dual approach – conspicuous production and inconspicuous consumption. In essence, their social identity is crafted not just through visible displays of wealth but also by engaging in less overt, yet equally impactful, patterns of consumption and production. As the pursuit of affluence intensifies, the focal point shifts from labor to consumption as the defining element of this class[170]. In this relentless ascent, there's a nuanced revelation: "While the mass of symbolic substitutes for wealth—virtual currency, accounting entries, and improbable assets—was on the rise, little attention was given to the vanishing act of genuine wealth" [171]. The fixation on virtual and speculative elements, juxtaposed with a neglect of substantial wealth, characterizes a trajectory that risks losing sight of the authentic foundations of economic well-being. These phases of life transform into an almost "ordinary" occurrence in the standard life narrative of an entire generation. In the conditions of individualization, it is this nomadic reality of mass unemployment, specific to certain life stages that makes contradictory things possible simultaneously: a mass dimension and the individualization of destiny, constantly elevated figures that somehow crumble, a fragmented and internalized mass destiny that, in its unchanged severity with the semblance of personal failure, conceals from the individual its mass proportions shared by millions. As a matter of fact, what Ventura refers to as a *class*, affluent on one side and competent on the other, is, in reality, a bubble (that remains cohesive because of its differences). "The exploitation of these differences and their material expression defines the new forms of the capital-labor relationship" [172]. How can the precarious multitude that

---

[170] "The criterion gauging its performance will no longer be productivity but, to borrow a neologism coined by Jean Baudrillard, *consumptivity*" Ventura, *Teoria Della Classe disagiata*. [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

[171] Ventura. [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

[172] Fumagalli, *Bioeconomia e Capitalismo Cognitivo : Verso Un Nuovo Paradigma Di Accumulazione*. [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

arises from it be represented when it is ontologically grounded as not immediately representable? This question stands as the paramount enigma encapsulating the challenges posed by capitalist ideology to this socioeconomic bubble. Hopefully, we have become detached enough to represent it as a fiction – as a meme. This, and this only, can be the background of the propositional part of my thesis. To my eyes and to my research, this is both biographically and theoretically self-evident. It is only through detachment and irony [173] that we can represent ourselves (individually) outside of this bubble. To quote Comitè Invisible:

> we belong to a generation that is living quite well without all that fiction. A generation that never expected to get anything out of our rights according to workplace law, and even less out of the right to work. A generation that's not even "precarious" as the most advanced fractions of leftist militancy like to theorize, because to be precarious is still to define yourself according to the sphere of work, in sum: according to its decomposition. We admit the necessity of getting money, regardless of the means, because it's impossible right now to do without it, but we don't admit the necessity of working [174]

Throughout the extensive exploration of the classe disagiata in this chapter, a profound analysis has unfolded, revealing layers of its existence within the larger framework of modernity. The concept of the classe disagiata has been depicted as a poignant symptom, serving as a barometer for the apogee of modernity. Interestingly, this zenith marks a paradoxical juncture as it heralds the commencement of its gradual decline. The dynamics surrounding work and leisure for the members of the classe disagiata have been scrutinized as well. The working conditions of this group are portrayed as existing within a realm of schizophrenia and paradox. Their incomes and work schedules are not only unpredictable but also create a convoluted landscape where traditional distinctions between work and leisure blur. A significant highlight surfaces in the prominence of consumption over work

---

[173] Thus, the meme.
[174] Comitè Invisible, *The Coming Insurrection*, 2007.

as the defining trait for the *classe disagiata*. The introduction of the term *consumptivity* encapsulates the essence of their socio-economic identity, emphasizing the pivotal role played by consumption patterns in shaping their class dynamics. Representation becomes a critical aspect. The classe disagiata is reframed as a bubble, rather than a class. This prompts contemplation on the difficult task of representing a group that shares commonalities emerging from their differences, a challenge accentuated by the inherent heterogeneity within this social bubble. Looking toward potential pathways for this group, the proposition emerges to reconsider traditional notions of work and leisure. The suggestion to view working conditions introduces a novel perspective, offering a potential way for the classe disagiata to navigate the complexities of their socio-economic reality. The examination of work, leisure, consumption, representation, and alternative perspectives collectively contributes to a comprehensive understanding of this unique socio-economic bubble.

2.4 – CONSUMPTION AND THE QUEST FOR STATUS

"(GERALD) I suppose society is wonderfully delightful!
(LORD ILLINGWORTH) To be in it is merely a bore. But to be out
of it simply a tragedy" [175]

"Labour is everywhere, because there is no more labour" [176]

The transition to a post-capitalist paradigm has brought about profound shifts in the dynamics of consumption and status, challenging traditional notions rooted in capitalist ideology. In this chapter, we explore the evolving relationship between consumption, work, and social status in contemporary society, where the boundaries between production and consumption are increasingly blurred. Central to our investigation is the premise that in the post-capitalist era, the conventional boundaries between work and consumption have become increasingly blurred, leading to a profound intertwining of these spheres in individuals' lives. While the concept of the *prosumer* has gained traction in discussions of contemporary economics, it is essential to unpack its significance within the context of our analysis. The term *prosumer* refers to individuals who both produce and consume goods or services, simultaneously. In essence, prosumers actively engage in the creation, customization, or co-production of the products or services they consume, often leveraging digital technologies and participatory platforms to do so. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in industries such as technology, media, and entertainment, where users contribute user-generated content, provide feedback, or collaborate in the design and development process. However, our analysis goes beyond the conventional understanding of the prosumer to explore how work itself can embody elements of consumption. In this expanded perspective, individuals not only participate in the production-consumption cycle but also derive

---

[175] Oscar Wilde, "A Woman of No Importance" (Garfield Heights, OH: Duke Classics, 2013), https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=D28D8B13-2375-4F8E-892D-109F64D4F406.
[176] Baudrillard and Grant, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*.

personal satisfaction, identity, and meaning from their work activities, blurring the lines between labor and leisure, production, and consumption. By examining the intricacies of this dynamic relationship, we aim to shed light on the evolving nature of work and consumption in the post-capitalist era. Consumption practices are imbued with a productive dimension, as individuals actively participate in shaping and defining their own experiences through the goods and services they consume. However, it's important to distinguish our perspective from the conventional view that equates consumption with labor solely based on its role in brand promotion and value creation[177]. While this aspect is undoubtedly relevant, our analysis extends beyond this notion to underscore how consumption increasingly resembles a form of labor in its own right, particularly when individuals invest more than just their material capital into it. In this expanded view, consumption becomes not only a means of acquiring goods and services but also a form of engagement and expression through which individuals invest their time in its various form. By treating consumption as a job-like activity, where individuals actively curate and perform their consumption practices, we illuminate the multifaceted nature of contemporary consumption dynamics in the post-capitalist landscape. Our examination begins by revisiting Thorstein Veblen's seminal work on conspicuous consumption and the leisure class. Veblen's critique of the extravagant display of wealth and status provides a foundation for understanding how consumption practices reflect broader social hierarchies and power dynamics. However, in a world characterized by abundance and excess, the traditional capitalist meaning of consumption loses its relevance, prompting us to reevaluate its significance in the post-capitalist landscape. Building upon this premise, we delve into the complexities of consumption and production in a globalized economy where traditional notions of manufacturing and labor are reshaped by delocalization and automation. In this context, the traditional distinction between producers and consumers becomes increasingly blurred, challenging our understanding of economic roles and

---

[177] As discussed by Galibert on Jean-Paul Galibert, *I cronòfagi : i 7 principi dell'ipercapitalismo* (Viterbo: Stampa Alternativa, 2015)., for example

responsibilities. Drawing on insights from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital, we explore how consumption practices contribute to the construction of social status and identity. Bourdieu's framework offers a nuanced perspective on the symbolic value of consumer goods and the role they play in the perpetuation of social hierarchies. By updating Veblen's theory of the leisure class through a Bourdieusian and Baudrillardean prism, we aim to elucidate the ways in which consumption practices serve as markers of social distinction and reinforce existing power structures. Furthermore, we examine the resizing of the middle class in the post-capitalist landscape and its implications for status dynamics. As precarious, cognitive jobs proliferate in an increasingly service-oriented economy, the middle class grapples with shifting notions of status and identity. We interrogate how these changes influence perceptions of social mobility and shape individuals' aspirations and behaviors.

The exploration of consumption dynamics within the context of post-capitalism converges significantly with the seminal works of Jean Baudrillard, particularly during the period spanning from 1968[178] to 1981[179]. Baudrillard's insights shed light on the evolving nature of consumption in a society marked by an abundance of goods and services, challenging traditional capitalist frameworks that ascribed value solely based on scarcity. "The rising generations are now inheritors: they no longer merely inherit goods, but the natural right to abundance" [180].

Building upon the foundations laid by Baudrillard and extending beyond the paradigm proposed by Thorstein Veblen, we observe a significant departure from the conventional association of leisure and luxury exclusively with the middle class. In contemporary society, the quest for status no longer hinges solely on conspicuous consumption, as famously introduced by Veblen. Instead, the proliferation of material production and distribution has democratized access to leisure and luxury, blurring the

---

[178] Baudrillard, "The Consumer Society : Myths and Structures."
[179] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation, Body, in Theory TA - TT -* (Ann Arbor SE - 164 p. ; 23 cm.: University of Michigan Press Ann Arbor, n.d.). This is also shown in Neo's apartment at the beginning of the movie *Matrix.*
[180] Baudrillard, "The Consumer Society : Myths and Structures."

boundaries that once demarcated social classes. This concept has been extensively explored in my intervention titled *Retail, Resell, Replica: Streetwear as a shared worldwide code of differentiation* presented at multiple conventions and meetings. On the article I intend to outline the process of social distinction within the streetwear community – a coherent semantic whole in which differentiation applies through both conspicuous and non-conspicuous signaling. This is a new and interesting field of study because it includes elements of classic and modern sociology of consumptions, thus affirming the ongoing relevance of both approaches. Since social identity is defined and asserted through difference, this research analyzes the choices in the allocation of time and money that a defined cohort of western middle-class youth make in order to acquire and enhance status among peers. Streetwear is defined as a sub-branch of the fashion industry whose products fall between the high-end and the fast fashion markets. Brands are identified by heritage – the ability to be foreign to mass culture interferences – and their level of manipulation of cultural niches. They either sell items in limited pieces or engage in the phenomenon of limited-edition production. These two elements, along with others, identify the streetwear industry as a high-density of information game. Therefore, consumption is usually only the last – definitive and necessary – step of a longer sequence of signification (to which peers usually contributes via online confrontation on social platforms). Of course, since items are produced to be scarce, their prices are relatively high and can only be afforded systematically by the richest tier of the cohort, thus representing a paradigmatic example of Veblen effect. Within streetwear, status is achieved through smallest marginal difference (SMD). That is to say, some sort of informal hierarchy among peers isn't built just through the purchase of high-priced items, but rather through the conspicuous display of an individual's management of such a code (through the purchase of selected items). The globalization of supply and demand guarantees that low-price replicas are introduced to the market, so that scarceness is virtually eliminated. Thus, an interesting question arises: can the black market bridge the gap caused by economic status? To put it in theoretical terms:

can economic wealth be replaced by psychic income (as in Foucault's interpretation of human capital)? This democratization implies two critical developments: firstly, the traditional mechanisms of conspicuous consumption as a marker of status lose their efficacy in a landscape where access to luxury goods becomes more widespread. This story from Fred Hirsch explains it sarcastically:

> as a middle-class professional remarked when cheap charter flights
> opened up a distant exotic country: "Now that I can afford to come
> here I know that it will be ruined" [181]

Secondly, individuals who previously occupied higher social positions retain a distinct advantage by virtue of their existing possession of status codes, thus perpetuating social disparities even in the absence of overt displays of wealth [182]. By transcending the traditional confines of class-based consumption, contemporary society navigates a complex terrain where the pursuit of status and identity unfolds through multifaceted expressions of consumption. In the contemporary landscape, consumption has evolved into a highly contextual phenomenon, characterized by a nuanced interplay of socio-economic factors. "Few objects today are offered alone, without a context of objects which 'speaks' them. And this changes the consumer's relation to the object: he no longer relates to a particular object in its specific utility, but to a set of objects in its total signification" [183]. While Veblen's era emphasized conspicuous consumption as a means of social distinction, today we are witnessing the emergence of a submerged form of inconspicuous distinction – which was also articulated in Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*. However, the nature of this distinction has undergone a significant transformation. It is no longer solely predicated on the possession of luxury items or the mastery of etiquette, but rather on a deeper understanding and navigation of socio-economic capital. In this context, the ability to comprehend and navigate the web of socio-economic

---

[181] Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth*.
[182] This is, for example, Ventura's position (via Bourdieu).
[183] Baudrillard, "The Consumer Society : Myths and Structures."

forces becomes paramount, shaping individuals' identities and social standing in increasingly complex ways. "The consumer society needs its objects in order to be. More precisely, it needs to destroy them [...] Only in destruction are objects there in excess and only then, in their disappearance, do they attest to wealth" [184]. Consumption patterns are no longer confined to overt displays of wealth or status; rather, they are linked to individuals' capacity to navigate and negotiate the socio-economic structures that underpin modern society. What this entails is that the *classe disagiata* occupies a paradoxical position within this framework. Its members are extremely classy and extremely poor at the same time. On one hand, they exhibit a certain degree of sophistication and refinement akin to the upper echelons of society, engaging in leisure activities and consuming goods traditionally associated with elevated social status. However, this veneer of classiness belies their underlying economic precarity. While they may partake in similar leisure pursuits as the affluent, their access to resources and time—crucial components of social and cultural capital—is severely limited. Consequently, while they may possess the trappings of luxury and sophistication, their inability to effectively manage and leverage these resources renders them ensnared in a state of perpetual crisis. Again, with Baudrillard: "it is our social logic which condemns us to luxurious and spectacular penury" [185]. On a certain sense, we can affirm that:

> the basic problem of contemporary capitalism is no longer the contradiction between 'profit maximization' and the 'rationalization of production' (from the point of view of the entrepreneur), but that between a potentially unlimited productivity (at the level of the technostructure) and the need to dispose of the product [186]

In this context, consumption emerges as a pivotal mechanism through which individuals actively contribute to the functioning of the economic system. Far from being a passive act of acquiring goods and services,

---

[184] Baudrillard.
[185] Baudrillard.
[186] Baudrillard.

consumption assumes the role of labor in the broader socio-economic landscape. Consumption, in essence, becomes a form of work dedicated to the task of disposal. When individuals engage in purchasing and utilizing products, they are not merely satisfying personal desires; rather, they are actively participating in the circulation and absorption of goods within the economy. This process of disposal is integral to sustaining the cycle of production and ensuring the continued operation of capitalist systems. Consumption is thus – via Baudrillard – *social labour* [187]. In parallel to the notion of consumption as a form of labor, the converse holds true: "labour [...] has come to be just another consumer good to be distributed throughout society" [188]. In this paradigm, labor is no longer solely a means of production but also a product to be consumed[189]. Individuals engage in work not only to generate income and sustain livelihoods but also as a means of participating in social transactions. Within this framework, work takes on a dual role: it serves as a source of material sustenance and economic value, while simultaneously functioning as a medium of social exchange and cultural currency. Furthermore, the consumption of work extends beyond the transactional exchange of labor for wages. As such, the act of engaging in work is imbued with meaning beyond its economic function, shaping individuals' identities and social relationships in profound ways. In essence, just as consumption assumes the attributes of labor in the modern economic landscape, work itself becomes a consumable good, subject to market forces and social valuation. As such, the act of consumption becomes imbued with significance beyond its immediate gratification, serving as a means of signaling social status, reinforcing cultural norms, and perpetuating economic structures. In this way, consumption transcends its traditional characterization as a leisure activity or personal indulgence to become a form of labor essential to the functioning of contemporary capitalism.

---

[187] Baudrillard.
[188] Baudrillard and Grant, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*.
[189] "The enormous paradox is that the less labour becomes a productive force, the more it becomes a product". Baudrillard and Grant.

