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*Protect me from what I want.*

Jenny Holzer

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## The Crisis of Freedom

### The Exploitation of Freedom

Freedom will prove to have been merely an interlude. Freedom is felt when passing from one way of living to another – until this too turns out to be a form of coercion. Then, liberation gives way to renewed subjugation. Such is the destiny of the *subject*; literally, the ‘one who has been cast down’.

Today, we do not deem ourselves subjugated *subjects*, but rather *projects*: always refashioning and

reinventing ourselves. A sense of freedom attends passing from the state of subject to that of project. All the same, this projection amounts to a form of compulsion and constraint – indeed, to a *more efficient kind of subjectivation and subjugation*. As a project deeming itself free of external and alien limitations, the *I* is now subjugating itself to internal limitations and self-constraints, which are taking the form of compulsive achievement and optimization.

We are living in a particular phase of history: freedom itself is bringing forth compulsion and constraint. The freedom of *Can* generates even more coercion than the disciplinarian *Should*, which issues commandments and prohibitions. *Should* has a limit. In contrast, *Can* has none. Thus, the compulsion entailed by *Can* is unlimited. And so 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. Psychic maladies such as depression and

burnout express a profound crisis of freedom. They represent pathological signs that freedom is now switching over into manifold forms of compulsion.

Although the achievement-subject deems itself free, in reality it is a slave. In so far as it willingly exploits itself without a master, it is an *absolute slave*. There is no master forcing the achievement-subject to work. Yet all the same, it is absolutizing *bare life* and *labour*. Bare life and labour form two sides of the same coin. Health represents the ideal of bare life. Today's neoliberal slave lacks the sovereignty – indeed, the freedom – of the master who, according to Hegel's dialectic, performs no labour at all and *only enjoys*. For Hegel, the *sovereignty of the master* derives from his rising above bare life and risking death itself in the process. Such *excess* – living and enjoying beyond measure – is alien to the slave, who worries only about bare life. But counter to what Hegel assumed, labouring does not make the slave free. The slave remains enslaved to labour. Now, the slave is forcing the master to work too.

Today's dialectic of master and slave means the totalization of labour.

As the entrepreneur of its own self, the neoliberal subject has no capacity for relationships with others that might be *free of purpose*. Nor do entrepreneurs know what purpose-free friendship would even look like. Originally, being free meant *being among friends*. 'Freedom' and 'friendship' have the same root in Indo-European languages. Fundamentally, freedom signifies a *relationship*. A real feeling of freedom occurs only in a fruitful relationship – when being with others brings happiness. But today's neoliberal regime leads to utter isolation; as such, it does not really free us at all. Accordingly, the question now is whether we need to redefine freedom – to reinvent it – in order to escape from the fatal dialectic that is changing freedom into coercion.

Neoliberalism represents a highly efficient, indeed an intelligent, system for exploiting freedom. Everything that belongs to practices and expressive forms of liberty – emotion, play and

communication – comes to be exploited. It is inefficient to exploit people against their will. Allo-exploitation yields scant returns. Only when freedom is exploited are returns maximized.

It is interesting to note that Marx also defines freedom in terms of a successful relationship to others: 'Only in community [with others does each] individual [have] the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible.'<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, being free means nothing other than *self-realization with others*. Freedom is synonymous with a working community (i.e., a successful one).

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'.<sup>2</sup> 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.’<sup>3</sup>

The *freedom of Capital* achieves self-realization by way of individual freedom. In the process, individuals degrade into the genital organs of Capital. Individual freedom lends it an ‘automatic’ subjectivity of its own, which spurs it to reproduce actively. In this way, Capital continuously ‘brings forth living offspring’.<sup>4</sup> Today, individual freedom is taking on excessive forms; ultimately, this amounts to nothing other than the *excess of Capital itself*.

### The Dictatorship of Capital

At a certain level of development, according to Marx, the forces of production (human labour, modes of work and the material means available)

come into conflict with the dominant relations of production (conditions of ownership and domination). Contradiction arises because the forces of production never stop evolving. Thus, industrialization brings forth new forces of production that come into conflict with structures of ownership and government that still resemble feudal conditions. In turn, this contradiction entails social crises: pushes to change the relations of production. For Marx, the contradiction is to be eliminated by way of the proletariat’s struggle against the bourgeoisie – which will bring forth a communist social order.

But counter to what Marx assumed, communist revolution cannot resolve the contradiction between forces of production and relations of production. The contradiction admits no dialectical *Aufhebung*. Capitalism can always escape into the future precisely because it harbours permanent and inherent contradiction. Accordingly, industrial capitalism has now *mutated* into neoliberalism and financial capitalism, which are implementing a

post-industrial, immaterial mode of production – instead of turning into communism.

As a mutant form of capitalism, neoliberalism transforms workers into *entrepreneurs*. It is not communist revolution that is now abolishing the allo-exploited working class – instead, neoliberalism is in the course of doing so. 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*.

The cooperative ‘Multitude’ that Antonio Negri has exalted as the post-Marxist successor to the ‘proletariat’ does not describe the contemporary mode of production. Rather, conditions are defined by the *solitude* of an entrepreneur who is isolated and self-combating and practises auto-exploitation voluntarily. As such, it is a mistake to believe that the cooperative ‘Multitude’ will overthrow the parasitic ‘Empire’ and bring forth a communist social order. The Marxist scheme to which Negri adheres will prove to have been yet another illusion.

In fact, no proletariat exists under the neoliberal regime at all. There is no working class being exploited by those who own the means of production. When production is immaterial, everyone already owns the means of production him- or herself. The neoliberal system is no longer a class system in the proper sense. It does not consist of classes that display mutual antagonism. This is what accounts for the system’s stability.

Today, the distinction between proletariat and bourgeoisie no longer holds either. Literally, ‘proletarian’ means someone whose sole possessions are his or her children: self-production is restricted to biological reproduction. But now the illusion prevails that every person – as a project free to fashion him- or herself at will – is capable of *unlimited self-production*. This means that a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ is structurally impossible. Today, the Dictatorship of Capital rules over everyone.

The neoliberal regime transforms allo-exploitation into auto-exploitation; this process affects all ‘classes’. Such classless self-exploitation – which

was something utterly unknown to Marx – renders impossible any social revolution based on the difference between the exploiters, on the one hand, and the exploited, on the other. Indeed, given the auto-exploiting achievement-subject's isolation, no *political We* is even possible that could rise up and undertake collective action.

People who fail in the neoliberal achievement-society see themselves as responsible for their lot and feel shame instead of questioning society or the system. Herein lies the particular intelligence defining the neoliberal regime: no resistance to the system can emerge in the first place. In contrast, when allo-exploitation prevails, the exploited are still able to show solidarity and unite against those who exploit them. Such is the logic on which Marx's idea of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is based. However, this vision presupposes that relations of repression and domination hold. Now, under the neoliberal regime of auto-exploitation, people are turning their aggression *against themselves*. This

auto-aggressivity means that the exploited are not inclined to revolution so much as depression.

In our world, we no longer work in order to satisfy our own needs. Instead, we work for Capital. Capital generates needs of its own; mistakenly, we perceive these needs as if they belonged to us. Capital therefore represents a new kind of *transcendence*, which entails a new form of subjectivation. We are being expelled from the sphere of lived immanence – where life relates to life instead of subjugating itself to external ends.

Emancipation from a transcendent order – that is, an order grounded in religious premises – is the hallmark of modern politics. Only under modern conditions – when transcendental means of justification no longer possess any validity – is a genuine politics, the politicization of society as a whole, held to be possible. Now, norms of action are supposed to be subject to negotiation at every level: transcendence will yield to *discourse immanent to society itself*. Society, the reasoning goes, can construct itself anew, purely from within, on the basis of

*immanent* properties. However, such freedom vanishes just as soon as Capital achieves the status of being a *new transcendency* – a *new master*. When this occurs, politics lapses into servitude again. It becomes the handmaiden of Capital.