> Consumption is defined [...] as a system of communication and exchange, as a code of signs continually being sent, received and reinvented – as language [190]

Indeed, the concept of consumption as a language highlights its intrinsic role as a form of labor within contemporary capitalist societies. Consumption operates not only as a means of acquiring goods and services but also as a complex system of communication and exchange, akin to a language. In this framework, individuals engage in a continuous process of sending, receiving, and reinventing signs and symbols through their consumption practices. Expanding on this idea, the notion that consumption functions as a language underscores the active and labor-intensive nature of consumer behavior. Just as language requires effort and engagement to convey meaning effectively, consumption demands active participation and interpretation on the part of individuals. Moreover, the analogy of consumption as a language highlights its dynamic and evolving nature. Individuals participate in a constant process of interpretation and reinterpretation, negotiating meanings and symbols within the broader socio-cultural context, and that is exactly their actual work within society. In this sense, consumption can be understood as a form of labor in itself. Just as individuals invest time, effort, and resources in learning and using language, they similarly invest in the act of consumption, actively engaging in the production and circulation of symbolic meanings and values. Furthermore, mirroring the dynamics of consumption, the concept of work similarly assumes a symbolic dimension within contemporary capitalist societies [191]. Work ceases to be mainly a means of producing goods and services but rather emerges exclusively as a sign amongst many within the broader system of social exchange. In this context, work becomes equivalent, in a capitalist sense, to any other sign or symbol circulating within the socio-economic landscape. "Like every other sign, it produces and consumes itself. It is exchanged against non-labour, leisure, in

---

[190] Baudrillard, "The Consumer Society : Myths and Structures."
[191] "labour is not a power, it has become one sign amongst many" Baudrillard and Grant, *Symbolic Exchange and Death.*

accordance with a total equivalence, it is commutable with every other sector of everyday life" [192]. Moreover, similar to consumption, work is subject to interpretation and negotiation within the symbolic economy. Individuals engage in a continual process of assigning meanings and values to different types of work, shaping perceptions of prestige, success, and social worth. Just as consumers interpret and reinterpret signs and symbols through their consumption practices, so too do individuals assign significance to different forms of labor within the social hierarchy. In this way, work assumes a dual role as both a means of producing goods and services and a signifier within the broader system of social exchange. This transition from the productivity of labor to its reproductivity signifies a profound shift in the nature of work within contemporary capitalist societies. Rather than solely producing tangible goods or services, labor now operates within the realm of reproduction, actively perpetuating the ideological and symbolic codes of capitalism. Labor, when viewed as a sign or symbol within the socio-economic system, assumes the role of reproducing and reinforcing the dominant narratives and structures of capitalism.

> There is no more productive labour, only reproductive labour. In the same way there is no more 'productive' or 'unproductive' consumption, only a reproductive consumption. Leisure is as productive as labour, factory labour as 'unproductive' as leisure or the service industries, it is irrelevant what formula we use [193]

Drawing on the insights of Guy Debord, this transformation can be understood as the emergence of labor as spectacle. Just as the spectacle encompasses the totality of social life under capitalism, labor participates in this spectacle by reproducing its codes, norms, and values. Labor, as spectacle, not only produces material goods but also manufactures and disseminates the symbolic representations and narratives that sustain the

---

[192] Baudrillard and Grant.
[193] Baudrillard and Grant.

capitalist system. "Its sole message is: "What appears is good; what is good appears" [194].

From an individual perspective, it is noteworthy that leisure, rather than traditional forms of labor, assumes a newfound productivity within the framework of contemporary capitalism. Leisure activities, once regarded as passive or non-productive pursuits, now play a pivotal role in facilitating social advancement and participation within capitalist societies. As Currid-Halkett suggests: "much of leisure, for the *aspirational class,* has become productive" [195]. Through leisure, individuals actively participate in practices such as cultural consumption, recreational pursuits, and social interactions, all of which contribute to their social and cultural capital accumulation. By engaging in leisure activities that align with dominant cultural norms and preferences, individuals can enhance their social standing, expand their social networks, and gain access to valuable resources and opportunities. Moreover, leisure activities often serve as sites of symbolic distinction and differentiation, allowing individuals to signal their social status, taste, and lifestyle choices to others. In this way, leisure emerges as a productive domain wherein individuals actively invest their time and resources to pursue social advancement and recognition within the competitive landscape of contemporary capitalism. By strategically leveraging leisure as a platform for social promotion, individuals navigate and negotiate the complexities of social hierarchy, status attainment, and cultural capital accumulation in pursuit of their socio-economic goals. The convergence of consumption, leisure, and work into a unified domain underscores the indeterminable and incommensurable nature of contemporary labor practices. In a socio-economic landscape where boundaries between these spheres blur, the traditional delineations of work as discrete, quantifiable labor become increasingly obsolete. "The work of the performance society is in this sense immeasurable" [196]. Instead, individuals find themselves perpetually engaged in a cycle of production, consumption, and leisure,

[194] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle.*
[195] Currid-Halkett, *The sum of small things : a theory of the aspirational class.*
[196] Federico Chicchi and Anna Simone, *La società della prestazione* (Ediesse, 2017). [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

wherein each activity informs and intersects with the others. Individuals no longer compartmentalize their activities into distinct categories of work and leisure; rather, they seamlessly integrate work-related tasks into their leisure pursuits and consumption practices. Furthermore, the interplay between consumption, leisure, and work renders the temporal boundaries of labor indeterminate. In this context, the notion of being *always at work* takes on new significance, reflecting the permeation of labor into all facets of life. Whether engaging in leisure activities, consuming goods and services, or performing traditional forms of labor, individuals are perpetually enmeshed in processes of production and exchange. This perpetual state of engagement underscores the interconnectedness of consumption, leisure, and work in shaping contemporary experiences of time, identity, and social relations. We are back to Marshall McLuhan's prophetic words:

> man works when he is partially involved. When he is totally involved, he is at play or at leisure [197]

In post-capitalist societies, the manipulation of signs for status becomes paramount for the *classe disagiata,* representing their primary mode of engagement within the socio-economic framework. Within this context, the acquisition and utilization of symbolic markers hold immense significance, as they serve as tools for navigating social hierarchies and asserting one's position within them. In doing so, they engage in a form of symbolic labor, wherein the production, dissemination, and interpretation of signs become integral to their pursuit of social recognition and validation. Thus, the ability to manipulate signs effectively emerges as a key skill set for navigating the complexities of post-capitalist societies, where symbolic capital holds significant sway in determining one's social standing and opportunities for advancement. Objects lose their use value. "You are always manipulating objects (in the broadest sense) as signs which distinguish you"

---

[197] McLuhan, "The Agenbite of Outwit."

[198]. Objects fulfil their role as signs only upon consumption, whereby the relationship they symbolize is brought into fruition. It is not merely the physical object itself that is consumed, but rather the abstract notion of the relationship it represents. "Only thus can it be consumed, never in its materiality, but in its difference" [199]. This relationship, though intangible, is imbued with meaning and significance, existing both within and beyond the material realm. Through consumption, individuals engage in a process of signification wherein the idea of the relationship is manifested and made tangible through the series of objects that signify it. Thus, consumption becomes a transformative act, wherein the symbolic value embedded within the object is actualized, experienced, and internalized by the consumer.

> What is consummated and consumed is never the object but the relationship itself, signified yet absent, simultaneously included and excluded; it is the idea of the relationship that is consumed in the series of objects that displays it [200]

The dynamic of seeking differentiation while simultaneously striving to fit in is inherently twofold and complex. On one hand, individuals within the *classe disagiata* seek to assert their unique identities and distinctiveness within the social fabric. This drive for differentiation stems from a desire to stand out, assert individuality, and carve out a sense of self amidst the multitude of social influences and pressures. However, simultaneously, there exists a parallel need to conform and align with prevailing norms, values, and expectations at the upper part of society. "Paradoxically, we want to be different from others while we simultaneously seek to fit in" [201]. For members of the *classe disagiata,* navigating this delicate balance between differentiation and assimilation proves to be particularly challenging and often fraught with obstacles. While they aspire to assert their uniqueness and distinguish themselves from others, they also face the

---

[198] Baudrillard, "The Consumer Society : Myths and Structures."
[199] Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* ([S.l.]: Verso, 2020).
[200] Baudrillard.
[201] Currid-Halkett, *The sum of small things : a theory of the aspirational class*.

harsh reality that the ability to fit in and differentiate oneself hinges upon possessing certain forms of capital. These forms of capital, whether social, cultural, or economic, serve as the currency through which individuals negotiate their social standing and navigate the complex terrain of social hierarchies. However, members of the *classe disagiata* often find themselves lacking in the requisite forms of capital necessary to effectively participate in this process of social differentiation and assimilation. They may lack the financial resources to access certain goods and services associated with status and prestige, or they may lack the cultural knowledge and social networks needed to navigate the intricacies of social etiquette and norms. Moreover, even if they possess some forms of capital, it may not be sufficient in quantity or quality to enable meaningful social mobility or status elevation within society.

> The habitus is not simply the consumption patterns but the knowledge of what to consume [202]

As a result, members of the *classe disagiata* are acutely aware of their precarious position within the social hierarchy, where their aspirations for differentiation are often thwarted by the harsh realities of social inequality and exclusion. Yet, what remains elusive to them is the recognition that this shared predicament could serve as a catalyst for collective demands on the state and a revolutionary mobilization of their general intellect. Despite their best efforts, they find themselves unable to convert their time, efforts, and resources into the forms of capital necessary to attain the status and recognition they desire. This was already foreseen by Schumpeter when he says that:

> The same apparatus which conditions for performance the individuals and families that at any given time form the bourgeois class, ipso facto also selects the individuals and families that are to rise into that class or to drop out of it [203]

---

[202] Currid-Halkett.

[203] Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2015).

As we increasingly devote our time and effort to accumulating resources for consumption, we inadvertently detract from the moments available to us for genuine enjoyment and fulfilment. The relentless pursuit of material possessions and purchasing power consumes not only our physical resources but also our mental and emotional energy, leaving us drained and depleted. In our relentless quest for affluence, we often overlook the simple pleasures and experiences that enrich our lives, sacrificing meaningful connections, moments of tranquility, and opportunities for personal growth. This phenomenon serves as a poignant insight into the concluding section of our thesis, where we delve into the intricacies of power and its underlying ideology. Through this exploration, we come to understand how ideology perpetuates a relentless pursuit of quantitative exchange (or simply what Debord defines *spectacle* [204]). In this spectacle-driven world, there is no respite from the imperative to engage in constant consumption and production, leaving little room for idleness or contemplation. Our perpetual involvement in quantitative exchange ensures that we remain ensnared within the confines of the existing power structures, unable to break free from the cycle of consumption and labor. This is the at the center of Berardi's book *La fabbrica dell'infelicità*, quoted here:

> As we increasingly devote our time and effort to accumulating resources for consumption, we inadvertently detract from the moments available to us for genuine enjoyment and fulfillment. The relentless pursuit of material possessions and purchasing power consumes not only our physical resources but also our mental and emotional energy, leaving us drained and depleted. In our relentless quest for affluence, we often overlook the simple pleasures and experiences that enrich our lives, sacrificing meaningful connections, moments of tranquility, and opportunities for personal growth. Consequently, despite our apparent abundance of material

---

[204] "The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point that it becomes images." Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*.

wealth, we find ourselves impoverished in terms of true fulfillment and happiness.

This phenomenon serves as a poignant segue into the concluding section of our thesis, where we delve into the intricacies of power and its underlying ideology. Through this exploration, we come to understand how ideology perpetuates a relentless pursuit of quantitative exchange, trapping us within the confines of a spectacular society, as described by Debord. In this spectacle-driven world, there is no respite from the imperative to engage in constant consumption and production, leaving little room for idleness or contemplation. Our perpetual involvement in quantitative exchange ensures that we remain ensnared within the confines of the existing power structures, unable to break free from the cycle of consumption and labor [205]

Our impoverishment stems from engaging in an internal race where the pursuit of accumulation and consumption perpetuates an ever-escalating cycle of competition. "As the level of average consumption rises, an increasing portion of consumption takes on a social as well as an individual aspect. That is to say, the satisfaction that individuals derive from goods and services depends in increasing measure not only on their own consumption but on consumption by others as well" [206]. This phenomenon has multifaceted implications, impacting individuals not only on an economic level but also on a psychological and emotional level. Economists like Robert H. Frank have extensively documented how this perpetual pursuit of status and material wealth leads to a phenomenon known as *expenditure cascades* [207]. This economic pressure contributes to financial stress, debt accumulation, and a reduced sense of financial security among individuals.

---

[205] Berardi, *La Fabbrica Dell'infelicità : New Economy e Movimento Del Cognitariato.* [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

[206] Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth.*

[207] Acutely exemplified here: "To land a job, for example, an applicant is well advised to "look good." But what, exactly, does that mean? On reflection, any realistic definition turns out to depend almost completely on context. To look good means simply to look better than most other applicants. One way to do so is to spend more than others on clothing. Since the same incentives clearly apply to all applicants, however, an escalating standoff inevitably ensues. At leading law and business schools, many students don't dare appear for an interview wearing a suit that costs less than six hundred dollars. Yet when all students spend that amount, their attractiveness rankings are no different than if all had spent only three hundred dollars. In either case, only one person in ten can exceed the ninetieth percentile on the attractiveness scale". Frank and Cook, *The Winner-Take-All Society : Why the Few at the Top Get so Much More than the Rest of Us*.) The rest is wasted.

Furthermore, thinkers like Berardi and Erehnberg argue that this incessant competition also takes a toll on individuals' mental and emotional well-being. The relentless pursuit of success and status in a hypercompetitive society fosters feelings of anxiety, inadequacy, and alienation. As individuals compare themselves to others and measure their self-worth based on external markers of success, they become trapped in a perpetual cycle of striving and dissatisfaction. This psychic toll manifests in various forms, including increased rates of stress-related illnesses, mental health disorders, and a pervasive sense of existential malaise. Ultimately, the internal race for accumulation and consumption perpetuates a vicious cycle of materialism and discontent, leaving individuals impoverished not only in terms of financial resources but also in terms of their overall well-being and quality of life. For the *classe disagiata,* this impoverishment manifests as a slow process of extinction, wherein individuals who fall behind in the relentless pursuit of accumulation and consumption gradually waste away their mental, social, and economic capital. This phenomenon resonates with Bourdieu's conceptualization of capital. As individuals belonging to the *classe disagiata* fail to accumulate and leverage these forms of capital, they become increasingly marginalized and disenfranchised within the social and economic fabric of society. The academic institution plays a significant role in exacerbating and perpetuating this process of extinction for the *classe disagiata* [208]. Firstly, education is heralded as essential for upward social mobility and long-term success, often touted as the most valuable

---

[208] This idea has been developed elsewhere by me while attending conferences. The title of the lecture is *Educating ourselves towards extinction.* Here's the abstract: "Is meritocracy still a viable option in advanced nations? When education is nothing but the hallway to occupation, meritocracy becomes the procedure by which the market allocates the best possible subjectivity to a specific demand. To compete for the top spots, material capital must be turned into its immaterial forms. But, when all the players adopt the same strategy, a lose-lose situation arises. The real social tragedy is not the gap, but the waste. That's a new form of social Darwinism: in the long term, only a wealthy few can afford to stay in the game. To provide exclusive performance, individualization must mean differentiation. In the fight for a spot on the upper echelon, cultural capital has less value than one would expect – knowledge by itself is not a key asset: it must be managed and exercised. Nevertheless, any kind of egalitarian reform for the educational system can only push towards a levelling of this type of capital. Social mobility is possible only when the underclass can have access to the same intangibles as the upper class, but these intangibles cannot be provided politically. They are, in fact, what makes an upper class as such. A new type of unemployed, underemployed and overexploited class has emerged. Education is provoking the shrinkage of middle class by means of a morbid extinction. The role of the State is crucial: is the regulation of the participation to a biased competition – so that this waste becomes socially acceptable – its only possibility before collapse?"

form of consumption with enduring utility. To quote Currid-Halkett: "Education is essential and perhaps the consumption habit with the greatest utility over the long term"[209]. As a result, those belonging to the *classe disagiata* are further marginalized and deprived of the means to acquire the necessary skills and credentials to compete in the knowledge economy. Moreover, drawing from Foucault's insights into biopolitical control, education functions as a mechanism for social regulation and normalization, shaping individuals' subjectivities and behaviors to conform to dominant societal norms and values. Within the academic institution, disciplinary practices, surveillance mechanisms, and hierarchies of knowledge production serve to discipline and regulate individuals, reinforcing existing power structures and marginalizing dissenting voices. As such, education not only perpetuates inequalities but also serves as a tool of social control, contributing to the gradual extinction of the *classe disagiata* by limiting their agency and mobility within society.