*Do we really want to be free?* Didn't we invent God so we wouldn't have to be free? Before God, we are all debtors: guilty (*schuldig*). But debt – guilt – destroys freedom. Today, politicians appeal to high debt rates to explain that their freedom to act is massively restricted. Free from debt – that is, wholly free – we would truly have to *act*. Perhaps we run up debts perpetually so we won't need to do so – that is, so we won't need to be *free*, or *responsible*. Don't our debts prove that we don't have the power to be free? Could it be that Capital is a *new God*, making us guilty and debt-ridden again? Walter Benjamin held that capitalism is a religion. As he put it, capitalism represents the 'first case of a cult that creates guilt, not atonement' (*der erste Fall eines nicht entsühnenden, sondern verschuldenden Kultus*). Since there is no possibility of relieving debt and

guilt, the state of unfreedom perpetuates itself: 'A vast sense of guilt that is unable to find relief seizes on the cult, not to atone for this guilt but to make it universal.'<sup>5</sup>

### The Dictatorship of Transparency

Initially, the internet was celebrated as a medium of boundless liberty. Microsoft's early advertising slogan – 'Where do you want to go today?' – suggested unlimited freedom and mobility on the web. As it turned out, such euphoria was an illusion. Today, unbounded freedom and communication are switching over into total control and surveillance. More and more, social media resemble digital panoptica keeping watch over the social realm and exploiting it mercilessly. We had just freed ourselves from the disciplinary panopticon – then we threw ourselves into a new, and even more efficient, panopticon.

Jeremy Bentham's panopticon isolated inmates from each other for disciplinary purposes and pre-

vented them from interacting. In contrast, the occupants of today's digital panopticon actively communicate with each other and willingly expose themselves. That is, they *collaborate* in the digital panopticon's operations. Digital control society makes intensive use of freedom. This can only occur thanks to voluntary self-illumination and self-exposure (*Selbstausleuchtung und Selbstentblößung*). Digital Big Brother *outsources* operations to inmates, as it were. Accordingly, data is not surrendered under duress so much as offered out of an inner need. That is why the digital panopticon proves so efficient.

Transparency is demanded in the name of the freedom of information too. In reality, however, this amounts to nothing other than a *neoliberal dispositive*. It means turning everything inside out by force and transforming it into *information*. Under the immaterial mode of production that now prevails, more information and more communication mean more productivity, acceleration and growth. Information represents a positive value; inasmuch

as it lacks interiority, it *can circulate independently, free from any and all context*. Accordingly, the circulation of information admits acceleration at will – for purely arbitrary reasons.

Secrets, foreignness and otherness represent impediments to unbounded communication. In the name of transparency, they are to be eliminated. Communication goes faster when it is smoothed out – that is, when thresholds, walls and gaps are removed. This also means stripping people of interiority, which blocks and slows down communication. However, such emptying-out of persons does not occur by violent means. Instead, it occurs as voluntary self-exposure. The negativity of otherness or foreignness is de-interiorized and transformed into the positivity of communicable and consumable difference: 'diversity'. The dispositive of transparency effects utter exteriorization in order to accelerate the circulation of information and speed communication. Ultimately, openness facilitates unrestricted communication – whereas closedness, reserve and interiority obstruct it.

The dispositive of transparency has the further consequence of promoting total conformity. The economy of transparency seeks to suppress deviation. Total networking – total communication – already has a levelling effect per se. Its effect is conformity: it is as if *everyone were watching over everyone else* – even before intelligence agencies or secret services have stepped in to supervise and steer. Invisible moderators smooth out communication and calibrate it to what is generally understood and accepted. Such *primary, intrinsic* surveillance proves much more problematic than the *secondary, extrinsic* surveillance undertaken by secret services and spying agencies.

Neoliberalism makes citizens into consumers. The freedom of the citizen yields to the passivity of the consumer. As consumers, today's voters have no real interest in politics – in actively shaping the community. They possess neither the will nor the ability to participate in communal, political action. *They react only passively* to politics: grumbling and complaining, as consumers do about a commodity

or service they do not like. Politicians and parties follow this logic of consumption too. They have to '*deliver*'. In the process, they become nothing more than suppliers; their task is to satisfy voters who are consumers or customers.

The *transparency* demanded of politicians today is anything but a *political* demand. Transparency is not called for in *political* decision-making processes; no consumer is interested in that. Instead, and above all, the imperative of transparency serves to expose or unmask politicians, to make them an item of scandal. The call for transparency presupposes occupying the position of a shocked spectator. It is not voiced by engaged citizens so much as by passive onlookers. Participation now amounts to grievance and complaint. With that, the society of transparency, inhabited by onlookers and consumers, has given rise to a *spectator democracy*.

An essential component of freedom is informational self-determination. The 1984 ruling on the census made by the German Federal Constitutional Court already declared: 'If citizens cannot know

who knows what, when, and on what occasion about them, the right to informational self-determination is incompatible with social order and the legal order facilitating the same.<sup>6</sup> That said, this ruling was made at a time when people commonly believed they were facing the State as an instance of domination, which wrested information from citizens against their will. Such a time is long past. Today, we voluntarily expose ourselves without any external constraint at all – without an edict commanding us to do so. Of our own free will, we put any and all conceivable information about ourselves on the internet, without having the slightest idea who knows what, when or on what occasion. This lack of control represents a crisis of freedom to be taken seriously. Indeed, given the data that people make available willy-nilly, the very idea of protecting privacy (*Datenschutz*) is becoming obsolete.

Today, we are entering the age of digital psychopolitics. It means passing from passive surveillance to active steering. As such, it is precipitating a further crisis of freedom: now, free

will itself is at stake. Big Data is a highly efficient psychopolitical instrument that makes it possible to achieve comprehensive knowledge of the dynamics of social communication. 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.

For human beings to be able to act freely, the future must be open. However, Big Data is making it possible to predict human behaviour. This means that the future is becoming calculable and controllable. Digital psychopolitics transforms the negativity of freely made decisions into the *positivity of factual states* (*Sachverhalte*). Indeed, *persons* are being positivized into *things*, which can be quantified, measured and steered. Needless to say, no *thing* can be free. But at the same time, things are *more transparent* than persons. Big Data has announced the end of the *person* who possesses free will.

Every dispositive – every technology or technique of domination – brings forth characteristic

devotional objects that are employed in order to subjugate. Such objects *materialize* and stabilize dominion. *Devotion* and related words mean ‘submission’, or ‘obedience’. Smartphones represent *digital* devotion – indeed, they are the *devotional objects of the Digital*, period. As a subjectivation-apparatus, the smartphone works like a rosary – which, because of its ready availability, represents a handheld device too. Both the smartphone and the rosary serve the purpose of self-monitoring and control. Power operates more effectively when it delegates surveillance to discrete individuals. *Like* is the digital *Amen*. When we click *Like*, we are bowing down to the order of domination. The smartphone is not just an effective surveillance apparatus; it is also a mobile confessional. Facebook is the church – the global synagogue (literally, ‘assembly’) of the Digital.

## 2.

## Smart Power

Power commands highly different modes of appearance. Its most direct and immediate form finds expression as the negation of freedom. This enables power-holders to impose their will against the will of those subject to power – by violence, if need be. However, power is not limited to breaking down resistance and forcing obedience. It need not take the form of coercion. Power that relies on violence does not represent power of the highest order. The mere fact that another will manages to form and

turn against the power-holder attests to the latter's weakness. 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.