In conclusion, our exploration of consumption in post-capitalist societies has revealed a profound transformation in the traditional understanding of consumption and its relationship with work. We began by examining how consumption loses its classical meaning in societies characterized by human capitalism and the overproduction of objects, highlighting the shift towards consumption as a form of labor and social participation. Central to this transformation is the recognition that production itself is a form of work, serving the fundamental function of reproducing the ideology that underpins post-capitalist societies. Within this ideological framework, our analysis delved into the social and individual implications of consumption. We observed how the disappearance of the old middle class and the intensification of competitive consumption contribute to a sense of impoverishment and alienation among individuals. Those who fail to keep pace with the relentless pursuit of status and accumulation find themselves marginalized and disenfranchised within society, facing the existential threat of slow extinction. This discussion underscores the importance of

---

[209] Currid-Halkett, *The sum of small things : a theory of the aspirational class.*

transitioning to the next chapter, which will focus on the underlying ideology that shapes and sustains post-capitalist societies. By understanding the mechanisms through which ideology operates, we can better grasp the broader dynamics at play and explore potential avenues for resistance and transformation.

2.5 – TIME IS A WASTE OF MONEY [210]

"Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to reject it" [211]

"I'm tired of the future" [212]

The exploration of time in post-capitalist societies serves as a crucial pivot point within the broader framework of this thesis, providing a cohesive thread that ties together the various themes and analyses presented thus far. As we delve into the intricacies of temporal dynamics, we uncover the profound implications of how time is conceptualized, experienced, and commodified within contemporary socio-economic systems. This chapter aims to unravel the multifaceted nature of time in post-capitalist societies, tracing its historical roots, examining its intersection with the human experience, and dissecting its complex relationship with capital. Structured in three main sections, this chapter will offer a comprehensive exploration of time as a fundamental dimension of contemporary life.

1. Historical Background of Time:

The first section of this chapter embarks on a journey through the historical evolution of time, tracing the origins of our contemporary conception of temporality. In our exploration, we will focus on the technological transformations that have been instrumental in the quantification and commodification of time, reshaping its role from a subjective experience to an objective and measurable resource for economic efficiency. Through an analysis of these technological developments, we will uncover how they reshaped societal perceptions of time, transitioning it from a fluid and subjective experience to a rigid and quantifiable metric essential for capitalist accumulation and control.

---

[210] Wilde, "Complete Works of Oscar Wilde."
[211] Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (New York: VINTAGE, 2018).
[212] Steven Spielberg, *Minority Report* (20th Century Fox, 2002).

2. Time and the Human Experience:

In the subsequent section, we turn our attention to the intersection of time with the human experience, probing into the revolutionary importance of sleep and the perilous consequences of acceleration. By examining the role of sleep as a vital component of human health and well-being, we uncover its significance in challenging dominant narratives of productivity and efficiency. Furthermore, we delve into the dangers of acceleration, interrogating the societal pressures that drive individuals towards relentless pursuits of speed and productivity at the expense of holistic human flourishing.

3. Time and Capital:

Finally, we scrutinize the complex relationship between time and capital, unravelling the ways in which time functions as a crucial frontier for capitalist exploitation. Within this analysis, we will delve into the concept of time as the ultimate commodity within capitalist societies. Our investigation will reveal how time serves as the foundational resource upon which all capitalist exchanges and accumulations are predicated. Time, in this context, is not merely colonized and commodified by capital; rather, it is inherently commodifiable and acts as the linchpin of economic transactions. By recognizing time as the fundamental unit of capitalist exchange, we can gain deeper insights into the mechanisms through which capital perpetuates its dominance and shapes human experiences in contemporary societies. Additionally, we delve into the spectrality of past, present, and future in the society of spectacle, illuminating the ways in which capitalist ideologies perpetuate a fragmented and disorienting experience of time. In our exploration of time in post-capitalist societies, we will draw upon a diverse array of scholarly perspectives to illuminate the multifaceted nature of temporality in contemporary contexts. One key source of insight will be Jonathan Crary, whose work underscores the revolutionary significance of sleep within the broader framework of human experience. Through Crary's lens, we will delve into the societal implications of sleep deprivation and the

erosion of restful reprieve in an age of relentless acceleration and consumption. Additionally, we will turn to the writings of Franco "Bifo" Berardi and Mark Fisher (and other *capitalist realists*), whose analyses shed light on the spectrality and psychic deflation inherent in the human experience amidst rapid technological advancements. Fisher's examination of psychic deflation will help us understand the existential toll of living in an era characterized by perpetual acceleration and information overload. Furthermore, we will engage with the works of Jean Baudrillard, whose insights into the intersections of death and time in capitalist exchange offer provocative considerations on the commodification of temporality. Finally, we will turn to Ivan Illich's writings to explore convivial alternatives to the relentless pace of acceleration. Through our engagement with these diverse sources, we aim to construct a comprehensive understanding of time's role in shaping contemporary societies and to explore possibilities for reclaiming the playfulness of time in a post-capitalist world.

In this chapter, we embark on a comprehensive exploration of time in post-capitalist societies, rooted in the seminal insights of Karl Marx as articulated in his later work, *Grundrisse*. Marx's analysis of machines and their impact on the organization of labor laid the theoretical groundwork for understanding time as a central axis of capitalist production. Indeed, it is within the framework of Marx's analysis that many subsequent theorists have situated their inquiries into the nature of time, labor, and capital. One notable theoretical extension of Marx's ideas is evident in Guy Debord's concept of the spectacle, which flourished within the backdrop of capitalist temporality delineated in *Grundrisse*. Debord's analysis of the spectacle as a mode of social organization predicated on the relentless commodification of time illuminates the profound entanglement of temporality with the logic of capitalist exchange. Similarly, Jean Baudrillard's reflections on symbolic exchange and death as the ultimate referent in capitalist societies build upon Marx's foundational insights into the commodification of time. Moreover, Michel Foucault's analysis of human capital can be situated within the broader framework established by Marx's *Grundrisse*, as

Foucault elucidates the ways in which temporal regimes of discipline and control operate within capitalist societies. Certainly, Foucault's analysis of biopolitics and the regulation of populations indeed delves into the profound implications of time within contemporary social formations, albeit in a slightly different manner than previously described. Foucault's examination centers on the emergence of homo oeconomicus, a figure characterized by being its own time rather than owning time. Foucault's analysis reveals how neoliberal rationality constructs subjects as self-managing entities who internalize temporal imperatives and mold their behaviors, aspirations, and identities accordingly. In this context, time operates as a disciplinary mechanism, shaping and regulating individual conduct through the imposition of temporal norms, rhythms, and expectations. The rise of homo oeconomicus signals a profound transformation in the organization of subjectivity, wherein individuals are not only subject to external temporal constraints but also internalize and embody temporal logics as constitutive elements of their selves. Thus, Foucault's exploration of biopolitics illuminates the ways in which temporal dynamics intersect with regimes of power and domination, underscoring the centrality of time in the governance of contemporary societies. By situating time within the framework of neoliberal rationality and biopolitical control, Foucault reveals how temporal logics permeate every aspect of social life, from economic practices to individual subjectivities, profoundly shaping the contours of contemporary social formations. However, as we delve deeper into contemporary theories of time, we find that the ontological landscape has evolved, reflecting the shifting dynamics of post-capitalist societies. While Marx's *Grundrisse* laid the groundwork for understanding time within the context of industrial capitalism, contemporary theorists have expanded upon these foundations to grapple with the complexities of neoliberalism, digital capitalism, and the advent of post-work societies. Indeed, the *Grundrisse* themselves can be seen as a form of proto-post-capitalism, anticipating many of the temporal dynamics that would come to define contemporary social formations. In our exploration of current authors, we will turn our attention to the leftist

perspectives emerging from the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU), which offer innovative insights into the temporal dimensions of post-capitalist societies. Drawing upon post-Berardian (deeply rooted in Italy's *potere operaio* of the 70s) cultural theory, these authors engage with questions of acceleration, temporality, and subjectivity in the digital age. Additionally, we will explore the anarchist movement of situationist origin, which offers critical reflections on temporal autonomy, conviviality, and the reclamation of time in opposition to capitalist domination. By situating our analysis within this rich theoretical landscape, we aim to construct a nuanced understanding of time in post-capitalist societies, elucidating its multifaceted manifestations and exploring possibilities for temporal liberation and transformation.

> Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth [213]

On a certain sense, we can pinpoint this quote as the seminal theoretical background for post-capitalist thought. With the advent of capitalist domination, the traditional cyclical nature of time, characterized by repetitive patterns and cyclical rhythms, undergoes a profound transformation. In capitalist societies, time becomes historical rather than cyclical, marking a departure from the static and predictable temporal order of agrarian societies. This shift is tied to the dynamics of capitalist production and the imperatives of economic growth and accumulation. In capitalist societies, time assumes a historical trajectory, propelled forward by the ceaseless movement of capital and the axiom of profit. Work becomes the primary mechanism through which history is made and society is transformed. Unlike in agrarian societies where labor is often bound by traditional practices and cyclical rhythms, capitalist production is driven by innovation, progress, and constant change. This is both a result of and a reason for technological change. In the seventeenth century, for example,

---

[213] Marx, *Grundrisse.*

the use of the clock became widespread, along with the idea of 'lack' of time. Time became money: I have earned time, I have time left, how can I spend it? I don't have time, I can't afford to waste my time, it's already an earned hour, are expressions that reflect the changed attitude. Soon, man began to be explicitly considered as a source of measurable strength. Capitalist work is imbued with historical significance, as it serves as the engine of societal transformation and progress. Through labor, individuals actively participate in shaping the course of history, contributing to the ongoing process of economic development and social change. Each labor activity becomes a part of the historical continuum, leaving its mark on the collective trajectory of society. Capitalist time is *bourgeoisie* time.

> The victory of the bourgeoisie is the victory of a profoundly historical time, because it is the time corresponding to an economic production that continuously transforms society from top to bottom. So long as agrarian production remains the predominant form of labor, the cyclical time that remains at the base of society reinforces the joint forces of tradition, which tend to hold back any historical movement [214]

When individuals engage in labor, they invest their time and energy into the production process, contributing to the ongoing transformation of society. However, the efficacy of labor as a historical force is contingent upon the individual's ownership and control over their own time. This expropriation of time leads to the emergence of a timeless society, where the temporal dimension is reduced to a mere resource for capital accumulation.

> In order to force the workers into the status of "free" producers and consumers of commodified time, it was first necessary to violently expropriate their time. The imposition of the new spectacular form of time became possible only after this initial dispossession of the producers [215]

---

[214] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle.*
[215] Debord.

In this timeless society, capital operates within the perpetual present, devoid of any past or future orientation[216].

The spectacle: a happy, eternally present unity[217]

Within this framework, the present moment is dominated by the imperatives of capital, erasing any alternative temporalities and perpetuating the illusion of an eternal now. The concept of 24/7 encapsulates the ultimate frontier of capitalist domination, as elucidated by Crary. "24/7 announces a time without time, a time extracted from any material or identifiable demarcations, a time without sequence or recurrence [...] In spite of its insubstantiality and abstraction as a slogan, the implacability of 24/7 is its impossible temporality" [218]. The commodification of time knows no bounds in the 24/7 society, where individuals are expected to be constantly available and productive, further reinforcing the hegemony of capital over the temporal landscape. As Camatte explains:

> From its earliest origins capital's relationship to the past or present has always been of less importance to it than its relationship to the future. Capital's only lifeblood is in the exchange it conducts with labour power. Thus when surplus value is created, it is, in the immediate sense, only potential capital; it can become effective capital solely through an exchange against future labour. In other words, when surplus value is created in the present, it acquires reality only if labour power can appear to be ready and available in a future (a future which can only be hypothetical, and not necessarily very near). If therefore this future isn't there, then the present (or henceforth the past) is abolished: this is devalorization through total loss of substance. Clearly then capital's first undertaking must be to dominate the future in order to be assured of accomplishing its production process. (This conquest is managed by the credit

---

[216] Thus, the title of the chapter. This is also the title of a manifesto that I published online, here: https://disinformationcultures.net/poloni
[217] Guy Debord, *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, 1978.
[218] Jonathan Crary, *24/7 : Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2014).

system). Thus capital has effectively appropriated time, which it moulds in its own image as quantitative time. However, present surplus value was realized and valorized through exchange against future labour, but now, with the development of the "future industry", present surplus value has itself become open to capitalization. This capitalization demands that time be programmed, and this need expresses itself in a scientific fashion in futurology. Henceforth, capital produces time [219]

The scarcity of time [220] as a resource in contemporary society can be attributed to the voracious nature of capitalism, which operates as a parasitic entity constantly seeking avenues for expansion and exploitation. Similar to a virus, capitalism thrives by extracting value from living beings and their surroundings to fuel its relentless growth and reproduction. In the early stages of capitalism, the focus was primarily on the exploitation of natural resources and labor power. However, as the capitalist system evolved and expanded, it began to extend its reach beyond the physical realm into the realm of information and human experience. With the domination of Earth's physical resources largely secured, capitalism has turned its attention towards the infosphere – the realm of information and human consciousness. According to Berardi, "the *cybertime* is the organic face of the process" [221]. Capitalism seeks to harness and commodify time, integrating it into the framework of quantitative exchange where everything, including human existence, is assigned a monetary value. The implementation of new infrastructures aimed at extracting and regulating time reflects capitalism's relentless drive to expand its influence and dominance. These infrastructures not only facilitate the extraction of time

---

[219] Jacques Camatte, *Against Domestication* (Kitchener, Ontario, Canada: Falling Sky Books, 1981).
[220] Time itself is not inherently scarce. However, when it is transformed into a resource and subjected to the mechanisms of capitalist exploitation, it becomes scarce. Capitalism operates by assigning value to resources and commodities, including time, within the framework of market exchange. When time is commodified and treated as a finite resource to be bought, sold, and traded, its abundance is negated, and it becomes subject to the laws of supply and demand. In this sense, time becomes scarce not because of any inherent limitation but due to its artificial scarcity imposed by capitalist systems. The scarcity of time under capitalism is a result of its transformation into a quantifiable and monetizable entity. In essence, the scarcity of time under capitalism is a consequence of its conversion from a natural aspect of life into a finite resource subjected to the imperatives of profit and accumulation.
[221] Berardi, *La Fabbrica Dell'infelicità : New Economy e Movimento Del Cognitariato*. [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

from individuals but also serve to regiment and standardize human existence within the framework of capitalist exchange. Time, once considered a natural and abundant aspect of life, has now been transformed into a scarce and precious commodity, subject to the dictates of capitalist accumulation and exploitation. The concept of cybertime stands in stark contrast to cyberspace, as while the latter is often perceived as boundless and expansive, the former is constrained by organic limitations. Cyberspace, characterized by its virtual and digitized nature, seems to offer infinite possibilities and expanses for exploration and interaction. However, cybertime, or the temporal dimension of cyberspace, is inherently finite due to its connection with organic processes and human experiences. Unlike the seemingly limitless expanse of cyberspace, cybertime is constrained by the biological and physiological factors that govern human perception and interaction with time. "The objective sphere of cyberspace expands at the speed of digital replication, but the subjective core of cybertempo evolves at a slow pace, the rhythm of corporeality, enjoyment, and suffering" [222]. Under these premises, the necessity of sleep poses a significant obstacle to the relentless expansion of capital. During sleep, individuals are unable to actively contribute to the processes of production and consumption, making it a period of time lost from the perspective of capitalist development. This inherent limitation has prompted the development of new technologies and strategies aimed at minimizing or circumventing the need for sleep. As outlined in Crary's seminal work *24/7* these mechanisms of control and appropriation seek to extend the waking hours of individuals, blurring the boundaries between day and night and eroding the traditional rhythms of rest and activity. This relentless pursuit of productivity, at the expense of sleep and rest, underscores the extent to which capitalism seeks to exploit every available moment of time for its own ends.

> The huge portion of our lives that we spend asleep, freed from a
> morass of simulated needs, subsists as one of the great human
> affronts to the voraciousness of contemporary capitalism. Sleep is an

---

[222] Berardi. [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

uncompromising interruption of the theft of time from us by capitalism. Most of the seemingly irreducible necessities of human life—hunger, thirst, sexual desire, and recently the need for friendship—have been remade into commodified or financialized forms. Sleep poses the idea of a human need and interval of time that cannot be colonized and harnessed to a massive engine of profitability, and thus remains an incongruous anomaly and site of crisis in the global present. In spite of all the scientific research in this area, it frustrates and confounds any strategies to exploit or reshape it. The stunning, inconceivable reality is that nothing of value can be extracted from it. It should be no surprise that there is an erosion of sleep now everywhere, given the immensity of what is at stake economically [223]

Via Galibert, we can say that – for capitalism – sleep is an "'illness' that shortens our life by a third" [224]. In the relentless pursuit of profit and efficiency, capitalism has a tendency to transform various aspects of life into commodities, subjecting them to market forces and privatization. Sleep, once regarded as a natural and essential part of human existence, has not been immune to this process. Capitalism has effectively commodified sleep by redefining it as a resource that can be bought, sold, and exploited for economic gain. The optimization of time has become a critical factor in achieving success and competitiveness. Seeing this phenomenon from the perspective of cultural theory, we see entrepreneurs and business leaders often portrayed as individuals who sacrifice sleep for productivity, embodying the ideal of relentless dedication to their goals. This cultural narrative reinforces the notion that sleep is a luxury that must be sacrificed in pursuit of success. Consequently, there is a societal pressure to minimize sleep and maximize waking hours, leading to a normalization of sleep deprivation. Moreover, the privatization of sleep extends beyond cultural perceptions to encompass physiological and biochemical dimensions. As individuals curtail their sleep to meet the demands of their work and

---

[223] Crary, *24/7 : Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep.*
[224] Galibert, *I cronòfagi : i 7 principi dell'ipercapitalismo.* [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

personal lives, they disrupt their natural sleep-wake cycles, leading to sleep deficits and associated health issues. To cope with the effects of sleep deprivation, many turn to various substances (deemed both legal and illegal) to artificially enhance alertness and cognitive function. The normalization of sleep deficits and the widespread use of stimulants underscore the extent to which sleep has been commodified and privatized in contemporary capitalist societies. As Crary observes:

> time for human rest and regeneration is now simply too expensive to be structurally possible within contemporary capitalism. Teresa Brennan coined the term "bioderegulation" to describe the brutal discrepancies between the temporal operation of deregulated markets and the intrinsic physical limitations of the humans required to conform to these demands [225]

As we delve deeper into the analysis of time in post-capitalist societies, it becomes evident that we are approaching the crux of the matter. At the heart of this examination lies the profound shift in the nature of time – it is no longer merely a possession or a measure of capital, but has become capital itself. In echoing Baudrillard's insights, we witness the culmination of this evolution as the endpoint of traditional political economy. The focus shifts from the accumulation and management of capital to a broader consideration of life in its entirety. This marks the true essence of human capital – an acknowledgment that time, in its multifaceted dimensions, encompasses the very fabric of existence and shapes the dynamics of societal structures. In this paradigm, the traditional boundaries between economic theory and the broader spectrum of human experience blur. To quote Negri: "time is no longer determined by any transcendent measure, any a priori: time pertains directly to existence" [226]. The end of political economy heralds a fundamental transformation in post-capitalist societies, where traditional modes of economic exchange give way to a total system of capitalist exchange. Within this framework, the notion of non-capitalist

---

[225] Crary, *24/7 : Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep.*
[226] Hardt and Negri, *Empire.*

exchange becomes obsolete as every interaction is reduced to a transaction between equivalents, governed by the imperatives of capital accumulation. In essence, all human activities and relations are subsumed under the logic of capital, blurring the distinction between economic transactions and other forms of social interaction. This all-encompassing commodification extends beyond the realm of traditional market exchanges to permeate every aspect of life, from social interactions to cultural expressions. As a result, the very fabric of society is reshaped by the primacy of capital, erasing the possibility of alternative modes of exchange and reinforcing the hegemony of capitalist ideology.

> The time of production – commodified time – is an infinite accumulation of equivalent intervals. It is irreversible time made abstract, in which each segment need only demonstrate by the clock its purely quantitative equality with all the others. It has no reality apart from its exchangeability. Under the social reign of commodified time, "time is everything, man is nothing; he is at most the carcass of time" [227]

In post-capitalist societies, time assumes a paradoxical status as both immeasurable and the ultimate equivalent. Unlike in traditional economic frameworks where time served as a metric for value and productivity, in the context of post-capitalism, time transcends such quantification. Instead, it becomes the all-encompassing medium through which all forms of human activity and exchange occur. This renders traditional measures of value obsolete, as time itself becomes the currency of exchange. This poses significant challenges to conventional notions of wealth and poverty, as well as to democratic principles centered around economic equality. Without a clear criterion for measuring production and reproduction in terms of time, the traditional metrics of wealth accumulation and economic prosperity lose their relevance. In this context, the political challenge lies in devising new frameworks for assessing value and redistributing resources that transcend

---

[227] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle.*

the limitations of capitalist exchange. Furthermore, the immeasurability of time complicates efforts to establish equitable distribution and democratic governance. In the absence of clear metrics, determining who should have access to resources and decision-making power becomes increasingly fraught. This underscores the need for innovative approaches to governance and resource allocation that prioritize inclusivity, sustainability, and the well-being of all members of society. In the realm of apparent leisure, it's essential to recognize that "time is not 'free' in leisure; it is expended" [228]. Before any theorization of a way out of this, it's imperative to develop a new vocabulary that reframes our understanding of time outside of capitalist parameters. Even when we perceive time as *free*, it carries implicit connotations of capitalist value and exchange. Therefore, by reimagining our language surrounding idle time, we can begin to redefine its significance and reclaim it from capitalist exploitation. Furthermore, we must liberate time from the abstraction imposed by its role as the ultimate equivalent in quantitative exchange. In capitalist systems, time becomes commodified and reduced to a measure of value, divorcing it from its inherent qualitative aspects.

> In our system, time can only be 'liberated' as object, as chronometric
> capital of years, hours, days, weeks, to be 'invested' by each person
> 'as he pleases'. It is already, therefore, no longer in fact 'free', since
> it is governed in its chronometry by the total abstraction which is
> that of the system of production [229]

In lack of a better phrasing: "the use-value which leisure desperately tries to restore, is that of being wasted" [230]. This is what Debord meant when he envisioned the spectacular society. Every effort to make use of our time is a spectacular effort.

---

[228] "Not as pure loss, because it is the moment, for the social individual, of a production of status. No one needs leisure, but all are charged to prove their freedom not to perform productive labour. [...] time which he cannot achieve, being, as he is, an object caught up in a definitively objectivized dimension of time". Baudrillard, "The Consumer Society : Myths and Structures."
[229] Baudrillard.
[230] Baudrillard.

> One can only 'exploit [*faire-valoir*] one's time', if only by making a spectacularly empty use of it [231]

Understanding time in post-capitalist societies is not merely a pursuit reserved for revolutionary agendas. Instead, it is a necessity for navigating the complex realities of contemporary existence within the hyperrealities of capitalist society. This approach lies at the heart of Capitalist realist theory, for example, which acknowledges the pervasive influence of capitalist ideology while seeking to comprehend and negotiate its intricacies. The aim is not necessarily to advocate for grand-scale revolutions or programmatic overhauls of the existing social order. Rather, it is to critically engage with the social world, to decipher its underlying logics, and to develop strategies for effectively navigating its terrain. By understanding the dynamics of time within post-capitalist societies, individuals can equip themselves with the tools needed to navigate the complexities of everyday life, to resist the seductive allure of spectacle and consumption, and to cultivate forms of agency and autonomy within the confines of capitalist hegemony. Moreover, recognizing the importance of understanding time in post-capitalist societies is crucial for averting potential social catastrophes. By engaging in the analysis of their time, individuals and communities can identify potential points of intervention, envision alternative futures, and work towards building more equitable and just societies. By embracing a nuanced understanding of time within post-capitalist societies, individuals can empower themselves to enact meaningful change, foster resilience, and navigate the currents of capitalist hyperreality with greater clarity and purpose. "It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory" [232]. We must engage in what Bourdieu defines "a general science of the economy of practices" [233]. This science must be

---

[231] Baudrillard.

[232] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, 1986, 241–258.

[233] Bourdieu.

capable of reappropriating the totality of the practices which, although objectively economic, are not and cannot be socially recognized as economic, and which can be performed only at the cost of a whole labor of dissimulation or, more precisely, euphemization, must endeavor to grasp capital and profit in all their forms and to establish the laws whereby the different types of capital (or power, which amounts to the same thing) change into one another [234]

Under this perspective we can, to a secular and sociological degree, update Walter Benjamin's claim on debt as a form of control: in post-capitalist societies debt "is also a capture of time, of our future" [235]. Under the lens of Bourdieu's framework of a "general science of the economy of practices," it becomes apparent that the pervasive influence of capital extends far beyond traditional economic transactions. This biopolitical device of debt engenders a collective sense of guilt among individuals who perceive themselves as unable to keep pace with the relentless demands of capitalist society. The pressure to constantly produce, consume, and accumulate becomes internalized, leading to feelings of inadequacy and anxiety about falling short of societal expectations. This collective guilt, compounded by the specter of an uncertain future shaped by indebtedness, weighs heavily on the individual psyche, contributing to a sense of psychological disarray. Franco "Bifo" Berardi's calls it *psychodeflation* [236]. Psychodeflation refers to a state of psychological deflation characterized by feelings of disillusionment, despair, and disconnection from reality. Indeed, within the confines of capitalist ideology, psychodeflation is often pathologized. From a capitalist realist standpoint, it becomes evident that the prevailing socio-economic system perpetuates conditions that are fundamentally disempowering and alienating for individuals. The relentless pursuit of productivity, consumption, and success, coupled with the erosion of social

---

[234] Bourdieu.
[235] Fisher, Ambrose, and Reynolds, *K-Punk : The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004-2016)*.
[236] See Franco Bifo Berardi, "Cronaca Della Psicodeflazione," 2020, https://not.neroeditions.com/cronaca-della-psicodeflazione/.

support networks and the commodification of everyday life, creates a pervasive sense of insecurity, instability, and disillusionment. In such a context, feelings of despair, hopelessness, and disconnection from reality may be seen as understandable reactions to a world that often seems indifferent to the well-being and flourishing of individuals. Moreover, we underscore the ways in which dominant narratives of success, happiness, and fulfillment serve to obscure the systemic inequalities and injustices that underpin society. In this light, psychodeflation and other forms of depression emerge not as individual pathologies to be treated and managed within the confines of capitalist ideology, but rather as symptomatic responses to a social and economic order. Those who struggle with psychodeflation are not only contending with their internalized sense of inadequacy but also navigating a socio-cultural landscape that marginalizes their experiences and reinforces normative standards of success and happiness.

The conception of time elucidated above exerts a profound ontological impact on the linearity and narrativity of human subjectification. Specifically, it causes the collapse of past, present, and future upon each other.

> The past, present, and future have not only collapsed into each other within the cultural sphere - forming, as Jameson argued, a postmodern pastiche devoid of sense - but have also triggered a bizarre material production process in which they mutually shape each other. [237]

In post-capitalist societies the prototypical figure to represent the individual is that of the specter, haunted by a sense of dispossession of the present (because the present is the time of capital) and a lack of projection into any temporal line, whether past or future. "What is important about the figure of the specter, then, is that it cannot be fully present: it has no being in itself

---

[237] Enrico Monacelli, "Manuale Anti-Pratico Di Ballardismo Applicato | Not," 2019, https://not.neroeditions.com/manuale-anti-pratico-ballardismo-applicato/.

but marks a relation to what is no longer or not yet" [238]. As specters, individuals inhabit a liminal space, caught between past, present, and future, yet unable to fully engage with any of these temporal dimensions due to the pervasive influence of capitalist ideology. "In spectacular time the past continues to dominate the present […] because dead labor continues to dominate living labor" [239]. To conclude the chapter – anticipating what will be said with clarity in the later pages – I advocate for a form of liberation from the dominion of capital that is not revolutionary in political or social terms, but rather operates on an aesthetic and ontological level. Drawing inspiration from the ideas of the situationists, I would advocate for the creation of temporary spaces of idleness as a form of resistance and reappropriation of our time. This concept can be likened to a guerrilla movement, where individuals strategically carve out moments and spaces in their lives to reclaim agency over their time and experiences. These spaces of idleness serve as sites of experimentation, imagination, and collective reimagining of social relations beyond the constraints of capitalist ideology. By engaging in acts of leisure, contemplation, and creative expression, individuals can disrupt the relentless pace of capitalist production and consumption, fostering moments of genuine connection, freedom, and fulfillment. This aesthetic approach to liberation offers a pathway towards reclaiming our humanity and redefining our relationship with time in post-capitalist societies. On his *Manifesto della pittura industriale*, Pinot Gallizio foresees a "tempo libero per libere energie antieconomiche" [240]. This is the goal of our guerrilla against time. Concluding on an ironic note, Mark Fisher describes another way to liberate our time. That would be spending our life in jail.

---

[238] Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life : Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014).
[239] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*.
[240] ("Free time for anti-economic free energies"), Pinot Gallizio, "Manifesto Della Pittura Industriale" (Alba, 1959).

> Only prisoners have time to read, and if you want to engage in a twenty-year-long research project funded by the state, you will have to kill someone [241]

Throughout this chapter, we have delved into the relationship between time and power in post-capitalist societies. Beginning with an examination of the technological advancements that have enabled the commodification and privatization of time, we have uncovered the mechanisms of biopolitical control that seek to harness time as a valuable resource for capital accumulation. Central to our exploration was the recognition of sleep as a critical frontier in the struggle against biopolitical control, as efforts to minimize sleep underscore the relentless drive for productivity and consumption. We have confronted the notion that time, once seen as a measure of value, has now become the very essence of capital itself, with profound implications for human subjectivity and social relations. In dissecting the convergence of time, leisure, production, and reproduction, we have exposed the collapse of temporal distinctions and the blurring of boundaries between work and leisure. Moreover, we have highlighted the insidious impact of psychodeflation – a state of psychological deflation stemming from the dissonance between societal expectations of happiness and the realities of contemporary life. Yet, amidst this pervasive sense of temporal enclosure, we have glimpsed the possibility of resistance – a guerrilla of sorts for the reappropriation of time as a site of aesthetic liberation. This pursuit of temporary spaces of idleness, rooted in the legacy of the situationists, offers a tantalizing glimpse of emancipation from the grip of capitalist temporality. As we bring this chapter to a close, it is evident that our journey is far from over. These nascent ideas of liberation serve as the precursor to a deeper exploration in the final chapter of our thesis, where we will delve further into the possibilities of reclaiming time as a fundamental terrain of human autonomy and creativity.

---

[241] Fisher, Ambrose, and Reynolds, *K-Punk : The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004-2016).*

2.6 – UBI SOLITUDINEM FACIUNT, PACEM APPELLANT [242]

"we keep going and we break down this present state of affairs to its core. It's so ugly that just living within it is enough to hate it" [243]

"it isn't the economy that's in crisis; the economy is the crisis; it's not that we can't get any work, it's that there's too much of it; all weighed in, it's not crisis but growth that's depressing us" [244]

In the upcoming chapter, we'll delve deep into the workings of psychopolitics and its governmentality of time. This section is dedicated to acknowledging the creation and ongoing development of a social order wholly committed to capitalist development – whose imperative is that of growth. We will examine how power structures manipulate time as a means of governing individuals and societies, shaping their perceptions, behaviors, and aspirations to align with capitalist interests. Through an exploration of various theoretical perspectives, we aim to unravel the complex interplay between power, ideology, and temporality in contemporary society. This exploration will be structured into four distinct sections, each shedding light on various dimensions of this complex phenomenon.