To be sure, power can express itself as violence or repression. But it is not *based* on force. Power need not exclude, prohibit or censor. Not does it stand opposed to freedom. Indeed, power can even use freedom to its own ends. Only in its negative form does power manifest itself as a violence that says 'no' by shattering the will and annulling freedom. Today, power is assuming increasingly *permissive* forms. In its permissivity – indeed, in its *friendliness* – power is shedding its negativity and presenting itself as freedom.

Disciplinary power is still commanded by negativity. Its mode of articulation is *inhibitive*, not *permissive*. Because it is negative, it does not describe the neoliberal regime – which beams forth in positivity. The neoliberal regime's technology of power takes on subtle, supple and smart forms; thereby, it

escapes all visibility. Now, the subjugated subject is not even aware of its own subjugation. The whole context of domination (*Herrschaftszusammenhang*) remains entirely hidden. Consequently, the subject thinks itself free.

Inasmuch as it expends a great deal of energy to force people into the straightjacket of commandments and prohibitions, disciplinary power proves inefficient. A significantly more efficient technology of power makes sure that people subordinate themselves to power relations *on their own*. Such a dynamic seeks to activate, motivate and optimize – not to inhibit or repress. 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*.

Power that is smart and friendly does not operate frontally – i.e., against the will of those who are subject to it. Instead, it guides their will to its own benefit. It says 'yes' more often than 'no'; it operates seductively, not repressively. It seeks to call

forth positive emotions and exploit them. It *leads astray* instead of erecting obstacles. Instead of standing opposed to the subject, smart and friendly power meets the subject halfway.

Smart power cosies up to the psyche rather than disciplining it through coercion or prohibitions. It does not impose silence. Rather, it is constantly calling on us to confide, share and participate: to communicate our opinions, needs, wishes and preferences – to tell all about our lives. *Friendly* power proves *more powerful*, as it were, than purely repressive power. It manages not to be seen at all. Today's crisis of freedom stems from the fact that the operative technology of power does not negate or repress freedom so much as exploit it. Free choice (*Wahl*) is eliminated to make way for a free selection (*Auswahl*) from among the items on offer.

Smart power with a liberal, friendly appearance – power that stimulates and seduces – is more compelling than power that imposes, threatens and decrees. Its signal and seal is the *Like* button. Now, people subjugate themselves to domination by con-

suming and communicating – and they click *Like* all the while. Neoliberalism is the *capitalism of 'Like'*. It is fundamentally different from nineteenth-century capitalism, which operated by means of disciplinary constraints and prohibitions.

Smart power reads and appraises our conscious and unconscious thoughts. It places its stock in voluntary self-organization and self-optimization. As such, it has no need to overcome resistance. Mastery of this sort requires no great expenditure of energy or violence. It simply *happens*. The capitalism of *Like* should come with a warning label: *Protect me from what I want*.

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the inception of a new kind of control society – one whose operations surpass the Orwellian state by leaps and bounds. Now, communication and control have become one, without remainder. Now, everyone is his or her own panopticon.

## 9.

# Emotional Capitalism

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Today, talk of feeling and emotion has grown inflationary. Many academic disciplines are researching emotion. All of a sudden, the human being no longer counts as an *animal rationale*; instead, man is a creature of sentiment. That said, hardly anyone bothers to ask where this sudden interest in emotions came from. Scientific emotion-researchers are clearly not reflecting much on their own activities. Thus, they have failed to remark that the emotional ‘boom’ stems from an economic process, above all.

Worse still, utter conceptual confusion prevails. ‘Emotion’, ‘feeling’ and ‘affect’ seem interchangeable for many researchers.

Yet feeling and emotion are not identical. We speak, for instance, of a feeling for language, athletics or other people – *Sprachgefühl*, *Ballgefühl*, *Mitgefühl* (respectively: linguistic aptitude, a knack for sports and compassion). One may ‘have a feel for language’ or ‘feel for others’, but no one has an ‘emotion for language’ or experiences ‘com-emotion’. There is no such thing as ‘language-affect’ or ‘com-affect’ either. Mourning is a feeling too. But it sounds strange to speak of an ‘affect of mourning’ or an ‘emotion of mourning’. Affect and emotion refer to strictly subjective matters, whereas feeling refers to something objective.

Feeling can be recounted. It has narrative length, or breadth. Neither affect nor emotion admits an *account*. The crisis of feelings that can be observed in contemporary theatre also represents a crisis of giving-account (*Erzählung*). Today, the narrative theatre of feelings is yielding to a clamorous

*theatre of affects*. Because narrative is lacking, an affective mass gets piled onto the stage. But, in contrast to feeling, affect does not open up *space*. Instead, it steers a linear *path* in order to discharge, to unload itself. The digital medium is an affect-medium too. Digital communication fosters the *immediate* release of affect: catharsis (*Affektabfuhr*). Simply on the basis of its temporality, digital communication conveys affect more than it transmits feeling. Shitstorms are streams of affect. They represent exemplary phenomena of digital communication.

Feelings are *constative*. For instance, we say: ‘I have a feeling *that*.’ In contrast, it is impossible to say, ‘I have an affect (or an emotion) *that*.’ Emotions are not *constative*, but *performative*. They refer to actions and deeds. Furthermore, they are intentional and goal-oriented. Feelings, on the other hand, do not necessarily display an intentional structure. Often, the feeling of anxiety has no concrete object. That is what makes anxiety different from fear, which has an intentional structure. Nor

is a ‘feel’ – that is, a sense – for language intentional. Its non-intentionality is what distinguishes it from linguistic *expression*, which, because it *expresses*, is *e-motive*. A feeling of cosmic oneness – an oceanic sense of the world (*ein kosmisches Mitgefühl, ein ozeanisches Welt-Gefühl*) – that does not focus on anything or anyone in particular is also possible. Neither emotions nor affects achieve the dimensions that characterize feelings. Emotions and affects are expressions of subjectivity.

Feelings also have a different temporality than emotions. They admit *duration*. Emotions prove significantly more fleeting and short-lived than feelings. Likewise, affect is often limited to a single moment. In contrast to feelings, emotions do not represent a *state*. The emotion does not *stand*. There is no *emotion of rest*. A *feeling of calm* is easy to conceive. In contrast, the expression ‘emotional state’ has a paradoxical ring. Emotions are dynamic, situative and performative. Emotional capitalism exploits precisely these qualities. Feelings, in contrast, cannot be readily exploited inasmuch as they

have no performativity. Finally, affects are not performative so much as eruptive; they lack *performative directionality*.

*Atmosphere* – or *mood* (*Stimmung*) – differs from both feeling and emotion. It possesses even more objectivity than feeling. Objectively, a space or room can harbour any given atmosphere. An atmosphere or mood expresses a *way-it-is*. In contrast, emotions derive from deviations from the *way-it-is*. For instance, a place may diffuse a friendly mood. This atmosphere is something wholly objective. But there is no such thing as a friendly emotion or a friendly affect. Atmosphere/mood is neither intentional nor performative. It is the element *where one happens to find oneself* (*etwas, worin man sich befindet*). It represents a state of being or state of mind (*Befindlichkeit*). As such, atmosphere is *static* and *constellative* – whereas emotion is *dynamic* and *performative*. *Where* distinguishes a state, a disposition; in contrast *whither* – a direction – defines emotion. Feeling, in turn, is a matter of *wherefore*: ‘why’.