In the first section, we will offer an *ad hoc* definition of biopolitics, focusing primarily on the biopolitical productivity of power through positivity. This entails exploring how contemporary power structures operate through mechanisms of positivity rather than the negativity inherent in disciplinarian regimes. We will examine how power manages to assert its influence both locally and globally, thereby eluding localization. Additionally, we will delve into the strategies employed by power to defend its ideology through counterinsurgence operations. These operations encompass a variety of tactics aimed at suppressing dissent, undermining

---

[242] "They make a loneliness and they call it peace". Tacitus, *De Vita Agricolae*, *TA - TT* - Oxford University Press London, 1967), doi:LK - https://worldcat.org/title/63247117.

[243] Gigi Roggero, "Per Scomporre l'orologio Della Modernità," 2020, https://commonware.org/recensioni/scomporre-lorologio-della-modernita. [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

[244] Comitè Invisible, *The Coming Insurrection.*

opposition, and maintaining the status quo. This may involve the use of state apparatuses such as surveillance, censorship, and propaganda to control the flow of information and shape public discourse in favor of the dominant ideology. Counterinsurgence operations also extend to the co-optation of dissenting voices, where individuals or groups are coaxed or coerced into aligning with the interests of those in power, thereby neutralizing potential threats to the established order. By employing such tactics, power seeks to safeguard its ideological hegemony and perpetuate its dominance over society. In the second section, we will analyze freedom as a biopolitical device of positivity. Here, we will delve into how notions of freedom are constructed and manipulated by power structures to maintain control over individuals and societies. In the subsequent section, we will explore depression as the only sane reaction to the impossibility of freedom and its demands. Drawing from the insightful analyses of authors like Berardi and Fisher, we will delve into the ways in which contemporary socio-economic conditions contribute to the normalization of depression and its profound implications for both individual and collective psyche. Berardi and Fisher's perspectives offer valuable insights into the cultural and psychological dimensions of depression, highlighting how pervasive capitalist ideologies perpetuate a sense of inadequacy and disillusionment in modern society. Furthermore, we will incorporate Ehrenberg's socio-clinical perspective to enrich our understanding of the psychological effects of neoliberalism. Ehrenberg's nuanced analysis explores the interplay between individual subjectivity and broader socio-economic structures, shedding light on how neoliberal discourses of self-responsibility and productivity shape mental health experiences. By integrating Ehrenberg's socio-clinical lens, we seek to uncover the complex ways in which neoliberal governance produces and perpetuates psychological distress, while also examining potential avenues for resistance and collective empowerment. Through this interdisciplinary approach, we aim to offer a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted phenomenon of depression within the context of contemporary capitalism. Finally, the fourth section will delve into crisis as a form of life and government, which can also be

conceptualized as *stasis* following Agamben's insights. Here, we will draw upon the perspectives of authors like the Comité Invisible, exploring their post-debordian and anti-capitalist approach to society in the context of contemporary crises. Throughout these sections, we will refer to key authors and their theories, including Negri and Han, who have made significant contributions to our understanding of psychopolitics within contemporary society. Antonio Negri's work delves into power dynamics and resistance in the context of the Empire. Byung-Chul Han analyzes the subtleties of modern power structures and the influence of neoliberalism on subjectivity. Their theories will help us explore how power shapes individual and collective behavior through affective means, shedding light on the mechanisms of control and resistance in today's world.

It is crucial that we begin our exploration of psychopolitics and its governmentality of time by acknowledging the axiomatic nature of the ideology of growth. This is because, if capital can only survive by exploiting all forms of resources, time emerges as the latest and ultimate resource for the reproduction of capital. The commodification and exploitation of time represent the epitome of capital's appetite for accumulation, as every moment becomes a potential source of profit. Capitalist ideology is ontologically an axiomatic because "it operates on the basis of an unproven premise (the necessity of unlimited growth that enables capital accumulation)" [245]. This ideology of unlimited growth is a paradoxical force within modernity, simultaneously indispensable and perilous. Its necessity lies in its ability to sustain the massive scale of consumption – and thus production and reproduction – characteristic of contemporary global capitalism. By perpetuating the cycle of consumption, it fuels economic growth and ensures the continued functioning of capitalist systems on a global scale. However, the very essence of this ideology is also its downfall. Moreover, when the ideology of growth is applied indiscriminately across diverse socio-economic contexts, it exacerbates these detrimental effects, leading to systemic injustices and crises. While it promises prosperity and

---

[245] Berardi, "Cronaca Della Psicodeflazione."

progress, its unchecked pursuit ultimately results in social degradation, undermining the very foundations of human sustainability on a global scale. Galbraith provides a vivid metaphor for this:

> our situation is that of a factory which must be operated at top speed for three shifts and seven days a week even at some risk of eventual breakdown, not because the product is in demand—on the contrary, much ingenuity is required to clear the shipping platform—but because any lower rate of operation will leave some of the people in town without a livelihood [246]

Our worries and rituals in our everyday life are nothing more than the worries and charades that animate the characters in *Alice in Wonderland*. Fisher, via Miller, observes that:

> the ordinary world appears as a tissue of Nonsense, incomprehensibly inconsistent, arbitrary and authoritarian, dominated by bizarre rituals, repetitions and automatisms. It is itself a bad dream, a kind of trance. In the solemn and autistic testiness of the adults who torment and perplex Alice, we see the madness of ideology itself: a dreamwork that has forgotten it is a dream, and which seeks to make us forget too, by sweeping us up in its urgencies, by perplexing us with its lugubrious dementia, or by terrifying us with its sudden, unpredictable and insatiable violence [247]

In more recent times, we have witnessed notable examples of popular culture reflecting and critiquing the rituals and absurdities inherent in the capitalist axiom. One such example is Yorgos Lanthimos' film *Dogtooth* (*Kinodontas*), which has been the subject of critical analysis by theorists like Mark Fisher. The key message beneath the promise of ideology is: "If you stay inside, you are protected [...] The outside must be totally pathologized"

---

[246] Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*.
[247] Fisher, Ambrose, and Reynolds, *K-Punk : The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004-2016)*.

[248]. This evidently illustrates the heritage of Foucault's work on capitalist realists' account of power. One of the central messages that I aim to convey on my thesis is the realization that we are akin to characters in both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Dogtooth*. In these narratives, individuals are ensnared in elaborate charades and rituals that only hold meaning within the confines of capitalist exchange. The key of (temporary) liberation that emerges from this understanding is rooted in irony – a detachment from the prevailing norms and expectations imposed by capitalist ideology. Irony, in this context, becomes a tool for critical reflection and perspective-taking. By adopting an ironic stance towards our own behaviors and societal rituals, we can distance ourselves from the immediacy of capitalist logic and gain a broader, more anthropological view of our existence. Through this lens of irony and detachment, we become capable of observing the absurdity inherent in our lives under capitalism. We recognize the arbitrary nature of societal conventions and the performative nature of our interactions within capitalist systems. This heightened awareness opens up possibilities for resistance and subversion, as we challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin capitalist ideology. This view of irony as detachment can be found in Pirandello's essay *On humor* [249]. This form of irony enables us to recognize that "power is the selection and enforcement of one possibility among many, and simultaneously it is the exclusion (and invisibilization) of many other possibilities" [250]. Simultaneously, it entails the exclusion and invisibilization of many other potentialities. In essence, power dictates what is deemed acceptable, legitimate, or valid within a given societal framework, while relegating alternative perspectives, voices, and experiences to the margins or even rendering them entirely invisible. In

---

[248] Mark Fisher, "Dogtooth: The Family Syndrome," *Film Quarterly* 64 (June 2011): 22–27, doi:10.1525/FQ.2011.64.4.22.

[249] "Irony consists in never completely merging with one's own work, in never losing, even in moments of pathos, the awareness of the unreality of one's creations, in not becoming the dupe of the phantoms one has evoked, in smiling at the reader who allows himself to be taken in by the game, and also at oneself, who devotes one's life to playing". Luigi Pirandello, *L'umorismo : saggio, Scrittori italiani e stranieri TA - TT -*, 2a ed. aum (Firenze SE - 226 pages ; 20 cm.: L. Battistelli Firenze, 1920), doi:LK - https://worldcat.org/title/8449247. [A/N] This has been translated from Italian to English.

[250] Franco Bifo Berardi, *Futurability : The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility* (London: Verso, 2019).

contemporary society, power has evolved to take on the form of biopolitical production, marking a significant departure from the earlier paradigm of disciplinary control. This transition was first observed by Deleuze[251] and further elaborated upon by thinkers such as Byung-Chul Han. In this new paradigm, power operates not merely through mechanisms of discipline and coercion but through the cultivation and management of life itself. This is also on the same pattern as Weber's first depiction of capitalism – when he says that "the capitalism of to-day, which has come to dominate economic life, educates and selects the economic subjects which it needs" [252]. The evolution of power from disciplinary control to biopolitical production signifies a fundamental shift from the negativity of discipline to the positivity of biocapitalist production. Unlike the traditional disciplinary regime, which relied on mechanisms of coercion and punishment to regulate behaviour, the biopolitical approach empowers individuals with a sense of freedom and autonomy. Under this paradigm, individuals are encouraged to pursue their own goals and aspirations, fostering a sense of personal agency and self-determination. However, this apparent freedom comes with a caveat: individuals become their own controllers, subjecting themselves to the demands and imperatives of biocapitalist production. They become complicit in their own subjugation, unwittingly perpetuating the systems of power and domination that govern contemporary society. To quote Han:

> we find ourselves in a paradoxical situation. Technically, freedom means the opposite of coercion and compulsion. Being free means being free from constraint. But now freedom itself, which is supposed to be the opposite of constraint, is producing coercion. [...] Self-optimization and submission, freedom and exploitation, fall into one [253]

[251] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control ," *October* 59, no. Winter (1992): 3–7, doi:10.2307/778828.
[252] Max Weber and Talcott Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2010).
[253] Han, *Psychopolitics*.

Individuals are no longer mere subjects of external control but active participants in the construction and maintenance of biocapitalist systems.

> The neoliberal regime's technology of power takes on subtle, supple and smart forms; thereby, it escapes all visibility[254] [...] It proves so effective because it does not operate by means of forbidding and depriving, but by pleasing and fulfilling. Instead of making people compliant, it seeks to make them dependent [255]

Biopolitical production is, according to Negri, "the production of social life itself, in which the economic, the political, and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest one another" [256]. In line with the observations made in the chapter on the *Classe disagiata,* it becomes evident that the biopolitical production under contemporary capitalism is geared towards quantitative exchange. In this system, every relationship is reduced to a capitalist transaction. Whether in the realm of work, leisure, or personal interactions, the overarching logic of capitalism dictates that all interactions are primarily governed by economic[257] considerations. "As the entrepreneur of its own self, the neoliberal subject has no capacity for relationships with others that might be free of purpose" [258]. The new form of alienation extends fetishism from commodities to social relations. In fact, it transforms freedom itself into a new commodity, into a fetishized commodity. This is what Chicchi [259] identifies: a freedom without a master, a reduction of freedom to the status of a commodity to be produced and sold. It is freedom without responsibility [260], it is freedom as the pure expression of the will to enjoyment. Freedom is a product and, as such, it must be consumed as if it were a new commodity. In this sense, for post-Foucauldian theorists, the

---

[254] Once again, we echo the sinister findings of behavioral psychology. See: Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity.*
[255] Han, *Psychopolitics.*
[256] Also: "Empire not only manages a territory and a population but also creates the very world it inhabits. It not only regulates human interactions but also seeks directly to rule over human nature. The object of its rule is social life in its entirety, and thus Empire presents the paradigmatic form of biopower". Hardt and Negri, *Empire.*
[257] As we've seen, *economy* here refers to the entirety of human life – not only to material exchange.
[258] Han, *Psychopolitics.*
[259] Chicchi, *Soggettività smarrita : sulle retoriche del capitalismo contemporaneo.*
[260] On a Sartrean sense.

incessant production of freedom is the central phenomenon of neoliberal economy. In this neoliberal framework, freedom becomes synonymous with consumer choice and market participation, reinforcing the capitalist imperative of endless growth and accumulation. As a result, the promise of freedom becomes yet another tool of domination and exploitation in the hands of those who control the means of production and distribution. Drawing once again from Fisher for a cross-cultural comparison of the current state of freedom, we are "like the Old Testament Jews after they left the 'house of slavery': liberated from a bondage to which they have no wish to return but also abandoned, stranded in the desert, confused about the way forward" [261]. Alongside the commodification of freedom, happiness has emerged as a central aspiration and marker of success. It is portrayed as the ultimate validation of an ethical and fulfilled life in post-capitalist societies. Happiness is not just a personal pursuit but a moral imperative. Within this framework, any deviation from the pursuit of happiness is often pathologized. Moreover, the pressure to be happy creates a pervasive sense of anxiety and inadequacy among individuals who may struggle to attain or maintain a constant state of happiness. The relentless pursuit of happiness can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and self-doubt, especially when confronted with the inevitable challenges and hardships of life. In this way, the idealization of happiness can become a source of psychological distress and social alienation for those who do not fit into the prescribed mold of happiness. This pressure no longer leads to sadness or depression, which are still stigmatized and often invalidated. Instead of traditional depression, the prevailing existential trait is characterized by a sense of what Berardi calls *psychodeflation*.

> Tired of processing overly complex signals, depressed after excessive overstimulation, humiliated by the impotence of her decisions in the face of the omnipotence of the techno-financial automaton, the mind has lowered its tension. Not that the mind has decided

[261] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org.heismarriedandlivesinsuffolk.

anything: it is the sudden lowering of tension that decides for all. Psychodeflation. [262]

This psychodeflation represents a profound form of social alienation, where individuals feel disconnected from themselves. According to Ehrenberg: "The depressed individual is unable to measure up; he is tired of having to become himself" [264]. This state of psychodeflation starkly underscores the dispossession of time that we meticulously examined in preceding chapters. It encapsulates the profound exhaustion stemming from the relentless pressure to conform to the rhythm of capitalist production and consumption, which we previously elucidated. In this context, individuals find themselves drained of vitality ("The more I express myself the more I dry up. The more I run after it, the more tired out I get" [265]). The absence of linearity and narrativity in their existence – which we discussed in the previous chapters – leaves them adrift, devoid of a coherent sense of purpose or direction. As specters, they struggle to grasp a coherent sense of self. In the context of capitalist exchange, the notion of enjoyment becomes castrated due to the infinity of options presented to individuals at all times. Within this framework, each decision to pursue a particular possibility inevitably carries with it the implicit renunciation of countless other potential avenues. This accumulation is:

> the postponement of any actual enjoyment [...] Every expenditure, every purchase is first a forfeiture, relative to what money is capable of. Every specific enjoyment it allows one to acquire is first a negation of the set of other potential enjoyments it contains within it. In the epoch of human capital and living currency, every moment of life and every real relation are haloed by a set of possible equivalents that gnaw at them. Being here involves the untenable renunciation of being everywhere else [266]

---

[262] Berardi, "Cronaca Della Psicodeflazione."

[264] Alain Ehrenberg, *The Weariness of the Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016).

[265] Comitè Invisible, *The Coming Insurrection.*

[266] Comitè Invisible and Robert Hurley, *Now* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2017).

Rather than viewing depression as an isolated affliction afflicting individual minds, it becomes imperative to recognize it as a symptom of broader socio-political forces at play. The recharacterization of depression as a collective and systemic phenomenon, rather than solely an individual pathology, marks a crucial first step in addressing it correctly. This is a politicization of depression, which entails shifting the focus from the symptomatic outcomes to the underlying structural mechanisms that give rise to and perpetuate depressive conditions.

> How has it become acceptable that so many people, and especially so many young people, are ill? The 'mental health plague' in capitalist societies would suggest that, instead of being the only social system that works, capitalism is inherently dysfunctional, and that the cost of it appearing to work is very high [267]

This approach underscores the interplay between power dynamics, social structures, and individual subjectivities, highlighting how broader economic, political, and cultural forces shape mental health outcomes. The *palliative society* [268] depoliticizes pain by medicalizing and privatizing it, suppressing its social dimension. By leaving suffering solely to medicine, we lose its significance as a social sign. From this perspective, the path to liberation lies in rediscovering genuine presence and immediacy in our interactions. It entails breaking free from the relentless cycle of equivalent exchange that characterizes capitalist society. To achieve this, we must immerse ourselves fully in the present moment, embracing life as if we were at play. In this state, our engagement in play constitutes a form of guerrilla resistance against the hegemony of capitalist time. Within the realm of play, we inhabit temporary autonomous zones [269] where the conventional notions of time are suspended. Here, the rigid structures and constraints of time imposed by capitalist ideologies lose their grip, allowing us to transcend

---

[267] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*

[268] Byung-Chul Han, *La società senza dolore : perchè abbiamo bandito la sofferenza dalle nostre vite* (Torino: Einaudi, 2021).