Eva Illouz's *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* offers no answer to the question of why it is that feelings experience a boom under conditions of capitalism, in particular. What is more, the book equates feelings and emotions without drawing any conceptual distinction at all. Nor is it very useful to locate the question of feelings under capitalism at its inaugural stages: 'Weber's Protestant ethic contains at its core a thesis about the role of emotions in economic action, for it is the anxiety provoked by an inscrutable divinity which is at the heart of the capitalist entrepreneur's frantic activity.'<sup>1</sup> It is mistaken to understand anxiety in terms of emotion. Anxiety is a feeling. Its corresponding temporality proves incompatible with affect. Affect is not a constant state. As such, it lacks the constancy that defines feeling. It is the constant *feeling* of anxiety that would entail frantic entrepreneurial activity. But what Weber analyses is the ascetic capitalism of accumulation, which obeys rational logic more than it follows emotional logic. Accordingly, capitalism of this sort does not feed

into consumer capitalism, which derives its profits from emotions. Moreover, consumer capitalism operates through the selling and consumption of meanings and emotions. It is not use value but emotive or cultic value that plays a constitutive role in the economy of consumption. By the same token, Illouz fails to account for the fact that emotion comes to possess value for capitalism only when a switch to immaterial production occurs. Emotions have become a means of production only in our own times.

Illouz also contends that the core of Durkheimian sociology, solidarity, represents a 'bundle of emotions' binding social actors to the central symbols of the society they inhabit. Summing up her argument, she declares:

Unbeknown to them, canonical sociological accounts of modernity contain, if not a full-fledged theory of emotions, at least numerous references to them: anxiety, love, competitiveness, indifference, guilt are all

present in most historical and sociological accounts of the ruptures which have led to the modern era.<sup>2</sup>

All of these references to various sociological theories of emotion do nothing at all to explain the boom of emotion *today*. This corresponds to Illouz's neglect of conceptual distinctions between feeling, emotion and affect. After all, 'indifference' and 'guilt' are neither affects nor emotions. It is only meaningful to speak of the *feeling* of guilt.

Clearly, Illouz has failed to notice that the boom of emotion in our times ultimately derives from neoliberalism. The neoliberal regime deploys emotions as resources in order to bring about heightened productivity and achievement. Starting at a certain level of production, *rationality* – which is the medium of disciplinary society – hits a limit. Henceforth, it is experienced as a constraint, an inhibition. Suddenly, it seems rigid and inflexible. At this point, *emotionality* takes its place, which is attended by the feeling of liberty – the free unfold-

ing of personality. After all, being free means giving free rein to emotions. Emotional capitalism banks on freedom. It hails emotion as the expression of unbridled subjectivity. Neoliberal technologies of power exploit this same subjectivity mercilessly.

Rationality is defined by objectivity, generality and steadiness. As such, it stands opposed to emotionality, which is subjective, situative and volatile. Emotions arise, above all, when circumstances change – and perception shifts. Rationality entails duration, consistency and regularity. It prefers stable conditions. The neoliberal economy, increasingly dismantling continuity and progressively integrating instability in order to enhance productivity, is pushing the emotionalization of the productive process forward. Accelerated communication also promotes its emotionalization. Rationality is *slower* than emotionality; it *has no speed*, as it were. Thus, the pressure of acceleration now is leading to a *dictatorship of emotion*.

Consumer capitalism enlists emotion in order to generate more desires and needs. *Emotional Design*

moulds emotions and shapes emotional patterns for the sake of maximizing consumption. All in all, today we do not consume things so much as emotions. The former cannot be consumed without end – but the latter can. Emotions assume dimensions beyond the scope of use value. In so doing, they open up a field of consumption that is new and knows no limit.

In disciplinary society, where one's task is to *function*, emotions represent disturbances. Accordingly, every effort is made to weed them out. Disciplinary society's 'concerted orthopaedy' seeks to make a shapeless mass of dough into an unfeeling machine. Machines function best when all emotions and feelings have been switched off.

The boom in emotion today stems, not least of all, from a new, immaterial mode of production in which communicative interaction plays an ever-greater role. It calls not just for cognitive competence, but also for emotional competence. In this context, the integral person is *installed* in the very process of production. Daimler-Chrysler has pub-

licly declared that since employees' 'behaviour and their social and emotional skills play an increasing role in the evaluation of their work ... this will ... be assessed ... on the basis of objectives achieved and the quality of outcomes.'<sup>3</sup> Now, sociality, communication and even individual conduct are being exploited. Emotions provide 'raw material' with which to optimize corporate communication. As Hewlett-Packard puts it: 'HP is a firm where one can breathe a spirit of communication, a strong spirit of interrelations, where people can communicate, where you go towards others. It is an affective relationship.'<sup>4</sup>

A paradigm shift is taking place at the administrative level of companies. Emotions are being granted more and more significance. Rational management techniques are being replaced by *emotional management*. Managers today are leaving the principle of rational action behind. Increasingly, they resemble *motivation coaches*. Motivation connects with emotion. Positive emotions provide the ferment that makes *motivation* grow.

Emotions are performative in so far as they call forth certain actions. As *inclinations*, they represent the energetic – the sensory, or even sensuous – basis for action. Emotions are steered by the limbic system, which is also where the drives are seated. They form the pre-reflexive, half-conscious, physico-instinctual level of action that escapes full awareness. Neoliberal psychopolitics seizes on emotion *in order to influence actions on this pre-reflexive level*. By way of emotion, it manages to cut and operate deep inside. As such, emotion affords a highly efficient medium for psychopolitically steering the integral person, the person as a whole.

## 10.

# Gamification

In order to heighten productivity, emotional capitalism also enlists playing and games – which should, in fact, be the *Other of Work*, its opposite. Emotional capitalism is gamifying the life- and working world. Playing games lends an emotional, indeed a dramatic, charge to working – which in turn generates more motivation. Because games rapidly deliver a sense of success and reward, the result is higher performance and a greater yield. A person playing a game, being emotionally invested, is much more

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engaged than a worker who acts rationally or is simply *functioning*.

Games exhibit a specific temporality marked by immediate experiences of success and reward. But what matures over time cannot be gamified. Whatever is long, anything that lasts a long time, proves incompatible with the game's temporality. Hunting, for instance, matches the mode of the game, whereas farming, which depends on slow processes of ripening and quiet growth, cannot be gamified at all. Life cannot be turned into hunting alone.

The gamification of work exploits *homo ludens*. The player subjugates him- or herself to the order of domination *in the very act of playing*. Today, the gamification logic of 'Likes', 'Friends' and 'Followers' means that social communication is also being plugged into and subordinated to a game mode. The corollary of the gamification of communication is its commercialization. That said, this process is destroying *human* communication.

'A corpse is running society – the corpse of labour' (*Ein Leichnam beherrscht die Gesellschaft – der*

*Leichnam der Arbeit*). So begins the *Manifesto against Labour*, written by the *Krisis-Group*, which is based around Robert Kurz.<sup>1</sup> Following the microelectronic revolution, the argument goes, the production of wealth has grown increasingly detached from human labour. Yet at the same time, society has never been so thoroughly committed to work as it is in our post-Fordist age – an epoch that, in actual fact, is only making labour more and more superfluous. The manifesto points out that the political Left, in particular, has exalted labour. Not only has it declared work the essence of human *being*; more still, it has mystified labour and pronounced it the opposite principle to capital. The Left does not view work itself as a scandal – only its exploitation. For this reason, the manifesto concludes, the programme of all workers' parties has always been simply the liberation of labour, instead of liberation *from* labour. Labour and Capital, then, represent two sides of the same coin.

Yet despite highly vigorous forces of production, we have not witnessed the advent of the 'realm of

freedom' (*Reich der Freiheit*) where 'labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends'.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, Marx himself adhered to the *primacy of labour*: the 'increase of free time', he contends, 'reacts back upon the power of labour as itself the greatest productive power'.<sup>3</sup> But with that, the realm of necessity comes to colonize the realm of freedom. 'Idle time' as 'time for higher activity' transforms its possessor 'into a different subject' with greater productive force than one who merely toils. As 'time for the full development of the individual', free time contributes to the 'production of *fixed capital*'.<sup>4</sup> In fact, this means that knowledge gets capitalized too. In modern parlance, more leisure time means increased *human capital*: idleness that might otherwise be devoted to activities free of purpose and constraint are integrated into the operations of Capital. Even though Marx speaks of '*capital fixe* being man himself', human beings, endowed with 'general intellect', are now transforming themselves into Capital. In contrast, true freedom would be possible only if life were entirely freed from Cap-

ital – which represents a new form of transcendence. The transcendence of Capital stands in the way of *life as immanence*.

Contrary to Marx's assumptions, the dialectic between forces of production and relations of production is not leading to freedom. More than anything else, it is entangling us in exploitation along new lines. We would have to think with Marx beyond Marx in order to make freedom – indeed, time that is free – our own. It could only come from the Other of Work: a wholly other force that no longer serves production or admits transformation into any kind of workforce at all. In other words, freedom could only come from a *mode of living* (*Lebensform*) that is no longer a *mode of production* – indeed, from *something altogether unproductive*. The course our future takes will depend on whether we prove able, beyond the world of production, to *make use of the useless*.

The human being is a creature of luxury. In the original and authentic sense, luxury is not a practice of consumption. Rather, it means a mode of liv-

ing that is free of necessity. Freedom is based on deviation: *luxuriance*, getting away from necessity (*Notwendigkeit*). Luxury transcends the intention of averting need (*die Not zu wenden*). But today, consumption is co-opting even luxury. Excessive consumption amounts to unfreedom: compulsion corresponding to the unfreedom of labour. Luxury as freedom – like play that is truly free – can be thought only beyond the world of work and consumption. Viewed in this light, it stands close to asceticism.

True happiness comes from what runs riot, lets go, is exuberant and loses meaning – the excessive and superfluous. That is, it comes from what luxuriates, what has taken leave of all necessity, work, performance and purpose. But today, even excess is being pocketed by Capital, which strips it of its emancipatory potential entirely. What is more, playing and games belong to luxury too – but as play that is not yoked to the process of labour and production. As a means of production, gamification is destroying play's potential to set free. Play

should make it possible to use things in wholly different ways; it should liberate them from the theology and teleology of Capital.

Not long ago, a highly unusual incident in Greece was reported. It was all the more unusual for occurring in a country suffering so greatly under the yoke of Capital. The event possesses a singularly *emblematic* quality – so much so that it seems like a *sign from the future*. Children, it is said, found a large bundle of banknotes in the ruins of a house. They made use of them in a wholly other way: playing with them and tearing them to shreds. Perhaps these children anticipated a future we will share: *the world lies in rubble; in the ruins, we are playing too – tearing apart paper money*.

‘Profanation’ means taking things that belonged to the gods – and were therefore removed from mortal use – and returning them to human beings to do with as they will.<sup>5</sup> The Greek children were profaning money by handing it over to an entirely other use: games and play. In a single stroke, profa-

nation transformed what is so fetishized today – money – into a common toy.

Agamben understands religion in terms of the Latin *relegere*. Accordingly, it means being attentive and alert: watching over things that are holy and taking care that they remain separate from other things. Such setting-apart is essential to religion. Profanation, then, means adopting an *attitude of conscious negligence* with regard to this same watchfulness. The children in Greece were displaying carelessness about money when they simply played with it and tore it apart. As such, profanation represents a *practice of freedom* that liberates us from transcendence – from any and every form of subjectivation. In this manner, profanation opens a *playful margin of immanence* (*Spiel-Raum der Immanenz*).

There are two forms of thinking: thinking at work and thinking at play. The conceptions advanced by Hegel and Marx are governed by the principle of work. Likewise, Heidegger's *Being and Time* is still bound to working. In its 'care' or 'anxiety', *Dasein* does not play. Only later did Heidegger

discover play, which is based on 'releasement' (*Gelassenheit*). In this light, he came to interpret the world itself as play. Now, he sought out the 'open (*das Offene*) of a free space hardly surmised and heeded, in which beings come into play as such'.<sup>6</sup> Heidegger's 'time-play-space' (*Zeit-Spiel-Raum*) gestures towards a time-space free of labour in any form. In this *realm of the event, psychology* has been completely surpassed as a mode of subjectivation.

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## 11. Big Data

### Columbus and His Egg

Bentham likened his panopticon to ‘Columbus and his egg’.<sup>1</sup> By his account, the invention should be applied to all disciplinary milieus of incarceration because it promotes the exceptionally efficient surveillance of inmates. The panopticon represents a watershed in the social order: ‘What would you say, if by the gradual adoption and diversified application of this single principle, you should see a new

scene of things spread itself over the face of civilized society?’<sup>2</sup>

Will Big Data also prove to be Columbus’s egg for the contemporary society of digital control – a system even more effective than Bentham’s panopticon? Will it actually manage not just to watch over human behaviour, but also to subject it to psychopolitical steering? Is another, wholly unintuitied drama poised to redraw the face of civilized society itself?

If nothing else, Big Data has given rise to a highly efficient form of control. Acxiom, an American Big Data company, promises clients a ‘360-degree customer view’. Indeed, the digital panopticon has made possible a wraparound view of those who dwell within it. Bentham’s panopticon was confined to a perspectival optical system. This meant that blind spots were unavoidable – here, prisoners could indulge in secret wishes and thoughts without being observed.

Digital surveillance proves so efficient because it is *aperspectival*. It does not suffer from the perspecti-

val limitations characterizing analogue optical systems. Digital optics enables surveillance from any and every angle. It eliminates all blind spots. In contrast to analogue and perspectival optics, it can peer into the human soul itself.

## Dataism

In the pages of the *New York Times*, David Brooks has announced a data revolution. His words are as prophetic as Chris Anderson's famous article 'The End of Theory'. 'Dataism' is the name of the new faith:

If you asked me to describe the rising philosophy of the day, I'd say it is data-ism. We now have the ability to gather huge amounts of data. This ability seems to carry with it certain cultural assumptions – that everything that can be measured should be measured; that data is a transparent and reliable lens that allows us to filter out emotionalism

and ideology; that data will help us do remarkable things – like foretell the future ... The data revolution is giving us wonderful ways to understand the present and the past.<sup>3</sup>

Dataism has taken the stage with the fervour of a *second Enlightenment*. During the *first Enlightenment*, statistics was thought to possess the capacity to liberate human knowledge from the clutches of mythology. Accordingly, euphoric celebration occurred. In light of such developments, Voltaire even voiced the wish for a new historiography, freed from past superstition. Statistics, as he put it, offers 'an object of curiosity for anyone who would like to read history as a citizen and as a philosopher'.<sup>4</sup> Revised by statistics, history would become truly philosophical. As Rüdiger Campe writes, 'The numbers of statistics provide the *basis* from which [Voltaire] can articulate his methodological mistrust of all histories that exist only as narratives. The stories of *ancient history* accordingly offer an example that borders on mythology for [him].'<sup>5</sup>

Statistics and Enlightenment are one and the same for Voltaire. Statistics means setting *objective knowledge founded on, and driven by, numbers* in opposition to mythological narration.

Now, *transparency* is the buzzword of the second Enlightenment. Data are supposed to be a pellucid medium. As Brooks describes them, data afford a ‘transparent and reliable lens’. The imperative of the second Enlightenment declares: everything must become data and information. The soul of the second Enlightenment is data totalitarianism, or data fetishism. Although it announces that it is taking leave of all ideology, dataism itself is an ideology. It is leading to *digital totalitarianism*. Therefore, a *third Enlightenment* is called for – in order to shine a light on how digital enlightenment has transformed into a new kind of servitude.