[269] See: Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, 2009.

temporal boundaries and experience a sense of timelessness. On this account of play, "each thing, each being, each place is immeasurable inasmuch as it is there" [270]. The second approach to addressing depression is through a pragmatic and realist perspective, centered once again around irony. Rather than viewing depression as a pathological condition to be cured through individual therapy or medication, this perspective acknowledges it as a natural and sane response to the pressures and alienation inherent in post-capitalist society and its urban *milieu*. This stance aligns with the principles of capitalist realism, which accept the prevailing conditions of society as immutable and inescapable. From this viewpoint, rather than seeking to overcome depression, individuals are encouraged to embrace it as a symptom of their sanity in an insane world. In its extreme manifestations, even suicide can be rationalized as a logical response to the overwhelming pressures of existence within capitalist society.

Before even reaching the ecological limits of development, we have encountered the boundaries of its social dimensions [271]. This highlights the urgency of prioritizing the preservation of social and psychological well-being over the preservation of an environment that is inherently shaped by capitalist imperatives [272]. Thus, redirecting our attention towards fostering

---

[270] Comitè Invisible and Hurley, *Now*. Also from Comitè Invisible: "It's not the world that is going to end soon, it's we who are finished, amputated, cut-off, we who refuse vital contact with the real in a hallucinatory way. The crisis is not economic, ecological, or political, the crisis is above all that of presence." Comitè Invisible and Robert Hurley, *To Our Friends* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2015).

[271] Whereas we think that growth would kills *ecologically*, we should reconsider its *social* limits. This is the ongoing debate ever since Fred Hirsch published *Social limits to growth* as a compendium to *The limits to growth*, commissioned by the Club of Rome.

[272] I have dealt with this topic on another lecture that I have been giving these past years, titled *The social limits of ecology*. Here's the abstract: "This abstract aims at demystifying the ethical power of the ecological narratives. Connecting Baudrillard, Hirsch, and Coccia, I argue that ecology is one of the strongest devices of biopolitical power today – and we are actively fueling it under the illusion of good citizenship. Thinking ecologically literally means representing the Earth as a house. As Coccia suggests, this approach has flaws right from the start: first, it is fundamentally Christian and patriarchal. God is the father, and all his creatures live under the same roof. On such a house, there is always an idea of order that must be defended and enforced. This order is, of course, anthropocentric. Man is the only subject who can perturbate the equilibrium – for the better or for the worse. As for the rest, "they are always at home and can only be there. Their natural state is a state of quarantine for the course of their entire lives". This sense of domestication and election gave capital the basis to create a false new sense of scarcity – and, thus, a new ethical dimension. In an age when production (in Marxist terms) lost its meaning (this is the core idea behind the so-called end of work), thinking ecologically instates a new sense of crisis. To quote Baudrillard: "The crisis will enable the return of a lost referentiality to the economic code and will give the principle of production a

resilient communities, nurturing relationships of presence, and promoting mental and emotional wellness becomes imperative in the face of these social challenges. We have been experiencing this "endless end" [273], this "permanent state of exception" [274] for so long that "Everyday life has begun to pattern itself on the survival strategies forced on those exposed to extreme adversity" [275]. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that even when we engage in what we perceive as political action, such as participating in mass demonstrations and protests, we are still operating within the framework of capitalist exchange. As Ventura suggests, the political strength is always neutralized. Rather than effecting substantial change, protest tends to veer towards aestheticism, serving only as a symbolic gesture. A symbolic gesture that only serves capitalist purposes (for both the individual and the State). The urban space is a playground, and the game consists of destroying symbols of capitalism and confronting the police. A struggle that, being unable to be political due to its manifest abstraction, since it has been realized that capitalism is incurable, is resolved in pure aestheticism. "An aesthetics of disruption" [276], sabotage, and destruction.

> We just have to keep in mind that nothing different can come out of an assembly than what is there already. If, on the same plaza, thousands of strangers are brought together, who don't share anything apart from the fact of being there, we can't expect that anything more will emerge from it than what their separation authorizes [277]

Public political discontent, when expressed through its aesthetic guise, often amounts to nothing other than virtue signaling. It becomes a performance, a spectacle that we engage in when we participate in the

gravity that evaded it". A new self-referential, individualizing crisis so that consumption can still be justified. On such an ecological approach, there is a complete lack of focus towards the social. Maybe we should start reading again the great stoics and focus – with Hirsch – on our social limits. Nature doesn't care about man."

[273] Comitè Invisible and Hurley, *To Our Friends*.
[274] Comitè Invisible and Hurley.
[275] Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self. Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (London: Pan, 1985).
[276] Ventura, *La guerra di tutti : populismo, terrore e crisi della società liberale*.
[277] Comitè Invisible and Hurley, *To Our Friends*.

spectacle of politics. Participating in public displays of discontent allows us to position ourselves on what we perceive to be the right side of history. It gives us a sense of belonging to a movement or community fighting for justice or change. In this way, our engagement in political activism becomes more about self-affirmation and identity construction rather than genuine efforts to challenge systemic issues or effect meaningful transformation in society. It becomes nothing more than a form of self-expression within the confines of capitalist exchange. It is only when we recognize that politics does not reside within the hollow halls of Parliament buildings that we can reclaim our political agency. We need *political* action, not *politics* [278]. As we approach our *social limits* (or better: as we endlessly are on the verge of them), we find out that political action

> is much less about the relation between the friend and the enemy, and much more crucially about relations among nonfriends and nonenemies. It's about shifting alliances of convenience between heterogeneous class interests. It's about conflicts that can take many forms, only some of them open, many of them discreet [279]

This is the "true face of the end-of-the-world: journalists, waiting, and events that refuse to happen" [280].

In this chapter, we embarked on a journey to unravel the deep-seated mechanisms that underpin the hegemony of capital in post-capitalist societies. We began by exposing the axiomatic nature of capital, which serves as the ideological bedrock for the relentless pursuit of growth for its own sake. This axiom perpetuates the myth of perpetual expansion and drives the insatiable appetite of power to educate and mold its subjects according to its needs. In the landscape of post-capitalist societies, power has assumed a new guise as a productive force, operating through the subtle mechanisms of freedom. Here, freedom becomes the ultimate tool of control, as individuals are encouraged to pursue their desires and

---

[278] "'Politique' should never have become a noun. It should have remained an adjective. An attribute, and not a substance" Comitè Invisible and Hurley, *Now*.
[279] McKenzie Wark, *Capital Is Dead* (VERSO, 2021).
[280] Comitè Invisible and Hurley, *To Our Friends*.

aspirations within the confines of capitalist exchange. Paradoxically, this quest for freedom ultimately leads to a sense of perpetual discontent and unfulfilled expectations, as happiness remains forever elusive, tethered to an idealized future that never arrives. As specters in a world devoid of space and time, we find ourselves trapped in a cycle of deflation and exhaustion, weary of the ceaseless endeavor to become something more. In our quest for a human future, irony emerges as a powerful weapon, allowing us to detach ourselves from the illusions of selfhood and gain a critical perspective on the machinations of power. Our attempts at political action within the confines of the capitalist system are ultimately futile, as they merely serve to perpetuate the very ideology we seek to challenge. By reclaiming our agency and rejecting the seductive allure of capitalist exchange, we pave the way for playful temporary autonomous zones of enjoyment.
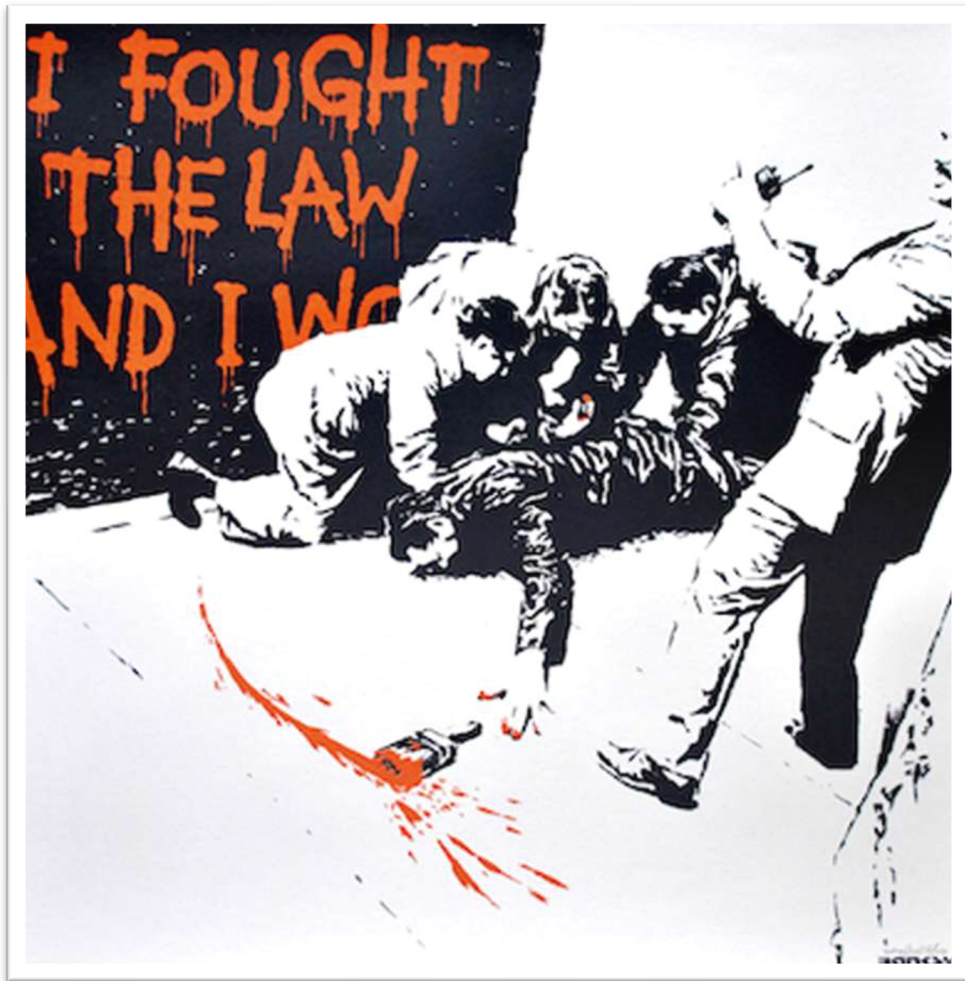
CHAPTER 3 – TO BE INVISIBLE OR NOT TO BE

Figure 1. Banksy

"There's no longer any place for innocence in this world. We only have the choice between two crimes: taking part in it or deserting it in order to bring it down" [281]

In embarking on this final chapter, I am confronted with what has proven to be the most challenging aspect of my intellectual journey. Personally, I find myself grappling with a profound sense of hypocrisy, stemming from the realization that in attempting to dismantle capitalist domination, I

---

[281] Comitè Invisible and Hurley, *Now*.

inadvertently contribute to its perpetuation. As academics, we are inherently positioned at the intersection of two opposing forces: coherence and production. On one hand, we should be committed to maintaining intellectual integrity and adhering to ethical principles, yet on the other hand, we cannot escape the reality that my work inevitably feeds into the capitalist system it seeks to critique. As I will elaborate on later, I posit that non-intelligibility serves as the cornerstone of a successful guerrilla strategy against capital. This assertion gives rise to a paradox: if "there is no language which can make our intentions comprehensible to the social order. Any move toward such comprehensibility would be a betrayal of the specific antagonistic character of our project against that social order"[282], then we are left with the dilemma of either embracing silence or embracing hypocrisy. This paradox underscores the inherent tension between authenticity and efficacy in challenging dominant power structures – especially from within the academia. What is certain is that any programmatic model "must be a rival to Capital, not a reaction to it" [283]. Nevertheless, it is also true that "every revolutionary opinion draws part of its strength from a secret conviction that nothing can be changed" [284]. Fortunately, from a capitalist realist perspective, both options are intelligible and legitimate (if approached ironically). Ironically enough, my generation (on this side of the world [285]) finds itself uniquely positioned to embrace both silence and non-standard forms of guerrilla resistance. It is our precariousness, stemming from the volatile and uncertain conditions of contemporary capitalism, that paradoxically equips us for life beyond its confines. Our ability to navigate the digital age also offers us new opportunities for clandestine forms of resistance, leveraging technology to communicate and organize beyond the reach of surveillance and control. This is a generation:

---

[282] Baedan, "Pure Negativity," *Journal of Queer Nihilism* 1 (2012).
[283] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*
[284] George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Penguin Books in association with Martin Secker & Warburg, 2001).
[285] All in all, we can identify this subject with the previously cited *classe disagiata*.

that is living quite well without all that fiction. A generation that never expected to get anything out of our rights according to workplace law, and even less out of the right to work. A generation that's not even 'precarious' as the most advanced fractions of leftist militancy like to theorize, because to be precarious is still to define yourself according to the sphere of work, in sum: according to its decomposition. We admit the necessity of getting money, regardless of the means, because it's impossible right now to do without it, but we don't admit the necessity of working [286]

A "politics of silence" [287] can be moved forward following the Deleuzian thematization, according to Han. This will be a fight "against neoliberal psychopolitics, which forces communication and disclosure" [288].

On the other side of the spectrum, we find the insurgence: the material guerrilla, the call to collective action. Unlike the solitary resistance of silence, this form of guerrilla warfare necessitates organization. It is a complex and programmatic endeavor that requires individuals to come together, forming alliances and solidarity networks. Indeed, the task of forming alliances and solidarity networks is immense, as it intersects with the fundamental need for a new language. Before individuals can effectively collaborate and work towards common goals, they must establish a shared understanding and vocabulary. In this form of resistance, individuals unite around shared goals and principles, leveraging their collective strength to challenge the structures of power and domination inherent in capitalism. It requires coordination, cooperation, and strategic planning to effectively mobilize and sustain momentum. It also involves redefining power, both ontologically and practically. To quote Negri – whose ideas on the *multitudo* definitely shaped this chapter – "truth will not make us free, but taking control of the production of truth will" [289]. In this guerrilla struggle, the new subject must be what Agamben theorizes as a *whatever singularity* [290] — a

[286] Comitè Invisible, *The Coming Insurrection*.
[287] Han, *Psychopolitics*.
[288] Han.
[289] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*.
[290] *Singolarità qualunque*. Giorgio Agamben and Michael Hardt, *The Coming Community* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

singular entity that eludes representation by any form of power. Power can recognize any claim of identity, even (and the history of relations between power and terrorism in our time is eloquent confirmation) that of another identity within itself [291]. But for singularities to form communities without claiming an identity, for men to belong without a representable condition of belonging, this is what the power cannot tolerate under any circumstances. The spectacle has parodistically realized Marx's project of a society without classes. For this reason, it will no longer be a struggle for the conquest or control of the power by new or old social subjects, but a struggle between the power and the *non-power*. This has nothing to do with the simple demand for the social against the nation States, which has long been the common motive of protest movements in our time. The *whatever singularity* in a spectacular society cannot form a *societas* because they do not have any identity to assert. That the unrepresentable exists and forms community without presuppositions or conditions of belonging, this is precisely the threat with which the power is not willing to come to terms [292].

> When repression strikes us, let's begin by not taking ourselves for ourselves [293]

The aim of this dis-identification is to confront the power on an equal level. It entails being recognized as adversaries by power.

> the idea of revolution as pure destitution [...] It's to make the government lower itself to the level of the insurgents, who can no longer be "monsters," "criminals," or "terrorists" but simply enemies. To force the police to be nothing more henceforth than a gang, and the justice system a criminal association [294]

---

[291] This is the history of any form of *mafia*, for example.
[292] This has been partially paraphrased from Giorgio Agamben, *I Situazionisti* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 1991).
[293] Comitè Invisible and Hurley, *To Our Friends*.
[294] Comitè Invisible and Hurley.