Big Data is supposed to be freeing knowledge from subjective arbitrariness. By this logic, intuition does not represent a higher form of knowing; instead, it represents something merely subjective – a stopgap compensating for the shortage of objec-

tive data. In complex situations, the argument goes, intuition is blind. The mistrust even extends to theory, which is suspected of being an ideology: if enough data are available, it should prove superfluous as well. The second Enlightenment is the age of purely *data-driven* knowledge. Anderson’s visionary rhetoric goes: ‘Out with every theory of human behavior, from linguistics to sociology. Forget taxonomy, ontology, and psychology. Who knows why people do what they do? The point is they do it, and we can track and measure it with unprecedented fidelity. With enough data, the numbers speak for themselves.’<sup>6</sup>

The medium of the first Enlightenment was reason. However, imagination, corporeality and desire were repressed in its name. By a fatal dialectic, the first Enlightenment switched over into barbarism. Now, in the second Enlightenment – which appeals to information, data and transparency – the same dialectic threatens to do the same. The second Enlightenment is summoning forth a new kind of violence. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* holds that the

process of illumination that set out to destroy mythology became entangled, with every stride it made, in a mythology of its own: ‘False clarity is only another name for myth.’<sup>7</sup> Adorno would say that the ‘transparency’ of today is another name for myth too – that dataism likewise heralds false clarity. The dialectic of old is also making the second Enlightenment, which seeks to counter ideology, into an ideology in its own right – more still, it is leading to the *barbarism of data*.

Dataism, it turns out, is amounting to digital Dadaism. Dadaism also takes leave of meaningful contexts of every kind. It empties language itself of sense: ‘The acts of life have no beginning or end. Everything happens in a completely idiotic way. That is why everything is alike. Simplicity is called Dada.’<sup>8</sup> Dataism is nihilism.<sup>9</sup> 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.

Now, numbers and data are not just being absolutized – they are becoming sexualized and fetishized. This amounts to nothing other than libidinal energy flowing into today’s ‘Quantified Self’. On the whole, dataism is displaying libidinous – indeed, pornographic – traits. *Dataists* mate with their data. In the meanwhile, there is even talk of ‘datasexuals’. They are ‘relentlessly digital’ and consider data ‘sexy’.<sup>10</sup> The *digitus* is starting to play the part of the *phallus*.

## Quantified Self

Belief that life admits measurement and quantification governs the digital age as a whole. ‘Quantified Self’ honours this faith too. The body is outfitted with sensors that automatically register data. Measurements involve temperature, blood sugar levels, calorie intake and use, movement profiles and fat content. The heart rate is taken in a state of meditation: performance and efficiency still count when relaxing. Moods, dispositions and routine activities

are all inventoried as well. Such self-measurement and self-monitoring is supposed to enhance mental performance. Yet the mounting pile of data this yields does nothing to answer the simple question, *Who am I?* ‘Quantified Self’ represents a Dadaist technology too; it empties the self of any and all meaning. The self gets broken down into data until no sense remains.

The motto of Quantified Self is ‘Self Knowledge through Numbers’. But no insight into the self can result from data and numbers alone, no matter how exhaustive they are. Numbers do not *recount* anything about the self. Counting is not recounting. A sense of self derives from giving an *account*. It is not counting, but recounting that leads to self-discovery or self-knowledge.

In antiquity, the care of the self was also tied to practices of self-observation. *Publicatio sui* (Tertullian) represented a significant component of paying due attention in this manner:

Writing was also important in the culture of taking care of oneself. One of the main features of taking care involved taking notes on oneself to be reread, writing treatises and letters to friends to help them, and keeping notebooks in order to reactivate for oneself the truths one needed.<sup>11</sup>

*Publicatio sui* meant committing to the search for truth. Records of one’s life served an ethics of the self. In contrast, dataism’s self-tracking is devoid of all *ethics* and *truth*; it amounts simply to a *technology* for self-monitoring. When the data collected is published and exchanged, self-tracking comes to resemble self-surveillance more and more. The subject of today’s world is an entrepreneur of the self practising self-exploitation – and, by the same token, self-surveillance. The auto-exploiting subject carries around its own labour camp; here, it is perpetrator and victim at one and the same time. As a self-illuminating, self-surveilling subject, it bears its own, internal panopticon within; here, there is no difference between guard and inmate. The digi-

talized, networked subject is a *panopticon of itself*. This ensures that each and every person has now taken on the task of conducting perpetual auto-surveillance.

### Life Logged in Full

Today, the clicks we make and the search words we type are stored. Every step is watched and recorded. A complete picture of our lives exists on the internet. Our digital habitus provides an extremely precise likeness of our persons – of our very souls. Perhaps it is even fuller and more accurate than the images we otherwise make of ourselves.

The number of web addresses now available is practically unlimited. As such, any item of use can be given its own internet address. Objects themselves are starting to transmit information. They report on our lives, activities and habits. The expansion of Web 2.0, the internet of persons, to Web 3.0, the internet of things, is bringing digital control society to completion. Web 3.0 has made it

possible to log life in every aspect. Now, the very things we use every day are also surveilling us.

We are caught, so to speak, in the total memory of the Digital. Bentham's panopticon still lacked an efficient recording system; it had only a 'punishment log' for penalties enacted and the reasons they occurred. Prisoners' actual lives were not taken down. Big Brother had no way of knowing what inmates really thought or desired. In contrast to Big Brother, who could be quite forgetful, Big Data never forgets anything at all. For this reason alone, the digital panopticon is much more efficient than Bentham's.

Indeed, in US elections, Big Data and data-mining have proven to be Columbus's egg. Candidates obtain a 360-degree view of voters. Enormous masses of data are gathered from various sources – bought, in fact – and connected to each other in such a way that highly precise voter profiles result. In the process, clients also gain insight into voters' private lives and their very psyche. Through *micro-targeting*, personalized messages are devised to

address and *influence* voters. As the practical micro-physics of power, micro-targeting is *data-driven psychopolitics*. Likewise, intelligent algorithms make it possible to predict voting behaviour and optimize candidates' appeal. Individually calibrated messages to voters are hardly any different than personalized advertisements. More and more, voting and buying, the state and the market, citizens and consumers are coming to resemble each other. Micro-targeting is becoming the standard practice of psychopolitics.

The census, which represents a *biopolitical* practice of disciplinary society, provides material that may be used *demographically*, but not *psychologically*. Biopolitics is incapable of enabling subtle interventions in the psyche. In contrast, digital psychopolitics manages to intervene in psychic processes in a prospective fashion. Quite possibly, it is even *faster* than free will. As such, it could overtake it. If so, this would herald the *end of freedom*.<sup>12</sup>

## The Digital Unconscious

It is possible that Big Data can even read desires we do not know we harbour. After all, under certain circumstances we develop inclinations that elude consciousness. Often, we do not even know why we suddenly experience a certain need. For instance, at a given stage of pregnancy, a woman may crave a particular product – yet this impulse marks a correlation of which she remains unaware. She buys the item, but she doesn't know why. *That's how it is*. Conceivably, this *that's-how-it-is* (*Es-ist-so*) exists in psychic proximity to the Freudian *id* (*Es*), which escapes the ego and consciousness. In this light, Big Data is making *the id into an ego* to be exploited psychopolitically. If Big Data has access to the realm of our unconscious actions and inclinations, it is possible to construct a psychopolitics that would reach deep into our psyche to exploit it.

According to Walter Benjamin, the movie camera affords access to the 'optical unconscious':

With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended ... clearly, it

is another nature which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye. ‘Other’ above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious ... We are familiar with the movement of picking up a cigarette lighter or a spoon, but know almost nothing of what really goes on between hand and metal, and still less how this varies with different moods. This is where the camera comes into play, with all its resources for swooping and rising, disrupting and isolating, stretching or compressing a sequence, enlarging or reducing an object. It is through the camera that we first discover the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis.<sup>13</sup>

One may understand Big Data in analogy to a movie camera. As a digital magnifying glass, data-mining would enlarge the picture of human actions; behind the framework of consciousness it would then disclose another scene shot through with

unconscious elements. Big Data’s microphysics, then, would make *actomes* visible – that is, *micro-actions* that elude detection by the waking mind. Thus, Big Data could also bring to light collective patterns of behaviour, of which individuals are unaware. This would render the *collective unconscious* accessible. In analogy to the ‘optical unconscious’, one could call such a microphysical or micropsychical web of relations the *digital unconscious*. As such, digital psychopolitics would be in the position to take control of mass behaviour on a level that escapes detection.

## Big Business

Today, Big Data is not just taking the stage as *Big Brother* – it is also taking the form of *Big Business*. First and foremost, Big Data is a vast, commercial enterprise. Here, personal data are unceasingly monetized and commercialized. Now, people are treated and traded as packages of data for economic use. That is, human beings have become a com-

modity. Big Brother and Big Business have formed an alliance. The surveillance state and the market are merging.

Acxiom is a company trading in the personal data of about 300 million US citizens – in other words, practically all of them. By now, Acxiom knows more about Americans than the FBI. The company divides people into seventy categories. In the catalogue, they are offered up like goods for sale. For any need, there is something to buy. People with a low economic value are designated as ‘waste’ – that is, ‘trash’. Consumers with a higher market value are found in the group ‘Shooting Star’. From ages thirty-six to forty-five they are dynamic, get up early to go jogging, have no children but are married, like to travel, and watch *Seinfeld*.

Big Data is leading to the emergence of a new *digital class society*. Human beings assigned to the ‘waste’ category belong to the lowest class. People with a bad score are denied credit. Thus, the panopticon has been joined by a ‘ban-opticon’.<sup>14</sup> The

panopticon kept watch over prisoners of the system who were incarcerated. The ban-opticon, on the other hand, is a dispositive that identifies persons who stand outside the system or are hostile to it, and *excludes them*. The classical panopticon served to discipline. In contrast, the ban-opticon ensures the system’s security and efficiency.

The digital ban-opticon identifies human beings without economic value as waste. Waste is something to be eliminated:

They are all redundant. The rejects or refuse of society. To sum up, waste. ‘Waste’, by definition, is the antonym of ‘utility’; it denotes objects without possible use. Indeed, the sole accomplishment of waste is soiling and cluttering up the space that could otherwise be usefully employed. The principal purpose of the ban-opticon is to make sure that the waste is separated from decent product and earmarked for transportation to a refuse tip.<sup>15</sup>

## Forgetting

Human memory is a narrative, an account; forgetting forms a necessary component. In contrast, digital memory is a matter of seamless addition and accumulation. Stored data admit counting, but they cannot be recounted. Storage and retrieval are fundamentally different from remembering, which is a narrative process. Likewise, autobiography constitutes a narrative: it is memorial writing. A timeline, on the other hand, recounts nothing. It simply enumerates and adds up events or information.

Memory constitutes a dynamic, living process; here, different levels of time intersect and influence each other. Memory is subject to constant rewriting and rearrangement. Freud understood human memory as a living organism too:

As you know, I am working on the assumption that our psychic mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification: the material present in the form of memory traces being subjected from time to time to a

*rearrangement* in accordance with fresh circumstances – to a *retranscription*. Thus what is essentially new about my theory is the thesis that memory is present not once but several times over, that it is laid down in various kinds of indications.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, *the past* – as something that remains self-identical and is always to be retrieved in the same form – does not exist. Digital memory consists of indifferent – as it were, *undead* – points of presence. It lacks the extended horizon constituting the *temporality of the living*. This means that digitalized life lacks animacy. Digital temporality belongs to the undead.

## Spirit

Big Data opens up the prospect of absolute knowledge. Everything can be measured and quantified; the things of the world reveal correlations that were previously hidden. Even human behaviour is sup-

posed to admit exact prediction. A new age of insight is being announced. Correlations are replacing causality. *That's-how-it-is* stands where *How so?* once wavered. The data-driven quantification of reality is driving *Spirit* from the realm of knowledge.

Hegel, the philosopher of *Spirit*, would deem the omniscience (*All-Wissen*) that Big Data promises to be absolute ignorance (*Un-Wissen*). Hegel's *Logic* may also be read as the logic of knowledge. Here, correlation represents the most primitive level. A strong correlation between A and B means that if A changes, a change also occurs in B. But when a correlation holds – however strong it may be – one still does not know *why* this is the case. It *just is that way*. Correlation represents a relation of probability, not of necessity. It declares: A *often* occurs together with B. That is the difference between correlation and causation, which is distinguished by necessity: *A causes B*.

But causality does not stand at the highest level of knowledge. Reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*) repre-

sents a more complex relation than causal relation. It declares: A and B condition each other mutually. A necessary connection holds between A and B. And yet, even at the level of reciprocity, the overarching context for the connection between A and B has not yet been grasped, i.e., *conceived (begriffen)*: 'If we stop at considering a given content just from the point of view of reciprocal action, we are in fact proceeding quite unconceptually.'<sup>17</sup>

Only the 'Concept' brings forth knowledge. The Concept is C, which *comprehends within itself (in sich begreift)* A and B – here, A and B are first *conceived (begriffen)*. The concept is the higher context surrounding A and B, which provides the foundation (*Begründung*) for the relationship between A and B. Thus, A and B stand as 'moments of a third, higher [whole]'.<sup>18</sup> Knowledge becomes possible only at the level of the Concept: 'The Concept dwells within the things themselves, it is that through which they become what they are, and to comprehend an object means therefore to become conscious of its concept.'<sup>19</sup> Only from the all-comprehending Con-

cept C is complete *comprehension* (*Begreifen*) of the correlation between A and B possible. In contrast, Big Data affords only extremely rudimentary knowledge, that is, correlations in which nothing is *comprehended*. Big Data lacks *comprehension* – it lacks the *Concept* – and thus it *lacks Spirit*. The absolute knowledge intimated by Big Data coincides with absolute ignorance.

The Concept is a unity that *in-cludes* (*ein-schließt*) and *com-prises* (*ein-begreift*) the elements of the whole that it is. It takes the form of a *conclusion* (*Schluss*) in which everything is *comprised* and *comprehended*. ‘Everything is a syllogism (*Schluss*)’ means ‘Everything is a concept.’<sup>20</sup> Absolute knowledge is an absolute syllogism: everything takes *conclusive* form within it. The ‘*definition of the Absolute*’ is ‘that it is the syllogism’<sup>21</sup> – i.e., the conclusion. But constant *addition* yields no conclusion, no syllogism, no ‘putting-together’. Syllogism is not *addition*, but *narration*. The absolute con-clusion *ex-cludes* any further addition. As narration, syllogism represents the opposite of addition. Big Data is purely addi-

tive; it never comes to an end, to a conclusion. In contrast to the correlations and additions that Big Data generates, theoretical thinking represents a *narrative form of knowledge*.

The Spirit is a conclusion, a syllogism, an integral whole in which component parts are meaningfully *preserved* (*aufgehoben*). The integral whole is a conclusive form. But without Spirit, the whole world falls apart into merely additive, unincorporated elements. Spirit constitutes the world’s *interiority* (*Innerlichkeit*) and *composure* (*Sammlung*): what gathers, or *composes* (*versammelt*), everything within itself. Theory is also conceptual – syllogistic – because it *comprehends* all the elements it *includes*. Ultimately, the ‘end of theory’ that Chris Anderson has trumpeted means *taking leave of Spirit*. Big Data makes Spirit – that is, thinking and thought – wither and die. Human science – *Geisteswissenschaft* – that is purely data-driven is, in fact, no longer human; it has no *Geist*, or Spirit. *Totalized data-knowledge amounts to absolute ignorance: the absolute zero of Spirit*.