This perspective aligns with a Nozickian, anarchist interpretation[295]. These acts of insurgence serve to make power unjust. Power cannot help but react to the terrorist attack because, from a strictly material standpoint, they have suffered damage (economic, human, moral) that they must redress if they do not want to be ultimately annihilated. This insurgent strategy confines the options of the adversary within a double bind, forcing them to either do what the terrorist wants them to do: react, or what the terrorist wants them to do: suffer. We must resist the allure of globalization and recognize that everything is always local. It is *locally* that the counterinsurgency machine fights the dissidence [296]. The global order can be better understood as an order of *non-places*. Its perceived action lies not in its global reach but in its ability to exert control over the local on a global scale [297]. It is within these local spaces that resistance and alternatives to the dominant global order can be cultivated and nurtured. It is crucial to recognize that the counterinsurgency efforts are often framed as pursuits of peace, despite being characterized by pervasive violence. This paradoxical situation epitomizes the contemporary state of affairs: "a perpetual and universal peace outside of history" [298] juxtaposed with the reality of widespread violence. Peace serves as a smokescreen to conceal the inherent contradictions and injustices of the prevailing order. Meanwhile, violence remains deeply embedded within the fabric of society, perpetuating cycles of oppression and resistance. Nevertheless, the guerrilla of the *whatever singularity* does not seek to establish either peace or violence. Instead, its

---

[295] This interpretation refers to a perspective that draws from the ideas of Robert Nozick. In this context, it represents a contractual approach to social organization, contrasting with Hobbes' conception of the social contract. What sets Nozick's view apart is its historical dimension. Unlike Hobbes, who posited a hypothetical social contract as a means to escape the state of nature, Nozick's conception emphasizes real agreements made (and terminated) by individuals over time. These agreements are not based on the immunization of fight for glory but are rather economical in nature. Individuals enter into these agreements after weighing the costs and benefits, seeking to secure their own interests. In this framework, the state is not envisioned as the Leviathan. Instead, the state is purely an organization that holds a legitimate monopoly on violence, granted by the consent of the governed. Importantly, this legitimacy is contingent upon the continued consent of the individuals subject to its authority. If the state fails to uphold its end of the social contract or violates the rights of its citizens, individuals retain the right to revoke their consent and challenge the state's authority.
[296] "Everything is local, including the global, although we still need to localize it" Comitè Invisible and Hurley, *To Our Friends*.
[297] See: Tiqqun, *La comunità terribile - Sulla miseria dell'ambiente sovversivo* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2003).
[298] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*.

aim is chaos – an ontological chaos rooted in the impossibility of representation and definition. This form of chaos transcends the binary oppositions of peace and violence. In embracing chaos, the whatever singularity asserts its autonomy and freedom from the constraints of the current order of production (and reproduction). It disrupts the illusion of stability and certainty perpetuated by dominant discourses and institutions. It operates on the fringes of comprehension, evading capture and categorization, and creating openings for new ways of thinking and being in the world. Closing with Debord:

> The victory will go to those who are capable of creating disorder
> without loving it [299]

---

[299] Guy Debord, "Thèses Sur La Révolution Culturelle," *Internationale Situationniste* 1 (1958).

CONCLUSIONS

The research objectives outlined in the introduction were centered around three fundamental questions that drove the inquiry:

Firstly, the thesis delved into the notion of epistemic responsibility in the information age. In a world inundated with an unprecedented abundance of information yet plagued by attention scarcity, the aim was to unravel the implications for individuals' epistemological responsibility. This inquiry examined how individuals navigated the digital landscape, confronting challenges such as information overload, filter bubbles, and algorithmic biases. In the exploration of epistemic responsibility within the information age, it became evident that the traditional gatekeepers of knowledge no longer hold the same sway. In a landscape inundated with information yet plagued by attention scarcity, establishing new forms of meaning becomes paramount. The thesis underscored the necessity of finding new mechanisms for validating information, not as a means of asserting power, but rather as a way to foster understanding and coherence among individuals navigating this digital milieu[300]. Failure to establish such mechanisms risks plunging society into a state where trust is eroded, and everything becomes susceptible to both literal and metaphorical interpretation – at the same time. Indeed, this phenomenon encapsulates the essence of the meme culture that characterizes our contemporary era.

Secondly, attention was turned to the shifting dynamics of work and consumption in the era of human capital. As the economy increasingly commodifies the totality of life, individuals no longer possess capital; instead, they themselves become the capital. This is the real meaning of human capital. This transformation occurs as time emerges as the ultimate currency within capitalist exchange. The thesis delved into the profound transformations unfolding within labor practices, employment relationships, and consumption patterns. Through this exploration, it became evident that the boundaries between work, consumption, and

---

[300] Even when they are not actually on the internet.

leisure blur significantly, particularly in light of time emerging as the ultimate equivalent in capitalist exchange. Furthermore, our investigation revealed a notable shift in the nature of work in the advanced western context: it has transitioned from being productive to reproductive. In essence, individuals no longer contribute significantly to the production of goods, as this role is increasingly assumed by third-world labor and automation. Instead, their labor serves to reaffirm and sustain the prevailing capitalist order. Each engagement in capitalist exchange thus becomes an act of complicity in the perpetuation of capitalist ideology.

Finally, the thesis proposed two radical paths to navigate the post-capitalist landscape and its ramifications for individual subjectivity. These alternatives lie at opposite ends of the spectrum, yet both offer coherent approaches to addressing the current predicament. The first path involves embracing capitalist realism, acknowledging the absurdity of capitalism's axioms and its catastrophic nature over the long term. This approach advocates for a stance of silence and individual acts of urban disobedience, enabling individuals to assert their agency and position themselves on the right side of their personal history. The second path entails confronting power as merely one form of governance among many potential alternatives. By reframing power dynamics and compelling those in positions of authority to recognize alternative possibilities, individuals can pave the way for the emergence of a different future.

Throughout this thesis, the primary focus has been on providing readers with the analytical tools and conceptual frameworks necessary to navigate the complexities of contemporary society and the challenges it presents to individual identity and agency. From the outset, it was clear that the aim was not to offer prescriptive political or social solutions but rather to foster a deeper understanding of the intricacies of the modern condition. One of the key insights that emerged from this investigation is the recognition of the pervasive incoherence inherent in the structures of contemporary society. Rather than advocating for a singular ideology or revolutionary agenda, the goal has always been to provide readers with an ironical glimpse into their surroundings, challenging them to question established norms

and assumptions. In summary, the main contribution of this research lies in its provision of a distant [302] perspective on contemporary society, offering readers the tools to navigate its complexities and confront the inherent contradictions of the modern condition.

The findings of this research hold significant theoretical implications within the broader context of philosophical inquiry. By addressing themes typically relegated to cultural theory and sociology this study seeks to demand philosophical dignity for these subjects. While the research may align with a specific theoretical framework, notably a leftist post-Marxist and post-Foucauldian reading of society, the aim is to transcend ideological boundaries. Rather than being confined to the realm of leftist discourse, the hope is that this work will resonate with a diverse range of readers, regardless of their political affiliations. Even if I believe that, as the philosophical joke goes, "if you understand Marx, you're either anti-capitalist or you're a liar", the intention here is to invite critical engagement from all perspectives. Furthermore, the exploration of new forms of politics presented in the latter chapters opens up possibilities for political sciences. By challenging traditional notions of democracy and transcending the conventional left-right political spectrum, the research suggests the potential for a reimagining of political structures and practices. This has implications for political theorists and practitioners alike, offering insights into alternative modes of political engagement and organization that may better address the complexities of contemporary society.

The practical relevance of this research lies in its potential to challenge conventional notions of political participation and power dynamics. By reframing the modern State and capitalism as just one among many possibilities, this work opens up new avenues for political engagement and analysis. This message may be politically dangerous, as it suggests granting equal political dignity to a wide range of actors, including those traditionally marginalized or vilified by mainstream discourse. It acknowledges that power is not solely vested in established institutions but is also wielded by

---

[302] As if we were approaching it *anthropologically*.

individuals and groups through their choices and actions, whether consciously or inadvertently. While this perspective may be unsettling, particularly in its implications for how we perceive actors often labeled as 'terrorists' or 'extremists', it is essential for fostering a more nuanced understanding of political agency. It encourages us to recognize that all forms of political action, whether deemed legitimate or not by prevailing norms, have the potential to shape the social and political landscape.

In discussing the limitations and future directions of this research, it is important to acknowledge that certain topics were omitted from the thesis due to constraints of scope and focus. However, these areas represent promising avenues for future exploration and could potentially yield valuable insights through multidisciplinary inquiry.

One such topic is second-degree epistemology, which pertains to how individuals navigate and discern information in an era characterized by information overload and pervasive misinformation. This field of study delves into questions surrounding the verification and validation of information in an age where the sheer volume of data makes it impossible to verify everything at a reasonable cost (both economical and psychological).

Ecology and the environment also present rich terrain for future research. Building upon discussions that I held at conferences these past years, there is potential to delve deeper into the intersection of capitalism and environmentalism. This inquiry aims to interrogate the prevailing conception of environmental preservation, revealing how capitalist imperatives often shape and constrain efforts to safeguard the natural world.

Similarly, education and ideology offer fertile ground for further investigation, drawing upon insights from scholars such as Foucault and Illich. This line of inquiry explores education as a key site of ideological reproduction and biopolitical control in contemporary societies. By examining how educational institutions shape individuals' subjectivities and social roles, researchers can illuminate the ways in which education functions as the main biopolitical device for creating useful individuals.

In closing, I want to underscore the deeply personal and therapeutic nature of this work, which served as a form of introspection and self-reflection for me, first. Looking ahead to the future of my thesis, I envision it not only as a theoretical exploration but also as a catalyst for engaging with readers on a deeply personal level. My hope is that this work will resonate with individuals navigating the challenges of post-capitalist societies, providing them with insights and perspectives that resonate with their own lived experiences. By inviting readers to critically reflect on their own place within the broader socio-political landscape, I aspire to foster a deeper sense of self-awareness and acceptance. As I embark on my journey as a scholar, I am mindful of the uncertainties and challenges that lie ahead. The road ahead may be fraught with precariousness, but I am committed to embracing every setback as an opportunity for growth and learning. I recognize the existence of academia's meritocratic systems also because my thesis has delved into its structures and dynamics. Through my research, I have gained a nuanced understanding of the various forms of capital at play within academic circles, extending beyond mere intellectual prowess. These include social, cultural, and even economic capital, which collectively shape the distribution of recognition and prestige within scholarly communities. By critically examining these systems of meritocracy, I have come to appreciate the complexities and inequalities inherent in academic institutions. My research has illuminated how factors such as institutional affiliations, networks, and socio-economic background can influence one's academic trajectory and opportunities for recognition. This heightened awareness has deepened my understanding of the challenges and barriers that scholars face in navigating the academic landscape. Despite this, I remain steadfast in my dedication to producing meaningful scholarship and contributing to the advancement of knowledge within my field. In closing, I am grateful for the opportunity to embark on this intellectual journey and to share my insights with readers. I really hope that this work will spark self-acceptance and social recognition.

"Non ci arrendiamo/
semplicemente perché non possiamo" [303]

---

[303] "We don't give up/ Simply because we can't" Kaos, "-/-/-/-/- (L'attesa)" (Jackpot Records, 1999).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

QUOTED SOURCES

Agamben, Giorgio. *I Situazionisti* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 1991).

Agamben, Giorgio, and Michael Hardt. *The Coming Community* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

Baedan. "Pure Negativity." *Journal of Queer Nihilism* 1 (2012).

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation. Body, in Theory TA - TT -* (Ann Arbor SE - 164 p. ; 23 cm.: University of Michigan Press Ann Arbor, n.d.).

———. "The Consumer Society : Myths and Structures" (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2017).

———. *The System of Objects* ([S.l.]: Verso, 2020).

Baudrillard, Jean, and Iain Hamilton Grant. *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (SAGE Publications, 2017).

Bauman, Zygmunt, and David Lyon. *Liquid Surveillance : A Conversation* (New York: Polity, 2016).

Beck, Ulrich, and Mark Ritter. *Risk society : towards a new modernity*, 2013.

Berardi, Franco Bifo. "Cronaca Della Psicodeflazione," 2020. https://not.neroeditions.com/cronaca-della-psicodeflazione/.

———. *Futurability : The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility* (London: Verso, 2019).

———. *La Fabbrica Dell'infelicità : New Economy e Movimento Del Cognitariato* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2001).

Bey, Hakim. *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, 2009.

Bobbio, Norberto. *Eguaglianza e Libertà* (Torino: Einaudi, 2009).

———. *The Future of Democracy : A Defence of the Rules of the Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

Boltanski, Luc, Ève Chiapello, and Gregory Elliott. *The New Spirit of*

Capitalism (Roma: VERSO Books, 2018).

Bourdieu, Pierre. "The Forms of Capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, 1986, 241–258.

Boyd, Danah. "Dear Voyeur, Meet Flâneur… Sincerely, Social Media." *Surveillance and Society* 8, no. 4 (2011): 505–507. https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v8i4.4187.

Brynjolfsson, Erik, and Andrew McAfee. *The Second Machine Age : Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016). https://www.worldcat.org/title/second-machine-age-work-progress-and-prosperity-in-a-time-of-brilliant-technologies/oclc/1110857170&referer=brief_results.

Camatte, Jacques. *Against Domestication* (Kitchener, Ontario, Canada: Falling Sky Books, 1981).

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus* (New York: VINTAGE, 2018).

Casati, Roberto. *Contro Il Colonialismo Digitale : Istruzioni per Continuare a Leggere* (Bari: Laterza, 2014).

Chicchi, Federico. *Soggettività smarrita : sulle retoriche del capitalismo contemporaneo* (London: B. Mondadori, 2012).

Chicchi, Federico, and Anna Simone. *La società della prestazione* (Ediesse, 2017).

Comitè Invisible. *The Coming Insurrection*, 2007.

Comitè Invisible, and Robert Hurley. *Now* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2017).

———. *To Our Friends* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2015).

Constantiou, Ioanna D., and Jannis Kallinikos. "New Games, New Rules: Big Data and the Changing Context of Strategy." *Journal of Information Technology* 30, no. 1 (March 2015): 44–57. https://doi.org/10.1057/jit.2014.17.

Crary, Jonathan. *24/7 : Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2014).

Currid-Halkett, Elisabeth. *The sum of small things : a theory of the aspirational class* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton university press, 2012).

Debord, Guy. *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, 1978.

———. *The Society of the Spectacle* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014).

———. "Thèses Sur La Révolution Culturelle." *Internationale Situationniste* 1 (1958).

Deleuze, Gilles. "Postscript on the Societies of Control ." *October* 59, no. Winter (1992): 3–7. https://doi.org/10.2307/778828.

Domingos, Pedro. *The Master Algorithm : How the Quest for the Ultimate Learning Machine Will Remake Our World* (New York: Basic books, 2018).

Ehrenberg, Alain. *The Weariness of the Self : Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016).

Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009). http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org.heismarriedandlivesinsuffolk.

———. "Dogtooth: The Family Syndrome." *Film Quarterly* 64 (June 2011): 22–27. https://doi.org/10.1525/FQ.2011.64.4.22.

———. *Ghosts of My Life : Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014).

Fisher, Mark, Darren C Ambrose, and Simon Reynolds. *K-Punk : The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004-2016)*, 2018.

Floridi, Luciano. *Information: A Very Short Introduction. Essays in Philosophy*. Vol. 11 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). http://commons.pacificu.edu/eip/.

———. *The Ethics of Information* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

———. *The Onlife Manifesto. Being Human in a Hyperconnected Era* (Cham: Springer Open, 2015).

Foti, Alex. *General Theory of the Precariat : Great Recession, Revolution, Reaction* (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2017).

Frank, Robert H., and Philip J. Cook. *The Winner-Take-All Society : Why the Few at the Top Get so Much More than the Rest of Us. Journal of ...* (New York: Virgin Books, 2010).

Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

Fumagalli, Andrea. *Bioeconomia e Capitalismo Cognitivo : Verso Un Nuovo Paradigma Di Accumulazione*. 2. rist. (Roma: Carocci, 2007).

Gaggi, Massimo. *Homo Premium : Come La Tecnologia Ci Divide* (Bari: Laterza, 2018).