The *Science of Logic* declares: ‘The syllogism is what is *rational*, and it is *everything* that is rational’<sup>22</sup> – it is a conclusion, or *Schluss*. For Hegel, the syllogism is not a category of formal logic. A syllogism follows when the beginning and end of a process form a meaningful set of relations – a unity that makes sense. Unlike mere addition, then, narration is a syllogism. *Knowledge* – the state of *knowing* – is a syllogism. Rituals and ceremonies are syllogistic forms too. They represent a narrative process. As such, they have their own temporality, their own rhythm and pace. As narratives, they defy acceleration. But when all syllogistic forms fall apart, everything dissolves; nothing has a *stay*. In a world where everything has become additive, where all narrative tension – any vertical tautness – has gone missing, total acceleration sets in.

Today, our perceptive apparatus itself is incapable of arriving at any conclusion: it just clicks its way through the endless, digital net. Our senses are completely distracted. Yet only contemplative lingering manages to achieve any meaningful end.

*Shutting one's eyes* offers a symbol for arriving at a conclusion. Abrupt change from image to image, from information to information, has made any such contemplative conclusion impossible. If all that qualifies as reasonable is a syllogism – a conclusion – then our era, the age of Big Data, is an *epoch without reason*.

### The Event

When the statistical method was discovered in the seventeenth century, it captivated scientists, gamblers, poets and philosophers alike. Enthusiastically, they embraced statistical probability and regularity. There can be no doubt that such euphoria admits comparison with the fortunes of Big Data today. *Then*, statistics inspired renewed trust in a higher power for people as they confronted the contingencies of the world. For instance, an eighteenth-century treatise by John Arbuthnot was called *An Argument for Divine Providence, taken from the Regularity observ'd in the British Births of both Sexes*. On

the basis of the statistically determined predominance of male infants relative to female ones, philosophers saw the hand of God at work – and found further reason to justify war.

Even Kant got carried away by the possibilities that statistical calculation afforded; he incorporated the lawful order it allowed him to discern into his teleological view of history. On the one hand, he posited the existence of free will. On the other, he restricted it. Kant affirmed that phenomena of free will – that is, human actions – are determined by general laws of nature, like every other natural fact. If one considers the play of freedom in human will ‘on a large scale’, lawfulness may be discerned. As unruly as the conduct of individual subjects seems to be, a ‘steady progression though slow development of ... original predispositions’ is recognizable at the level of the species. To make this point, Kant refers to statistics:

Thus marriages, the births that come from them and deaths, since the free will of

human beings has so great an influence on them, seem to be subject to no rule in accordance with which their number could be determined in advance through calculation; and yet the annual tables of them in large countries prove that they happen just as much in accordance with constant laws of nature, as weather conditions which are so inconstant, whose individual occurrence one cannot previously determine, but which on the whole do not fail to sustain the growth of plants, the course of streams, and other natural arrangements in a uniform uninterrupted course. Individual human beings and even whole nations think little about the fact, since while each pursues its own aim in its own way and one often contrary to the other, they are proceeding unnoticed, as by a guiding thread, according to an aim of nature, which is unknown to them, and are laboring at its promotion.<sup>23</sup>

In essence, the first Enlightenment was committed to belief in statistical knowledge. Rousseau's *volonté générale* results from statistical-mathematic operations too. The general will takes form *without any communication at all*.<sup>24</sup> It results from statistical averages:

There is often a considerable difference between the will of all and the general will: the latter looks only to the common interest, the former looks to private interest, and is nothing but a sum of particular wills; but if, from these same wills, one takes away the pluses and the minuses which cancel each other out, what is left as the sum of the differences is the general will.<sup>25</sup>

Rousseau stresses that arriving at the general will requires no communication; indeed, it excludes it. Communication distorts statistical objectivity. Accordingly, he would like to prohibit political parties and associations. The democracy he envisions is democracy without discourse or communication.

Proceeding statistically is supposed to yield a synthesis of quantity and truth.<sup>26</sup> Rousseau offers a biopolitical response to the question of the features defining a good government. He avoids approaching the question morally. For him, the purpose of a political association is simply the protection and welfare of its members. The surest sign of success is the increase of population. Unquestionably, for him, the best government is the one in which the citizens 'become populous and multiply the most'. Thus, he sounds the call: 'Calculators, it is now up to you: count, measure, compare.'<sup>27</sup>

Today's euphoria about Big Data strongly resembles the euphoria about statistics in the eighteenth century – which did not last for long, however. Statistics was surely the Big Data of the eighteenth century. Before long, resistance mounted against statistical reason – above all, on the part of Romanticism. The fundamental affect of Romanticism is horror at everything average and normal. The singular, improbable and sudden stand opposed to what is merely probable in statistical

terms. Romanticism cultivated the outlandish, abnormal and the extreme in order to counter statistical normality.<sup>28</sup>

Nietzsche also shared this abhorrence for statistical reason:

Statistics proves that there are laws in history. Yes, it proves how vulgar and disgustingly uniform the masses are. You should have kept statistics in Athens! Then you would have sensed the difference! The more inferior and un-individual the masses are, the more rigorous the statistical law. If the multitude has a more refined and nobler composition, then the law immediately goes to the devil. And way up at the top, where the great minds are, you no longer can make any calculations at all: when, for example, have great artists ever gotten married! You are hopeless, you who want to discover a law in this. Thus, to the extent that there are laws in history, they are worthless, and history

itself – that is, everything that has occurred – is worthless.<sup>29</sup>

Statistics does not take into consideration ‘great active individuals on the stage of history, but only ... the supernumeraries [Statisten]’.<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche inveighs against a version of history ‘that takes the great drives of the masses to be what is important and that views all great men merely as their expression, as the bubbles that become visible on the surface of the flood’.<sup>31</sup>

For Nietzsche, the figures of statistics prove only that man is a herd animal. He observes that ‘die Menschen zunehmen im *Gleichwerden*'.<sup>32</sup> This means both that ‘people are increasingly growing equal’ and that ‘people batten [i.e., grow fat] as they *become the same*.’ Such *Gleichschaltung* also characterizes our contemporary society of transparency and information. When everything is made visible at once, deviations can scarcely occur. Transparency entails a compulsion to conform, which eliminates the Other, the Alien and the Deviant. Above all, Big

Data makes collective patterns of behaviour visible. Dataism is augmenting *Zunehmen im Gleichwerden*, or hypertrophied sameness. Data-mining does not differ from statistics in any fundamental way. The correlations it lays bare represent only what is likely in statistical terms. It calculates average values. As such, Big Data has no access to what is unique. Big Data is wholly *blind to the event*. Not what is statistically likely, but what is unlikely – the *singular*, the *event* – will shape history, in other words, the *future* of mankind. Thus, Big Data is *blind to the future* too.

## 12.

### Beyond the Subject

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What Nietzsche refers to as the ‘naturification’ (*Ver-natürlichung*) of the human being includes ‘readiness for what is absolutely sudden and thwarting (*das absolut Plötzliche und Durchkreuzende*)’.<sup>1</sup> The *event*, which annuls what has held until now – the standing order – proves just as incalculable and abrupt as a *natural disaster* or *act of God*. It defies all calculation and prediction. When it occurs, an *entirely new state of affairs* begins. The *event* brings into play an *outside*, which breaks the subject open and wrests it