Galbraith, John Kenneth. *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971).

Galibert, Jean-Paul. *I cronòfagi : i 7 principi dell'ipercapitalismo* (Viterbo: Stampa Alternativa, 2015).

Gallizio, Pinot. "Manifesto Della Pittura Industriale" (Alba, 1959).

Garfinkel, Simson. *Database Nation : The Death of Privacy in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: O'Reilly, 2000).

Habermas, Jürgen, Ciaran Cronin, and Pablo De Greiff. *The Inclusion of the Other : Studies in Political Theory* (Oxford: Polity, 2005).

Han, Byung-Chul. *La società senza dolore : perchè abbiamo bandito la sofferenza dalle nostre vite* (Torino: Einaudi, 2021).

———. *Psychopolitics* (London: VERSO Books, 2017).

Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

Hirsch, Fred. *Social Limits to Growth*, 2015.

Ippolita. *Tecnologie del dominio : lessico minimo di autodifesa digitale* (London: Meltemi, 2017).

Jenkins, Henry, Brad Seawell, and David Thorburn. *Democracy and New Media* (London: The MIT Press, 2004). https://www.worldcat.org/title/democracy-and-new-media/oclc/1026108286&referer=brief_results.

Kaos. "-/-/-/-/- (L'attesa)" (Jackpot Records, 1999).

Keen, Andrew. *The Cult of the Amateur : How Blogs, Myspace, YouTube and the Rest of Today's User-Generated Media Are Destroying Our Economy, Our Culture, and Our Values (Book, 2011) [WorldCat.Org]* (London: Nicholas Brealey, 2011). https://www.worldcat.org/title/cult-of-the-amateur-how-blogs-myspace-youtube-and-the-rest-of-todays-

user-generated-media-are-destroying-our-economy-our-culture-and-
our-values/oclc/844944525&referer=brief_results.

Kierkegaard, Søren, and Alastair Hannay. *Either/or : A Fragment of Life.*
Penguin Classics TA - TT - (London, England SE: Penguin Books London,
England, 1992). https://doi.org/LK -
https://worldcat.org/title/27084685.

Klonick, Kate. "The New Governors: The People, Rules, and Processes
Governing Online Speech." *Harvard Law Review* 131, no. 6 (April 2018):
1599–1670.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324645451_The_new_gover
nors_The_people_rules_and_processes_governing_online_speech.

Lasch, Christopher. *The Minimal Self. Psychic Survival in Troubled Times*
(London: Pan, 1985).

Lyon, David. "9/11, Synopticon, and Scopophilia: Watching and Being
Watched." In *The New Politics of Surveillance and Visibility* (University
of Toronto Press, 2005), 35–54.
https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442681880-002.

Marder, Ben, Adam Joinson, Avi Shankar, and David Houghton. "The
Extended 'chilling' Effect of Facebook: The Cold Reality of Ubiquitous
Social Networking." *Computers in Human Behavior* 60 (July 2016): 582–
592. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.02.097.

Marx, Karl. *Grundrisse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books in association
with New Left Review, 1973).

McIntyre, M.G. "Do What You Love and You Will Never Stop Working | The
Outline," June 2019. https://theoutline.com/post/6978/doing-what-
you-love-is-hard-work?utm_source=contributor_pages.

McLuhan, Marshall. "The Agenbite of Outwit." *McLuhan Studies* 2 (1998).

McLuhan, Marshall, and Quentin Fiore. *The Medium Is the Massage*
(Toronto: Random House, 1967).

McLuhan, Marshall, and Bruce R. Powers. *The Global Village :*
Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century (Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 1989).

Monacelli, Enrico. "Manuale Anti-Pratico Di Ballardismo Applicato | Not,"

2019. https://not.neroeditions.com/manuale-anti-pratico-ballardismo-applicato/.

Moretti, Enrico. *The New Geography of Jobs* (Boston Mass.: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013).

Origgi, Gloria. *La reputazione : chi dice cosa di chi* (London: EGEA, 2016).

Orwell, George. *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Penguin Books in association with Martin Secker & Warburg, 2001).

Pariser, Eli. *The Filter Bubble : What the Internet Is Hiding from You* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

Pirandello, Luigi. *L'umorismo : saggio. Scrittori italiani e stranieri TA - TT -*. 2a ed. aum. (Firenze SE - 226 pages ; 20 cm.: L. Battistelli Firenze, 1920). https://doi.org/LK - https://worldcat.org/title/8449247.

Roggero, Gigi. "Per Scomporre l'orologio Della Modernità," 2020. https://commonware.org/recensioni/scomporre-lorologio-della-modernita.

Rudder, Christian. *Dataclysm : Who We Are When We Think No One's Looking*. 1st Editio. (New York: Crown, 2014).

Schmidt, Eric, and Jared Cohen. *The New Digital Age : Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business* (London: Murray, 2014).

Schumpeter, Joseph A. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2015).

Skinner, B. F. *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

Spielberg, Steven. *Minority Report* (20th Century Fox, 2002).

Tacitus. *De Vita Agricolae. TA - TT -* (London SE - xii, 344 p., 8 p. plates : illustrations, krt. ; 20 cm: Oxford University Press London, 1967). https://doi.org/LK - https://worldcat.org/title/63247117.

Tiqqun. *La comunità terribile - Sulla miseria dell'ambiente sovversivo* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2003).

Veblen, Thorstein, and Martha Banta. *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Oxford: Oxford Univ Press, 2009).

Ventura, Raffaele Alberto. *La guerra di tutti : populismo, terrore e crisi della società liberale* (Roma: Minimum fax, 2019).

———. *Teoria Della Classe Disagiata* (Roma: Minimum fax, 2017).

Wallerstein, Immanuel M. *World-Systems Analysis : An Introduction* (London: Duke University Press, 2007).

Wark, McKenzie. *Capital Is Dead* (VERSO, 2021).

Weber, Max, and Talcott Parsons. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 2010).

Weinberger, David. *Everything Is Miscellaneous : The Power of the New Digital Disorder* (New York: Times Books / Henry Holt, 2008).

Wilde, Oscar. "A Woman of No Importance" (Garfield Heights, OH: Duke Classics, 2013). https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=D28D8B13-2375-4F8E-892D-109F64D4F406.

———. "Complete Works of Oscar Wilde," 2015. https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=27D1B7E5-A68B-4A4D-9DCB-BFD01F33E321.

Williams, James. *Stand out of Our Light : Freedom and Resistance in the Attention Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Wu, Tim. *The Attention Merchants : The Epic Scramble to Get inside Our Heads*. Fourth pri. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017).

Zuboff, Shoshana. "Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization." *Journal of Information Technology* 30, no. 1 (March 2015): 75–89. https://doi.org/10.1057/jit.2015.5.

———. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism : The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019).

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Amin, Samir. *Unequal Development : An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*. 1. Indian. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979).

Arrow, Kenneth J. "Higher Education as a Filter." *Journal of Public Economics* 2, no. 3 (July 1973): 193–216. https://doi.org/10.1016/0047-2727(73)90013-3.

Arrow, Kenneth J. *Social Choice and Individual Values*. 2. print. (New York: John Wiley, 1963).

Augé, Marc. *Nonluoghi : introduzione a una antropologia della surmodernità* (Milano: Elèuthera, 2014).

Balkin, Jack M. "Free Speech in the Algorithmic Society: Big Data, Private Governance, and New School Speech Regulation." *UC Davis Law Review*, October 2017. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3038939.

Balkin, Jack M. "Digital Speech and Democratic Culture: A Theory of Freedom of Expression for the Information Society." *New York University Law Review* 79, no. 1 (2004). https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.470842.

Bascetta, Marco. "L'epoca della dis-retribuzione." In *Salari rubati : economia politica e conflitto ai tempi del lavoro gratuito* (Verona: Ombre corte, 2017).

Beck, Ulrich, and Mark Ritter. *Risk society : towards a new modernity*, 2013.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* ([United States?]: Prism Key Press, 2010).

Benjamin, Walter. "Some Reflections on Kafka." In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007).

Bobbio, Norberto. *The Future of Democracy : A Defence of the Rules of the Game* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

Bobbio, Norberto. *Liberalismo e Democrazia* (London: Simonelli, 2006).

Bogost, Ian. "Exploitationware." In *Rhetoric/Composition/Play through Video Games* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013), 139–147. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137307675_11.

Busacca, Maurizio. *Lavoro Totale. Il Precariato Cognitivo Nell'era Dell'auto-Imprenditorialità e Della Social Innovation* (Doppiozero, 2015).

Coccia, Emanuele. "Reversing The New Global Monasticism," 2020. https://fallsemester.org/2020-1/2020/4/17/emanuele-coccia-escaping-the-global-

monasticism?fbclid=IwAR0j9vkSaIO8igyr7_A9UnIFNCtxFg28Vjy26b
DiXsYOpFxdM-DU-1focII.

Debord, Guy. "Abat-Faim." *Éditions de l'Encyclopédie Des Nuisances*, no. 5 (1985).

Debord, Guy. "The Sick Planet," 1971.

Debord, Guy. *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle* (London: Verso, 1998).

Deleuze, Gilles, and Antonio Negri. "# DELEUZE /// Control and Becoming: A Conversation between Toni Negri and Gilles Deleuze," 2011. https://thefunambulist.net/editorials/philosophy-control-and-becoming-a-conversation-between-toni-negri-and-gilles-deleuze.

Derrida, Jacques, and Peggy Kamuf. "Specters of Marx. The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International" (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012).

Didino, Gianluca. "I Fantasmi Della Nostra Epoca," 2020. https://www.indiscreto.org/appunti-di-hauntologia-come-i-fantasmi-caratterizzano-la-nostra-epoca/.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

Esposito, Roberto, Vanessa Lemm, and Rhiannon Noel Welch. "Terms of the Political : Community, Immunity, Biopolitics" (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013). http://site.ebrary.com/id/10611579.

Esposito, Roberto. *Communitas : The Origin and Destiny of Community* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010).

Esposito, Roberto. *Termini della politica. 1. Comunità, immunità, biopolitica* (London: Mimesis, 2018).

Federici, Silvia. "Caliban and the Witch : Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation" (Penguin Books, 2021). https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=ACBAB28C-BCA8-4625-8557-1AA06AAAF883.

Fincher, David. *Fight Club* (Fox 2000 Pictures, 1999).

Florida, Richard L. *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

Florida, Richard L. *The New Urban Crisis : How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle Class-- and What We Can Do about It* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

Foucault, Michel. *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003).

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 2020).

Foucault, Michel. "The Political Function of the Intellectual." *Politique Hebdo*, no. 247 (1976).

Foucault, Michel, and Michel Senellart. *The Birth of Biopolitics Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Garton, Vincent. "Leviathan Rots - Urbanomic." Accessed February 21, 2020. https://www.urbanomic.com/document/leviathan-rots/.

Gerbaudo, Paolo. "The Age of the Hyperleader: When Political Leadership Meets Social Media Celebrity." Accessed February 27, 2020. https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/media/2019/03/age-hyperleader-when-political-leadership-meets-social-media-celebrity.

Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).

Graeber, David. "Of Flying Cars and the Declining Rate of Profit," 2012. https://thebaffler.com/salvos/of-flying-cars-and-the-declining-rate-of-profit.

Harvey, David. "The Right to the City." *New Left Review*, no. 53 (2008): 23–40.

Harvey, David. "A Brief History of Neoliberalism" (Oxford University Press, 2005). https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uqac-ebooks/detail.action?docID=4963818.

Head, Simon. *The New Ruthless Economy: Work and Power in the Digital Age. The New Ruthless Economy: Work and Power in the Digital Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195179835.001.0001.

Hoffman, Abbie. *Steal This Book*, 1970.

Illich, Ivan. *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

Illich, Ivan. *Tools for Conviviality* (London: Fontana, 1979).

Ivain, Gilles. "Formulaire Pour Un Urbanisme Nouveau." *Internationale Situationniste* 1 (1958).

Kriss, Sam. "Teenage Bloodbath: The 2010s in Review," 2020. https://samkriss.com/2020/01/05/teenage-bloodbath-the-2010s-in-review/.

Lanthimos, Yorgos. *Κυνόδοντας* (Boo Productions, 2009). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1379182/releaseinfo?ref_=tt_dt_dt#akas.

Lanthimos, Yorgos. *Alpeis* (Haos Film, 2011). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1859446/companycredits?ref_=tt_dt_co.

Lorusso, Silvio. *Entreprecariat : siamo tutti imprenditori, nessuno è al sicuro* (Brescia: Krisis Publishing, 2018).

Luhmann, Niklas. *Risk: A Sociological Theory* (New York: A. de Gruyter, 1993).

Lund, Arwid. "A Contribution to a Critique of the Concept Playbour." In *Reconsidering Value and Labour in the Digital Age* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015).

Mackay, Robin, and Mark Fisher. "Pomophobia (with Mark Fisher)." *Swarm*, no. 4 (1996).

Marazzi, Christian. *Il posto dei calzini : la svolta linguistica dell'economia e i suoi effetti sulla politica* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999).

Marazzi, Christian, and Sylvere Lotringer. *Autonomia : Post-Political Politics* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Semiotext(e), 2007).

Marroni, Aldo. "Della moneta estetica." In *La moneta vivente* (Milano: Mimesis, 2008).

McDonald, Aleecia M., and Lorrie F. Cranor. "The Cost of Reading Privacy Policies." *A Journal of Law and Policy for the Information Society* 4, no. 3 (2008): 543–545. https://kb.osu.edu/handle/1811/72839.

Metahaven. *Can Jokes Bring down Governments? : Memes, Design and Politics*, 2013.

Merrin, William. "'Did You Ever Eat Tasty Wheat?': Baudrillard and The Matrix." *Scope: An Online Journal of Film Studies*, 2003.

Mezza, Michele, Roberto Amen, and Tonino Satta. "1977: L'anno Che Non Finì" (Italy: RaiDue, 1997).

Milanović, Branko. *Global Inequality : A New Approach for the Age of Globalization* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018).

Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects : Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

Negarestani, Reza. "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin (Reading Applied Ballardianism) – Toy Philosophy." Accessed February 21, 2020. https://toyphilosophy.com/2018/08/09/mene-mene-tekel-upharsin-reading-applied-ballardianism/.

Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Wiley, 2015).

Pellegrino, Vincenza. *R/Esistenze Precarie : Lavoratori Universitari e Capitalismo Cognitivo* (Verona: Ombre corte, 2016).

Rand, Ayn. *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: Signet, 1964).

Reich, Wilhelm. *The Function of the Orgasm : Sex-Economic Problems of Biological Energy* (London: Souvenir Press (E & A), 1983).

Rifkin, Jeremy. *The Zero Marginal Cost Society : The Internet of Things, the Collaborative Commons, and the Eclipse of Capitalism*, 2015.

Rifkin, Jeremy. *The End of Work : The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995).

Ritzer, George. *Enchanting a Disenchanted World : Continuity and Change in the Cathedrals of Consumption*. 3rd editio. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014).

Shafique, Tanzil. "Towards 'Antifragile Urbanism': Beyond the Fragility of Utopia and the Robustness of Resilience." *Studio Magazine on Architecture and Urbanism* 9 (2019).

Shankar Jha, Prem, and Eric John Hobsbawm. *The Twilight of the Nation State Globalization, Chaos and War* (London; Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006).

Smail, David J. *Power, Interest and Psychology Elements of a Social Materialist Understanding of Distress* (Ross-on-Wye: PCCS Books, 2005).

Standing, Guy. *The Precariat : the New Dangerous Class.* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC ;, 2014).

Tiqqun. *Theses on the Terrible Community*, 2001.

Wallerstein, Immanuel M. *World-Systems Analysis : An Introduction* (London: Duke University Press, 2007).

Ward, Adrian F., Kristen Duke, Ayelet Gneezy, and Maarten W. Bos. "Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity." *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* 2, no. 2 (April 2017): 140–154. https://doi.org/10.1086/691462.

Wolf Bukowski. *La buona educazione degli oppressi : piccola storia del decoro*, 2019.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Courage of Hopelessness : Chronicles of a Year of Acting Dangerously* (London: Penguin Books, 2018).

Zizek, Slavoj. *The Parallax View* (London: MIT, 2009).